



**CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF DIGITAL PUBLIC
RELATIONS PRACTICE IN SELECTED GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA**

BY

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT– DISSERTATION

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

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DECLARATION BY SUPERVISORS

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

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ABSTRACT

Public relations has undergone significant changes in recent years to meet the evolving demands of its audience. Traditionally relying on print, radio, and television, the practice of public relations has been greatly influenced by the rapid progress in digital communication. This has led to the emergence of digital public relations as a crucial component in contemporary public relations. While there is a growing body of literature on public relations practices, there exist a research gap in understanding the specific practice of digital public relations by government institutions in Ghana. Literature on the practice of digital public relations in Ghana have primarily been dominated by studies on the practice of digital public relations by educational institutions, political organizations and private organizations neglecting the unique challenges and opportunities faced by government organizations in digital public relations efforts. Given the important role of government institutions in shaping public opinion and fostering citizen engagement, it was essential to explore their utilization of digital platforms for effective communication. This study therefore examined why and how digital media was being used for public relations practice by government institution. The study was underpinned by the diffusion of innovation theory and the technology, organization, and environment theoretical framework. The purposive sampling technique was used to select public relations officers from five public institutions - Ministry Information, the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Communications. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, an interpretivist research paradigm was adopted, and a descriptive research design was used. A sample size of five public relations officers from Ministry of Information, Communication, Health, Finance and Youth and Sports was selected using purposive sampling. Data was collected through interviews and social media audit of the website and social media platforms of the government ministry and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed that digital public relations is increasingly being adopted by government institutions in Ghana as a means of engaging with stakeholders and promoting their activities. The study showed that social media platforms and websites, are the most used digital public relations tools in the public sector. The information sharing needs, nature of stakeholders, cost and supporting institutional goals influenced the adoption of digital public relations by government institutions in Ghana. The study also revealed that public sector institutions in Ghana were benefiting from practice of digital public relations within the areas of improved crisis management efforts, awareness creation, enhanced interactivity, and mitigation against disinformation. Based on the findings, it is recommended that government institutions continue to prioritize and invest in digital public relations strategies for effective communication. Additionally, a concerted effort should be made to address challenges related to internet connectivity, cyber security, and digital knowledge of public relations officers to maximize the benefits of digital public relations in government institutions.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to all the people who have in diverse ways contributed to shaping my growth and development. Especially to my supervisors who have been very supportive during this period.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, the landscape of public relations has undergone a significant transformation with the rapid advancement of digital technologies. This shift has necessitated the adoption of new strategies and communication channels to effectively engage with stakeholders (Ahmad, 2019). As government institutions and businesses around the world strive to effectively communicate and engage with their citizens and customers, digital public relations have emerged as a crucial component in their communication strategies (Permatasari et al., 2021). Ghana, a nation known for its rich cultural heritage and growing digital infrastructure, is no exception to this trend. According to Lee et al., (2021), public relations play a pivotal role in shaping and maintaining the image and reputation of government institutions. As information dissemination increasingly moves into the digital sphere, understanding and effectively utilizing digital platforms for public relations activities have become indispensable. Digital channels offer new opportunities for government institutions in Ghana to reach out to citizens, stakeholders, and the broader public in real-time (Lin, 2022; Istrate et al., 2022). Embracing these digital avenues can enable them to disseminate information, engage with the public, and foster transparent communication.

Public relations is the practice of managing the communication between an organization and its publics (Santoso, 2021). Public relations aim to create and maintain a positive image and reputation for the organization, as well as to influence the opinions and behaviours of the target audience. According to Lee and Yue (2020), public relations can be seen as a strategic management function that integrates various communication activities and disciplines to achieve organizational

goals. Traditionally, public relations relied on mass media channels such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television to reach the public (Ishola, 2023; Arqoub & Dwikat, 2023; Stjernholm, 2022). However, with the advent of digital technologies and the proliferation of online platforms, public relations has evolved to incorporate new ways of engaging with the audience.

Digital public relations is the use of digital and social technologies to manage the awareness and understanding, reputation and brand of a company or organisation, through the purposeful influence of exposure via digital media (Rees, 2020).

Digital public relations uses elements of content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), to establish dialogic communication with the audience and customer, to answer their questions and needs, and to use their suggestions to improve products and services online (Permatasari et al., 2021; Verma & Hassan, 2020). Digital public relations has become an essential aspect of communication strategies for institutions/businesses worldwide (Anani-Bossman, 2023). It offers opportunities to engage with the public, build trust, and disseminate information effectively. In Ghana and other regions in Africa, government institutions are beginning to embrace digital public relations to enhance transparency, public participation, and citizen engagement (Ofori et al., 2023; Ngondo, 2019). According to Ofori, et al., (2023), government institutions are leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to engage with the public directly. They share updates, news, and initiatives, respond to queries, and address concerns promptly. They also create and distribute informative and engaging content via various digital channels. This includes press releases, blog posts, videos, infographics, podcasts, and newsletters.

Ghana, as well as other countries in Africa such as South Africa, Nigeria Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, have embraced the digital transformation in public relations (Ngondo, 2019; Agbeko et al., 2021; Ndulu et al., 2023). Recognizing the immense potential of digital platforms, government of these

countries have made strides in using digital technologies to enhance communication, promote transparency, and establish trust with its citizens. Embracing digital public relation practices has therefore become increasingly essential for government institutions, as they understand the significant impact it can have on building trust, promoting transparency, and fostering effective communication with the public. By harnessing a diverse array of digital channels and strategies, government entities can expand their outreach, actively engage citizens, and nurture a culture of participatory governance (Milakovich, 2021).

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

According to Agbeko et al. (2021), the advancement of digital technology has transformed the way organizations communicate and engage with their stakeholders. This shift is particularly relevant for government institutions in Ghana, as they strive to foster participatory governance, transparency, and trust-building with their citizens. A Panta Ray report by Riglietti et al. (2020) found that 72% of organizations that use social media to communicate with stakeholders have seen an improvement in their reputation. Numerous studies have highlighted the potential benefits of incorporating digital platforms into public relations strategies. For example, Sahoo and Mohapatra (2019) analysed the use of internet-enabled communication platforms by state-owned public sector units (PSUs) in Odisha state in India. They found that while more than half of the PSUs have a corporate website, their presence on social media platforms is low. The study findings revealed that PSUs were actively using their websites to communicate with their publics. Gulerman and Apaydin (2017) examined the effectiveness of digital public relations tools on different customer segments in Turkey and found that different digital public relations tools have different effects on specific customer segments. Hassan (2022) explored modern techniques in

public relations, their impact on practitioners' performance, and their areas of employment. Hassan's study revealed that technological advancements in the last decade have led to shifts in public relations practice, particularly with the emergence of interactive communication tools like websites, which have expanded their use and posed significant challenges.

Additionally, research has shown that social media, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing public relations practice (Fitzpatrick & Weissman, 2021; Ahmad, 2019; Neill & Lee, 2016; Inya, 2017). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of digital public relation practices in contemporary public relations (Thompson 2018; Davies & Hobbs, 2020; Chanplin, 2021; Nutsugah & Anani-Bossman, 2023), there is limited number of studies that examine digital public relations practices in selected government institutions in Ghana.

In Ghana, research on digital media usage is still in its early stages and is mostly concentrated on educational settings, according to Anani-Bossman (2023). Literature outside the educational setting context is even more scarce, with the majority of studies focusing on describing how digital platforms are used for dialogic communication (Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi, 2015; Nutsugah et al., 2022; Ayiku & Tandoh 2020) and usage by partisan actors (Amenyeawu, 2021; Asante, 2020). However, little attention has been given to the motivations behind the adoption of digital platforms, how they fit into the broader communication strategies of government ministries, and the benefits and challenges that arise as a result.

Even for studies that attempt to understand the adoption of these platforms they tend to narrow on only one digital media platform without the considerations for the duplicity of platforms which characterise digital public relations. For instance, Dornyo and Adiku (2015), aimed at understanding why public relations practitioners acquire official Facebook pages for their

organisations. After purposely interviewing members of the Institute of Public Relations Ghana, the study concluded that organisations considered Facebook as a good medium since a lot of their customers were using Facebook.

Ayiku and Tandoh (2020) in their study on the use of corporate websites as dialogic public relations tools by Ghana's public and private institutions which included three government ministries, (i.e. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Health), sought to unravel the dialogic nature of corporate websites in Ghana without examining what drove the adoption of these websites by the various institutions. This study recognizes the research gap in Ayiku and Tandoh's study and seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by focusing on the motivations behind the adoption of digital public relations tools and practices in the context of government agencies. This study therefore did not focus on the mere analysis of the usage of a digital platform, but rather the underlying reasons driving the adoption of these digital platform technologies, how they are incorporated in the communication strategies of ministries and the benefits and challenges of using digital platforms for public relations.

Methodologically, this study answered the call by (Huang et al., 2017; Ye & Ki, 2012) to scholars to integrate more qualitative research approach in the conduct of digital media public relations research. According to Huang et al. (2017), it is crucial to have a better understanding of the unique qualities of internet applications, such as asynchrony, globalization, cross-boundary, hypertext, etc., and their impact on PR practice. They urge for an increased focus on theoretical development and methodological rigor in digital PR research. According to Ye and Ki (2012), there is an imbalance in online public relations research between theoretical applications and quantitative and

qualitative methodology. Their research showed that quantitative research (71.3%) was conducted much more frequently than qualitative research (27.0%). As a result, they recommend that scholars incorporate more qualitative research in their public relations studies.

The majority of the existing literature on digital media is dominated by quantitative methods, which fall short of meeting the position of scholars who advocate for using diverse methodological approaches, such as qualitative methods, to study new or emerging research areas (Ju et al., 2021).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the digital public relations practice in selected government institutions in Ghana. The study investigated the reasons why government institutions in Ghana are adopting digital public relations and how they have integrated digital platforms into their communication channels and public relations strategies. Additionally, it assessed the advantages and challenges that government organizations encounter while utilizing digital public relations practices.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study's specific objectives are:

1. To explore the underlying motivations for government institutions decision to adopt digital public relations practices.
2. To examine the strategies used by government institutions to incorporate digital platforms into their public relations strategies and communication channels.
3. To explore the benefits of digital public relations to government institutions.

4. To assess the challenges experienced by government institutions in implementing digital public relations practices.

1.5 Research Questions

The following questions would be addressed by this research study:

1. What are the primary motivations for government institutions decision to adopt digital public relations practices?
2. How do government institutions incorporate digital platforms into their public relations strategies and communication channels?
3. What are the benefits of digital public relations to government institutions?
4. What are the challenges experienced by government institutions in adopting digital public relations practices?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research is important because it shed light on the changing nature of government communication in the digital age by investigating the methods used by these organisations to integrate digital platforms into their public relations strategies and communication channels. The findings of this study are relevant as they offer valuable understanding of why government organizations practice digital public relations.

Moreover, this study contributed to the broader field of public relations by focusing specifically on the government sector and digital public relations. By examining how government institutions in Ghana navigate the digital realm, the research expanded understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in this context. This knowledge can be applied to enhance public

relations practices not only within the government sector but also in other industries that seek to engage with their audiences through digital platforms. The findings of this study can also serve as a valuable resource for practitioners and researchers alike, providing insights into best practices and potential areas for improvement in digital public relations strategies.

Additionally, this research holds societal significance by addressing the role of digital public relations in fostering trust in public institutions. In an era where public trust is crucial for the effective functioning of government organizations, understanding how digital platforms can be leveraged to build this trust is of utmost importance. By exploring the benefits and challenges associated with digital public relations practices in government institutions, this study contributes to the development of strategies that would enhance transparency and trust in public institutions. Ultimately, this can lead to improved citizen engagement and cooperation, fostering a more informed and participatory society.

1.7 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The scope of the study focused on examining the digital public relations practices within selected government institutions in Ghana. Specifically, the study analysed the adoption, strategy employed by these institutions to integrate digital platforms into their public relations strategies and communication channels and the benefits and challenges. The five government organizations included in the study are the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Communications. By exploring these institutions, the study provided insights into the diverse approaches and challenges faced by government entities when utilizing digital public relations.

However, it is important to note the delimitations of the study. Firstly, the research primarily relied on interviews and digital media audit as the data collection tools, which may limit the depth and breadth of information obtained. The qualitative approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the subject matter, but it may not have captured the full spectrum of digital public relations practices in these government institutions. Additionally, the study focused solely on the selected government organizations mentioned, potentially excluding other relevant entities that could have provided valuable insights into the topic.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is structured into five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose. Chapter one provides an overview and context of the study, outlining its objectives, research questions, significance, and scope. Chapter two covers a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the subject, including the exploration of underlying theories supporting the study. Moving on to chapter three, the research methodology is discussed, encompassing the research approach, design, sampling techniques, and data collection procedures employed by the researcher. Chapter four is exclusively focused on discussions of the collected data for the study. Chapter five, on the other hand, features a summary, the study's conclusions, and relevant recommendations derived from the findings.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter of the study presents a general overview of the entire study. The chapter focused on discussing the problem statement that shaped this study. The chapter also discussed the research objectives and questions that guided the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, a comprehensive review of existing literature and related research on the practice of digital public relations is presented. The study did a conceptual review for the study. Additionally, the chapter explored theories that underpins the current study, establishing its theoretical foundation. Furthermore, a thorough review of literature related to the study's objectives is provided, offering valuable insights and context for the research.

2.1 Public Relations in Ghana

Public relations is typically defined as the managerial activity that aims to develop and sustain mutually advantageous connections between an organisation and the public upon which its success or failure depends (Demir et al., 2020). It is the strategic discipline concerned with the deliberate management and strategic dissemination of information originating from a person or organization to the general public, with the ultimate aim of shaping and influencing their perception and understanding (Grunig, 2020). Public relations is fundamentally based on truth and transparency and helps an organization avoid any negative backlash that is likely to occur in the future, it is not about deceptive hype or exaggeration (Smith, 2020). In their seminal work, Grunig and Hunt (1984) delineated four distinct models that illuminate the various approaches used in public relations practices with respect to the direction of information flow between an organization and the public which include the symmetric model, asymmetric model, public information model, and press-agentry model. Public relations play a significant role in influencing an organization's

choices to adjust and function in a manner that prioritizes the welfare of the general public. Based on the above, public relations in this study is conceptualized as the strategic dissemination of information by an organization to promote good and sustainable relations with the general public. It is a tool that is helpful for all organizations and groups and therefore, its importance should not be undermined as it is key to promoting a good brand image for an organization.

Public relations in Ghana dates back to the old times when villages and towns had town criers, gathered at the town halls or listened to the rhetoric of elders (Akpabio, 2009). It has been in existence since olden times and has currently gained traction mostly in formal organizations in Ghana. The inception of modern public relations in Ghana can be attributed to the British colonial administration. The British administration employed public relations strategies to effectively communicate information to the general public and establish connections with influential members of the community and opinion leaders. This approach aimed to foster comprehension and acceptance of the administration's policies (Anani-Bossman, 2021). Following Ghana's attainment of independence in 1957, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, undertook a comprehensive restructuring of the government ministries and the administration of governmental affairs. After this time period, a number of organisations were established to train communication professionals, promote professionalism among practitioners, enhance the public's perception of public relations, and establish guidelines for the field (Blankson, 2009).

Public relations have expanded at a phenomenal rate due to the stable democracy in Ghana and the efforts of Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (Anani-Bossman, 2021). The field of public relations in Ghana has seen significant progress, as shown by the presence of PR/communications departments in almost every organisation of which government institutions are not exempted. Organization-stakeholder connections (public relations) in Ghana, and Africa in general, are

handled in large part via the use of interpersonal communication (Anani-Bossman, 2021). In Ghana, people have a strong sense of community, which translates into the development of open lines of communication and relationship building with key stakeholders, including journalists, community leaders, and opinion leaders.

Anani-Bossman (2021), study also provides evidence that public relations practise in Ghana is characterised by the adoption of a mixed-motive strategy which encompasses the use of both the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models of public relations. As a result, practitioners design tactics that are contingent upon the imperative of attaining a mutually agreeable resolution with stakeholders. The Ghanaian public relations industry is being impacted by globalization and is gradually embracing professionalism as practitioners engage in research activities on behalf of their organizations and customers (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2014).

2.2 Government Communication

Government communication is crucial to the operation of modern democracies. It acts as a conduit between governments and citizens, facilitating the dissemination of information, promoting transparency, and nurturing confidence. The process of transmitting information between governments and their constituents is known as government communication (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). It is a vital instrument for governments to inform, educate, and engage citizens, as well as to establish trust and legitimacy. Traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television; social media; Government websites and online platforms; public events and town hall meetings; and direct communication with citizens, such as through letters, emails, and telephone calls are tools used for government communication (Han & Cheng, 2020; Han & Xu, 2020). The choice of

communication channels will depend on the specific audience the government is attempting to reach, the message it wishes to convey, and the available resources.

Communication within the government is an ongoing process that must be continuously adapted to changing conditions. However, by adhering to the principles of effective communication, governments can strengthen their relationships with citizens and achieve their policy objectives. The rise of social media has had a significant impact on government communication in recent years (Kaya, 2020). Previously impossible, digital media platforms enable governments to communicate directly with constituents. In recent times, COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the significance of government communication. Governments across the globe have utilised a variety of communication channels to inform their citizens about the pandemic, promote public health measures, and address public concerns (Tam et al., 2021; Kim & Kreps, 2020). From country to country, the efficacy of government communication during the pandemic has varied. Nonetheless, it is evident that effective government communication is crucial for crisis management.

Government communication in Ghana plays an essential role in facilitating the flow of information between the government and the public. It includes the dissemination of government policies, initiatives, and programmes and the provision of a forum for citizens to express their concerns and opinions (Masuda et al., 2022). Government ministries, departments, and agencies have their own public relations divisions that manage communication activities pertaining to their respective fields. These entities are responsible for issuing press releases, organising press conferences, and promoting the government's positive image (Meyer, 2020). Regularly, government officials hold press briefings and conferences to address the media and provide updates on significant issues, policies, and programmes. These events provide journalists with the opportunity to pose queries

and seek clarification on government-related matters (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). Various platforms are often utilised by government to reach a larger audience and deliver essential messages, such as public service announcements and educational programmes (Demuyakor, 2023). In 2019, the Government of Ghana enacted the Right to Information Act, allowing citizens to request information from government institutions (Mahama,2020). In Ghana, government communication plays a crucial role in informing the public about government initiatives and policies. Through channels such as press briefings, websites, social media, and community engagement, government can promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in government (Androniceanu, 2021).

2.3 Digital Public Relations in Ghana

Digital public relations is the utilisation of digital platforms and technologies to manage and improve the reputation and communication efforts of individuals, organisations, or corporations (Permatasari et al., 2021). It includes the strategies and tactics used to engage target audiences, develop relationships, and influence public perception in the digital realm. Digital public relations emphasise on establishing a strong online presence for individuals or businesses (Adeola et al., 2020; Cartwright et al., 2021). Fundamental to digital public relations is the production of compelling and pertinent content (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Digital public relations also emphasise online reputation management and enhancement (Permatasari et al., 2021). According to Capriotti, et al., (2021) digital public relations entails monitoring online conversations, responding to negative comments or evaluations, and promoting a favourable sentiment. Continuous monitoring of online conversations, trends, and feedback is required for digital PR (Shankar et al., 2022). This enables PR professionals to adapt strategies

and tactics, respond to emergent issues, and maintain a competitive advantage in the ever-changing digital landscape (Lopes & Casais, 2022).

A study by Anani-Bossman (2023) emphasised the increasing importance of digital media within the field of public relations due to the prevailing global pattern of organisations embracing digital strategies and interactive capabilities of online platforms. Anani-Bossman and Obeng (2022) added that the proliferation of internet and mobile phone access in Ghana has allowed digital platforms to develop as a practical and effective means of communication. These mediums have proven useful in bridging the gap between the public and their government.

Government ministries have used digital platforms as a means to efficiently distribute information and communicate with the public, in response to the evolving tastes and habits of individuals. The expeditiousness of digital platforms enables government to rapidly resolve problems, participate in dialogues, and quickly respond to public concerns (Young, 2022). According to Fashoro and Barnard (2021), the utilisation of digital public relations practises presents a viable and economical approach for government institutions in Ghana to boost the transmission of information. In contrast to conventional public relations techniques, digital platforms provide a cost-effective and streamlined means of engaging and disseminating information to a substantial populace, facilitating broader civic involvement and enhancing transparency. Government agencies may enhance public engagement and participation in decision-making processes by using digital platforms, which provide a two-way communication channel for individuals to voice their thoughts, offer feedback, and actively participate (Arshad & Khurram, 2020). This promotes a perception of inclusiveness, reinforces the bond between the government and its constituents, and facilitates the cultivation of trust. In contemporary times, governmental entities over the globe are increasingly acknowledging the significance of using digital platforms within their public relations

endeavours to adequately engage with citizens, foster transparency, and cultivate trust. Active interaction on social media platforms is a prominent strategy used by government agencies. According to the studies of Graham (2014) and Moreno et al. (2015), governmental entities were found to use social media platforms as a means to provide timely information, address enquiries from citizens, and engage in dialogues pertaining to multiple topics. Through this, governments establish a perception of being easily approachable and accessible, hence cultivating favourable ties between them and the general public. This therefore provides governments the chance to demonstrate openness and accountability to the citizenry.

According to Moreno et al. (2015), communication practitioners use digital channels as a means of disseminating information pertaining to government initiatives, policies, and advancements. Governments foster confidence among individuals and exhibit their dedication to transparency by freely disseminating updates and data. Chepkemoi (2021) emphasizes the value of digital public relations in times of crisis. After studying the public relations practices of two universities in Kenya, the researcher highlighted digital media as an effective medium for responding to queries from the public. Government organisations can therefore leverage on digital channels to facilitate crisis communication, enabling them to effectively disseminate the right information, combat disinformation, and successfully handle public perception. Graham (2014) study revealed that, digital platforms facilitate the gathering of feedback, conducting surveys, and engaging in public dialogues, thus affording individuals the opportunity to directly articulate their viewpoints and apprehensions to the government.

Smith (2020) also advocated for the use of visually appealing elements to effectively communicate intricate information, particularly within governmental contexts. He advised that governments tailor their communications to accommodate various platforms and demographic groups, therefore

guaranteeing the relevance and ease of accessibility of the information provided. The integration of various multimedia components, including films, infographics, and photographs, has the potential to augment the efficacy of government communications. Suciati's (2022) research conducted in-depth interviews with various micro, small and medium entities in Indonesia to unravel how they were using social media. The study highlighted the utilisation of social media platforms for public relations endeavours and the significance of real-time monitoring. Government institutions can similarly, engage in proactive monitoring of social media discussions, analyse the prevailing sentiments, and swiftly respond to public inquiries and apprehensions. Based on the aforementioned research, it can be seen that governments can enhance their ties with the public through social media engagement, increasing transparency, leveraging digital platforms for crisis communication and allowing two-way communication. Despite the various benefits of digital media, Hilary and Dumebi, (2021), indicated that digital media has contributed immensely to the spread of disinformation and misinformation.

In summary, the empirical findings derived from multiple studies suggest that the implementation of digital public relations strategies within governmental organisations yields numerous advantages which include heightened citizen participation, prompt dissemination of information, enhanced transparency, and cost-efficiency. Nevertheless, it is essential to properly address and manage the associated challenges such as digital literacy and skills gap, data security concerns, maintaining online reputation and resolving digital inequities to ensure successful implementation of digital public relations.

2.4 Theoretical Review

2.4.1 Technology, Organization, and Environment Theory

The Technology, Organization, and Environment (TOE) is a theoretical framework that is useful for understanding the factors that influence the effective adoption and implementation of technological innovations within an organization. Tornatzky et al., (1990) developed the TOE framework to investigate the interplay between an organization's internal structures, its technological capabilities, and the external setting in which it functions. Al Hadwer et al., (2021) and Awa et al., (2017) stipulate that the TOE framework divides the factors influencing an organization to adopt an innovation into three groups: (1) technology (i.e., systems security, complexity, compatibility with existing systems and relative advantage); (2) organization (i.e., organization size; top-management support of replacing operative systems; structure as well as culture and resources); and (3) environment (i.e., market uncertainty, governmental or competitors' pressure, and customer demands).

The TOE framework's technological component includes both the accessibility and nature of the technology at play. The technological element includes all applicable internal and external technologies (Amini et al., 2023) for the organization as a whole. The organizational context of the TOE framework is a description of the features of the organization that have an effect on the adoption and implementation of digital practices, such as the organization's size, structure and communication procedures. Awa et al., (2017) indicate the relevance of the size of the organization in adoption of technologies where larger organizations have greater capabilities for incorporating new technologies as compared to smaller organizations due to economies of scale. Amini and Jahanbakhsh (2023) explain that the framework's "environmental aspect" includes factors including the industry's structure, technical support structures and government restrictions. Firms

may be more or less likely to embrace digital PR practices depending on the regulatory climate and level of competition in their respective industries.

There are several research that have applied that TOE framework in their study. For example, Wulandari et al., (2020) utilised the TOE framework to examine the effect of social media usage on micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Bandung. The research uses causal quantitative methods and SEM analysis techniques, with 400 respondents. The findings suggest that technology, organization, and environment are the factors that encourage MSMEs to adopt social media, impacting their performance in customer services, sales, marketing, and internal operations.

Similarly, Fadhlina et al., (2016) used the TOE framework to identify the factors influencing the adoption of social media marketing among Malaysian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The results of the research indicate that factors related to technology organization and environment have a significant impact on the adoption of social media marketing by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kelantan, Malaysia. Most of the participants emphasized the need for improvements in the ICT infrastructure, especially in terms of Internet speed and coverage areas. Furthermore, Molinillo and Japutra (2017) used the TOE framework to study digital information and technology adoption drivers. The study findings indicate that SMEs can gain a competitive edge by utilizing digital marketing-related information and technology.

Zhang et al., (2020) used the TOE framework to assess firms' organisational and environmental readiness for green innovation technologies, introducing a new perspective. In their study, the researchers proposed that certain conditions are necessary and sufficient to promote green innovation, which in turn leads to competitive advantage through improved environmental and firm performance. The study involved gathering survey data from 340 companies in China to test

their research model. The results supported the researchers' hypotheses, showing that all dimensions of the necessary and sufficient conditions contribute significantly but in slightly different ways to the success of green innovation.

Mahakittikun et al, (2020) investigated the factors within the TOE framework and their relationship to firm performance in the mobile payments industry. The findings suggest that certain factors, such as relative advantage, innovativeness, knowledge of mobile payments, critical mass, competitive pressures, and external support, can be used to predict the performance of a firm. Innovativeness was found to be the strongest predictor of positive firm performance, while critical mass had a negative impact on firm performance.

These studies demonstrate the TOE framework's longevity in understanding technology and system adoption and innovation across environments.

The TOE theory has substantial significance in the context of digital public relations. In the framework of this study, the technology component is used to understand the digital tools and platforms such as social media, websites, blogs, email and mobile apps, which are eligible to be adopted for digital public relations (Al Hadwer et al., 2021). The aforementioned technologies are present both internally and externally in the government institution, and are essential prerequisites for the implementation of digital public relations strategies (Adeola et al., 2020). The organisational dimension of the theory will aid in the assessment of the public relations (PR) department and professionals within government organisations and provide a framework to assess management support, available resources and technical support structures within government institutions available for facilitating the successful adoption and implementation of digital PR practices.

The environmental component of the framework will be applicable in understanding the external factors and the technological infrastructure that can affect the public relations department's ability to use innovative technologies for digital public relations. The rapidly changing landscape of public relations globally has brought on the need for government organizations to adopt digital means of public relations (Ahmad, 2019). Government organizations in the face of the rapid evolution of digital technologies, communication channels and the digital landscape are making strides to adopt digital strategies in public relations to effectively engage the public and ensure the effective dissemination of information (Ofori et al., 2023). The TOE framework will thus be utilized in this study to analyse how the adoption of digital PR tools and strategies is influenced by their technological characteristics, the organizational structure and culture, and the broader environmental (as well as global) factors.

2.4.2 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The diffusion of innovation theory, proposed by Everett Rogers in 1962, explores how new ideas, technologies, or innovations spread and are adopted within a social system (Rogers, 1962; Wolf, 2022). The theory identifies five primary adopter groups: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Kaminski, 2011). It suggests that the adoption process is influenced by a number of factors, including the perceived attributes of the innovation, the communication channels used to disseminate information, the characteristics of the social system, and the degree to which the innovation is compatible with existing norms and values (Min et al., 2019). The diffusion of innovation theory is typically regarded as a valuable change model for guiding technological innovation in which the innovation itself is modified and presented to meet the requirements of all levels of adopters. In addition, it emphasises the significance of communication and peer networking in the adoption process.

The diffusion of innovation theory, as outlined by Rogers (2003), offers insights into the dissemination of new ideas, norms, and technology within a society. This theory suggests that the process of innovation diffusion is not limited by the specific attributes of the innovation itself, the characteristics of the adopters, or the cultural context. Instead, it proposes that the mechanisms responsible for the spread of innovations are universally applicable across different domains involved in innovation development (Le & Lei, 2019). In essence, the theory emphasizes that the factors driving the diffusion of innovations are common and consistent, regardless of the specific context. This means that the same fundamental principles can be applied to understand and analyze how innovations are adopted and disseminated, irrespective of the nature of the innovation or the individuals and communities involved. By focusing on these underlying mechanisms, the diffusion of innovation theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how new ideas and technologies gain acceptance and become integrated into society at large (Makary et al., 2019).

For the purpose of this study, Roger's (2003) five characteristics of innovations was adopted to explain why digital innovation technologies are being adopted by public relations officers for the practice of digital public relations. The theory identifies the characteristics of innovations, compatibility, complexity, relative advantage, trialability and observability.

Zollet and Back (2015) investigated the motivation of companies to adopt interactive features on their websites, focusing on the company's perspective using the diffusion of innovation framework. Data from 138 firms in Switzerland and Germany was collected and analysed using multiple regression analysis. Results showed that complexity, perceived benefits, top management support, and information intensity are key drivers in the diffusion of innovation related to interactivity on corporate websites among firms in Switzerland and Germany. In this study, the researcher did not

only focus on websites but also incorporated social media platforms in investigation why Government ministries use digital media platforms.

Fagan (2011) conducted research on the adoption of web sites by 29 small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) using a Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory framework in Salisbury, United States of America. The study focused solely on web sites as an internet-based technology that SMEs may adopt. The finding of the study showed that information about the relevance of websites played a crucial role in the adoption of technological platforms. This finding will be crucial in our quest to understand how informed government ministries are, about the relevance of digital media platforms and if it plays a role in their adoption decision.

Farajnezhad et al. (2021) investigated the impact of diffusion of innovation model on behavioural intention in adopting social media marketing among 253 Iranian social media users. The study found that social media was being adopted for marketing purposes because the users privately used social media platforms and had tried it out personally, before deciding to incorporate it in their organizational use. The finding of this research will help in shedding light on the tribality of digital media platforms by public relations officers and how it affects the decision to adopt these platforms.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed various research works that have been done which is significant to this study as well as theories which served as a guiding principle to place this study in a proper perspective. The reviewed theories were: diffusion of innovation theory and Technology, Organization, and Environment. In this chapter various concepts, including digital public relations and public

relations in Ghana, along with government communication were explored. The next chapter will centre on the research methodologies employed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methodology adopted for this study. Research methodology refers to the systematic and structured framework that researchers use to plan, conduct, and analyse research studies (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). It encompasses the principles, procedures, and techniques employed in the research process, aiming to ensure that the research is conducted rigorously, ethically, and in a manner that generates reliable and valid results (Mishra & Alok, 2022). The chapter is further divided into sub-chapters, namely introduction, research approach and design, sampling methods and sampling size, data collection instrument, validity and reliability, data analysis, ethical issues and chapter summary.

3.1 Research Paradigm

In the field of research, paradigms are useful tools that combine theory and practice to address a variety of problems (Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). According to Creswell and Poth (2016), research paradigm refers to the philosophical framework that guides the design and approach of a research study. Creswell (2017) notes that research paradigm shapes the researcher's worldview and influences their beliefs about the nature of reality, knowledge, and how knowledge can be acquired. There are three distinct research paradigms: positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism (Rahi, 2017; Žukauskas et al., 2018).

Interpretivism posits that the social world is subjective, and that individuals' perceptions, meanings, and interpretations play a crucial role in shaping reality (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). This paradigm according to Creswell (2014) emphasizes understanding the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals within their social and cultural contexts. Interpretive research is qualitative in nature, and methods like interviews, observations, and content analysis are commonly used to explore the complexities of human behaviour and interactions (Awasthy, 2019).

Due to the qualitative character of this study, the interpretivist paradigm was used to investigate the daily experiences, perceptions, and behaviours of Ghanaian government institutions regarding their digital public relations practises. The interpretivist paradigm emphasises context, meaning, and the social construction of reality, which matches the focus on these practises' subjective components (Quinlan, 2017)

3.2 Research Approach and Design

The research approach is the overarching strategy or framework that governs the methodologies and techniques employed to conduct a study (Mehrad & Zangeneh, 2019). There are three primary research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and hybrid/mixed (Mulisa, 2022).

In the context of this study on digital public relations practice in specified Ghanaian government institutions, a qualitative methodology was employed. Qualitative research entails investigating the context, meanings, and patterns that emerge from the narratives and responses of the participants (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022).

For this study, a qualitative approach was chosen because it corresponds with the objectives of the research, which are to investigate and comprehend the motivations, strategies, benefits, and challenges associated with digital public relations practises in government institutions.

In addition, a qualitative research approach was adopted for this study because, the qualitative research approach allows the researcher to delve deeper into the phenomenon under study while engaging the use of narrative descriptions to explain the phenomenon (Crabtree & Miller, 2023). Through open-ended interviews and digital media audit, the study investigated the perspectives, opinions, and insights of the participants, obtaining a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the practice of digital public relations.

Research design refers to the procedural framework that guides the process of conducting research (Asenahabi, 2019). It encompasses the plan for the study, including the chosen strategy, data collection methods, time horizon, and analysis procedures (Sileyew, 2019). This study used a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design seeks to provide a comprehensive and detailed picture of the subject matter in order to allow for a deeper exploration and expression of ideas (Pratap, 2019). The goal of a descriptive research design is to analyse and describe the features, behaviours, and qualities of a certain population or phenomenon (Sharma et al., 2023; Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

Instead of trying to demonstrate causal linkages or make predictions, this study focused on providing a thorough and full account of the subject under investigation. Using a descriptive research design, the study helped to paint a complete picture of how digital public relations is practised within the designated government organisations. The researcher used this method to investigate the adoption, benefits and difficulties of implementing digital public relations practises

at these institutions, as well as the strategies they employ when incorporating digital platforms into their public relations activities.

The descriptive research design is appropriate for the study because it helped capture the intricate and subtle details of the digital public relations landscape unique to the Ghanaian government.

3.3 Sampling methods and Sample Size

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is a non-probability sampling method where research participants are selected based on specific characteristics believed to be significant for the study's objectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Purposive sampling enables the careful selection of respondents who can provide rich and relevant information related to the research question (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

The study used purposive sampling to choose five (5) government institutions for this study: The Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Communications. The ministry of information was selected because it serves as the mouthpiece of the Government and regularly churns out information about Government institutions, hence the high probability of adopting the use of digital platforms in its public relations practices. The ministry of communication serves as the government ministry responsible for managing government's telecommunication infrastructure, this therefore imposes some responsibility on the ministry to adopt digital platforms. Bedane (2017) focused on the communications ministry in Ethiopia while studying similar phenomenon. Bedane (2017) argued that the communications ministry, by virtue of being deeply engrossed in communication activities in the entire country is critical to be studied within the scope of digital public relations in

government organizations. Other ministries like Ministry of Health, Finance and Youth and Sports were selected using a ministry agency criterion. The criterion revealed that the three ministries had the most agencies among government ministries signalling engagements with diverse audiences. This therefore imposes a responsibility on the ministries to expand their communication approach to reach these varied audience.

Subsequently, 5 participants were recruited from these government institutions in addition to the digital media platforms as the sample size for this study. Hagaman and Wutich (2017), suggest that a sample size of 5 to 6 interviews is sufficient for qualitative research to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations. Additionally, the 5 participants in this study were, Miss Munira Karim, Ministry of Information, Mr Isaac Offei Baah, Ministry of Health, Mr. Kenneth Annag, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Miss Naa Korkoi Essah, Ministry of Communications and Mr. Emmanuel Ansah, Ministry of Finance. These participants selected because of their position and roles as public relations practitioners in the selected government organizations. Their position and roles as public relations practitioners ensured the selected participants supplied information relevant to the practice of digital public relations practice in their organizations. According to Etikan (2016) research participants must be selected because they are in a position to supply detailed and rich information.

3.4 Data Collection: Procedures and Instruments

Data collection is the process of gathering information and evidence for research purposes. It involves using various methods, such as surveys, interviews, observations, or experiments, to collect data that is relevant to the research objectives (Wilson & Miller, 2014).

3.4.1 Interviews

In this study, interviews was chosen as one of the methods for collecting qualitative data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2021), interview is a tool used in qualitative research to elicit views and opinions from participants. To ensure a systematic and focused approach to data gathering, an interview guide (see Appendix A) was developed. The interview guide focused on gathering demographic information about the participants. This included details such as the interviewees' job roles, years of experience in public relations, and the specific government institutions they represented. The interview guide was crafted to probe into the reasons behind the shift towards digital platforms for communication and engagement with the public. Understanding these primary motivations allowed for a comprehensive examination of the factors influencing the adoption of digital PR in government institutions.

The interview guide also helped to delve into the specific strategies and tactics used by government institutions to incorporate digital platforms into their public relations strategies and communication channels. This was aimed at gaining insights into the diverse approaches and techniques employed by these institutions to leverage digital tools effectively for public relations purposes. The interview guide also had questions to help understand the benefits and challenges experienced by government institutions when implementing digital public relations practices. By exploring the positive outcomes and potential obstacles faced during the adoption and execution of digital PR strategies, this section provided valuable information on the effectiveness and impact of digital communication in the government sector.

3.4.2 Digital Media Audit

A digital media audit is the processes of reviewing key strategies as well as material and contents that have been published on an organization's digital platforms such as social media and organizational websites (Gattiker, 2013). According to Adi (2013) digital media audit allows the organization to know which key communication strategies have become successful in reaching organizational communication objectives.

Reukova (2015) argues that a digital media audit is essential in identifying digital media assets, how digital media platforms advances objectives; advantages and disadvantages of existing setup and strategy; risk exposure and wasted investment in present strategies.

For the purpose of achieving the objectives of this study, a digital media audit of the websites and social media platforms of the selected government organizations was adopted as a data collection and analytical tool. The audit was done on the digital media platforms of the selected ministries from 1st June 2023 to 30th November 2023. The study adopted indicators from Bernard and Wilfred's (2021) scalable information technology audit framework for small and medium enterprises engaging in social media to conduct the audit of the digital media platforms of the selected government institutions. Using a digital media audit form (see Appendix B), the digital media platforms of the government ministries were reviewed and data collected. The process involved visiting official digital media platforms, scanning the plans and capturing data on the media audit form for purposes of audit.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial stage in the research process where collected data is examined, organized, and interpreted to derive meaningful insights and conclusions that address the research objectives

(Saldaña, 2020; Wickham, 2016). Due to the use of interviews to gather data, thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data together with the digital media audit conducted.

3.5.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic data analysis is a qualitative analysis method that involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022; Saldaña, 2020). Interviews were recorded using a voice recorder to ensure accuracy and capture the participants' responses in their original form. After conducting the interviews, the recorded audio was transcribed, preparing the data for analysis, as it allowed the researcher to work with written text, facilitating the organization and coding of data during the analysis process.

In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to explore and make sense of the various themes and subthemes that emerged from the one-on-one semi-structured interview.

In the course of the data analysis process, the researcher conducted a thorough and methodical examination of the transcribed interviews. The primary aim was to discern any recurring patterns, ideas, or topics that directly pertained to the research objectives. These recurring elements were instrumental in shaping the initial themes that would serve as the foundation for the subsequent analysis.

Moreover, the identified themes were subjected to further development by carefully selecting illustrative quotes and pertinent excerpts from the interviews. These snippets were chosen to offer tangible and compelling evidence that would substantiate the existence and importance of each theme. This meticulous process ensured that the findings derived from the thematic data analysis

were presented in a well-structured and coherent manner, enhancing the clarity and comprehensibility of the research results.

Data collected from the websites and social media platforms were also analysed using a digital media audit. The researcher focused on recurring information that had been published on the social media platforms and websites of the selected organizations. A critical analysis of textual, video and audio data were engaged to investigate how the platforms were used to engage stakeholders in line with performing PR functions. The data collected were thematized and presented in line with their corresponding research questions.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2014) argues that qualitative research validity requires researchers to confirm the accuracy of findings by employing specific procedures which include member checks, prolonged engagement with the participants, and peer debriefing to confirm the authenticity of the data and interpretations. Determining the accuracy of research findings from the view of the researcher, the participants, and/or the consumers of the research is referred to as validity (Leung, 2015). The reliability of a research study refers to the consistency and soundness of the methods used and how they were applied (Miles et. al, 2014). Providing a clear justification for the methods used and clarity in the analytical procedures can increase the sense of reliability of a study (Creswell, 2013). Reliability also addresses the consistency and clarity of the actual research conduct, which increases the likelihood that other researchers can discern and undertake the research methods described (McDonald et. al.2019).

One of the ways that this study ensured validity and reliability was using appropriate tools in the process of data gathering. Here, one interview guide was used to collect data from all respondents

and one digital media audit form was to gather data from the digital media pages to ensure validity and reliability of findings. Additionally, a written transcribe of the interview was later reviewed with participants to ensure that their opinions were appropriately represented, and changes made where necessary.

Also, the study engaged the use of multiple data collection methods (interviewing and digital media audit) to ensure that the data used in the analysis were a true reflection of issues. The use of more than one data collection and analysis techniques has critical implications for improving the validity of the findings of qualitative studies (Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021; Aspers & Corte, 2019). Thus, the researcher engaged these approaches to ensure validity and reliability of the findings in this study.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations play a critical role in research studies involving human participants, and the study on digital public relations practice in selected government institutions in Ghana is no exception. Informed consent was sought, ensuring that participants were fully aware of their involvement in the study and that their participation was entirely voluntary. Respondent's signed a consent form, permitting the researcher to state their names in the work. Furthermore, the interviews (both audio recording and transcriptions) were kept and stored properly. During the interview process, the participants were informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. By adhering to these ethical research code of conduct, the study maintained a high ethical standard and ensured the welfare and rights of the participants throughout the research process.

The researcher also sought permission from the public relations officers of the selected organizations before engaging in the collection of data related to contents on the websites and social media platforms. This was done to avoid issues of data mongering and other breaches.

3.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research techniques used in the study were extensively discussed and justified. The research paradigm adopted was interpretivism due to the qualitative nature of the study, and a descriptive research design was employed. A sample size of five PR officers from government institutions was selected using non-probability purposive sampling technique. Data was collected through interviews and digital media audit form, and ethical considerations were carefully adhered to throughout the research process. These methodological choices were made to ensure the reliability and validity of the study's findings, while also upholding ethical standards.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This study was interested in investigating the key factors that motivated public institutions decision to adopt the use of digital technologies in the performance of public relations functions. The study was also interested in identifying and understanding some the core strategy that government organizations had adopted in integrating digital technologies in PR operations. Furthermore, the study sought to understand how beneficial digital PR has been to government institutions while also assessing the challenges that government ministries face while implementing digital PR practices.

The study purposely sampled five government institutions - The Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Communications for the investigations. The researcher also adopted interviews of PR professionals of the selected government institutions to understand the core research objectives while also engaging a digital media audit of the sampled government institutions.

This chapter focuses on presenting findings made from the data collection phases of the study.

The study adopted the thematic analysis approach to analyse the data collected from the interview sessions with the sampled PR practitioners and a digital media audit report from the various government institutions. The findings have been presented and discussed in this chapter in relation to the research questions developed for this study.

4.2 RQ1: What are the Primary Motivations for Government Institutions' Decisions to Adopt Digital Public Relations Practice?

The first objective of this study was to understand the motivating factors that have accounted for the adoption and use of digital technologies within government institutions. Essentially, the first objective of the study sought to understand what issues have influenced government institutions decisions to engage in digital public relations.

To ascertain this however, the study first sought to understand the extent to which digital technologies had become adopted and used within the selected government institutions. The researcher therefore engaged a digital media audit of the government organizations' digital platforms to understand the extent to which digital technologies had been adopted in the ministries. The researcher then went on ahead to understand the factors that had influenced the adoption and use of digital Public Relations in the organizations.

4.2.1 Digital Media Adoption and Use among Government Institutions

Table 1 Digital Media Adoption and Use among Government Institutions

Government Institution	Official Website	Social Media Platforms	Prominent Website Contents	Social Media Content Types	Frequency of Updates	Audience Engagement
Ministry of Information	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	News updates, announcements, press releases, upcoming events,	Livestreaming, events updates, announcements, responses to trending issues	Few times a week	Infrequent audience engagement

Ministry of Finance	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	project pictures News updates, announcements, press releases, upcoming events, project pictures	Livestreaming, events updates, announcements, responses to trending issues	Daily updates on the website	Infrequent audience engagement
Ministry of Health	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	News updates, announcements, press releases, upcoming events, project pictures	Livestreaming, events updates, announcements, responses to trending issues	Daily updates on the website	Infrequent audience engagement
Ministry of Youth and Sports	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	News updates, announcements, press releases, upcoming events, project pictures	Livestreaming, events updates, announcements, responses to trending issues	Daily updates on the website	Infrequent audience engagement
Ministry of Communications	Yes	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	News updates, announcements, press releases, upcoming events, project pictures	Livestreaming, events updates, announcements, responses to trending issues	Daily updates on the website	Infrequent audience engagement

Source: Field Data, 2023

The table above presents findings made from a digital media audit conducted in line with the understanding the extent to which digital media technologies had been adopted by the selected

government ministries in Ghana. The findings made from the study as presented in the table above points to the indication that there were significantly high levels of digital media technology adoption among all the government institutions sampled for the study.

The data in the table above indicates that all the five government ministries sampled for this study had organizational websites that were running and functional. Additionally, the data indicates that social media adoption was also quite high as all the organizations had adopted the use of at least three different social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Authors such as Tam et al. (2021) as well as Kim and Kreps (2020) have noted that social media have become very prevalent tools in the activities of government institutions in recent times. Kaya (2020) argues that the changing dynamics government publics has inured that social media become adopted government communication.

Furthermore, the study agrees with the findings of Ofori et al. (2023) who found that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were among the most used social media platforms among government institutions in Ghana.

The study found that digital media platforms were also widely used for communication with stakeholders within the sampled organizations. For instance, the findings made from the digital media audit indicate that organizational websites were functional and used to perform critical information sharing functions such as giving live updates, live streaming of events and session as well as publication of press releases. Furthermore, social media platforms that were adopted by the government organizations were also used for both primary and advanced social media functions which includes providing organizational information in multimedia formats as well as high level engagements with social media followers on a daily basis. However, it is important to

add, that government organizations were not actively engaging with their audiences especially in the comment sections when feedbacks are shared or questions asked.

The findings made from the digital media audit conducted on the selected government ministries suggest therefore that there were significantly high levels of digital media adoption and use within the sampled organizations. This was evidenced in the presence of a functional websites, diverse arrays of social media platforms and the use of these platforms to communicate often with online stakeholders as shown in the table above. This conforms largely to the findings of Ngondo (2019) Agbeko et al. (2021) as well as Ndulu et al. (2023) who have all argued that digital PR adoption and use in Ghana remains one of the iconic on the African continent.

4.2.2 Motivating Factors that Influence the Adoption and Use of Digital PR in Government Organizations.

According to Lee and Yue (2020) PR institutions within government organizations often engage in the use of traditional communication channels. However, the rise of digital media tools means that newer forms of communication have emerged with better communication tendencies for PR departments in government organizations. However, as evidenced by the core tenets of the Technology, Organization and Environment Theory (TOE) some critical factors like the type of technology, the structure of the organization inures for the adoption of these new forms of communication (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990).

This study, having noted a significantly good level of adoption and use of digital media tools in government ministries further sought investigate the factors that had motivated the adoption and use of digital media technologies as PR tools within the sampled government organizations. This study found that, information sharing needs, nature of stakeholders, cost effectiveness of digital

public relations and supporting institutional goals had motivated the adoption and use of digital PR in government ministries. The study found that these factors provided foundational motivation for the adoption and use of digital communication technologies for performing PR functions within the ministry.

4.2.2.1 Information Sharing Needs

The study found that one of the core factors that influenced the adoption and use of digital PR in the selected government organizations in Ghana is the need for PR departments of the government ministries to share information. The study found that, the respondents perceived that the dynamic nature of the information world in the 21st century has come to mean that government ministries need to share information in real-time and with immediacy. Thus, because of the need to deliver information as quickly as possible to stakeholders, the adoption and use of digital communication technologies in dispensing public relations duties had become essential.

Some of the respondents noted that the ministry was pushed to engage in digital PR in order to ensure timely information reaches target audience with speed and accuracy. The respondents noted that information sharing was critical to ensuring that stakeholders were well-informed about issues happening within the ministries as well as other critical issues. Thus, some of the respondents stressed the need to share information in line with educating online publics about the key operations of the ministries and other essential issues.

In the extract below for instance, the respondent stresses that the primary reason for the use of digital PR was the need to keep online publics updated. This implies therefore that the dynamism in how information is shared between government ministries and their publics which has now assumed some elements of immediacy was critical in informing the decisions to adopt and use

digital PR within organizations. The respondents avers that there was the need to ensure that audience were updated often with key organizational information:

There was the need to share information with our stakeholders...Most of the time it helps us to keep our stakeholders, the public and other people who are interested in what we are doing updated. Apart from even sharing information with them and the education, it keeps them updated.(Naa Korkoi Essah, 2023)

The extract suggests that the adoption of digital PR within the selected organizations was emergent from the need to share information towards education of the stakeholders of the respective organizations. Beyond this, the extract indicates that keeping up to date with the latest information from the organization was a core concern for most of the organizations for which reason digital PR had been adopted and used within the organizations. Indeed, digital media technologies such as social media and websites allow organizations to communicate effectively and quickly. The real-time communication function of digital media technologies ensures that PR professionals are supply organizational information with immediacy, ensuring that publics are kept up to speed with the latest information from the organization. Young (2022) found in their study that the core reason for the use digital media tools' involvement in government communication reside in the information provision and the need to keep the citizenry updated with the latest information regarding governing activities.

To add to this, the study found that information sharing needs which motivated adoption of digital PR was tied with the need to share information in a timely manner. Thus, the findings indicate that respondents perceived that sharing information was not enough, however, being timely with information sharing was a critical consideration factor for which reason digital media technologies had become highly adopted within the practice of PR in the government ministries.

Maybe you have issue...example is these AVR drugs at the port that happened last Saturday. So if we have to wait for it to come to news, it will come maybe six o'clock in

the evening. Now you want to respond. Then you have to wait and come back to work on Monday...meanwhile the thing happened Saturday. You may end up getting this thing across by Wednesday. By that time the people had gotten the other side of it already... and so what you are even bringing is something...dead news to them... they don't even to listen to it. But this one you put it there...right away you get it and then you move on. (Issac Ofei Baah, 2023)

The extract above implies the relevance of sharing information with immediacy – which was perceived by the respondent as a key issue that was considered for the adoption of digital PR in their government institution. The respondent note that using social media tended to restrict the risk of communicating with publics late and giving information that would eventually become irrelevant to them.

Information sharing and the way that information is shared has critical implications for how people perceive issues and events. The lack of communication or timely communication may result in crisis situations that could have been averted with real-time information sharing. Authors such as Chepkemoi (2021) and Tam et al. (2021) have all found that the use of the use of digital media tools in government communication have critical implications for averting and managing crisis situations. This study found that the core of information sharing needs of the government ministries sampled for this study was engraved in the need, in the long run, to prevent or manage conflict situations.

This study notes that the information sharing needs of the government institutions which gave motivation to the adoption and use of digital PR conforms to the ideas of the TOE theory which emphasises that organizations must. Awa et al. (2017) have argued that critical issues such as information that are needed for the operations of systems within organizations cause environmental and structural changes that may become one of the confounding factors for the adoption of newer technologies within organizations.

4.2.2.2 Nature of Stakeholders

The study also found that the nature of stakeholders like their source of information, size and their ability to use digital tools was a key contributing factor in the adoption and use of digital PR. The study noted that each government organization had peculiar types of stakeholders with whom they must communicate. The study found that some of the respondents perceived that the core reason why digital PR had been adopted was to help government ministries reach an increasingly growing number of stakeholders who are scattered across the globe, “so basically just enable us reach a larger number of publics who are actually in the community of social media” (Emmanuel Ansah, 2023). The respondent opines that the core use of social media platforms has the tendency of reaching a large number of people was very important for them. Since, the ministry had to deal with an expansive number of stakeholders, the use of digital media technologies became relevant in dispensing of PR functions within the institution. The quote also brings to the fore the idea that digital media is used to create communities of interest that government ministries need to communicate to. The phrase supposes that by nature, stakeholders use digital media platforms to create and develop online communities. Essentially, there is the need to communicate organizational information with these online communities through these digital media platforms.

The findings further present that stakeholders have now become engrossed in the use of social media to access and digest organizational information. Hence, the tendency of stakeholders in recent times to access information from online platforms instead of traditional media platforms has informed the decisions to engage more actively in digital PR activities to communicate. According to Obeng (2022) the proliferation of the internet as well as mobile devices has come with it a social media prevalence culture in Ghana. Thus, Obeng (2022) notes that high levels of

social media has given sense to the fact that organizations now want to communicate with their stakeholders on digital media platforms.

This study found that social media and other digital media technologies have become very prevalent to the extent that organizational stakeholders have high regard for such platforms for receiving and digesting information from organizations. In the extract below for instance, one of the respondents note that the ease of use of social media and online platforms has ensured that a culture of requesting and receiving organizational information on the go has been cultivated among key stakeholders. Thus, publics of government organizations do not tend to wait for traditional platforms to have access to news but tend to access information about government ministries online with immediacy.

You look at the way the world is going, then you follow suit. Because these platforms, they will come and they will also change into a different thing...they want engagement and that is why the people are moving on. You will quickly have to migrate to that platform so that you are able to put your cases or issues across... because currently no one is reading. We have about sixty newspapers we got for our directors...everyday...but you go and they are there. They are not reading them because whatever news they want is on their phones. (Isaac Ofei Baah, 2023)

The extract above provides evidence in support of the finding that some of the respondents perceived that the changing dynamic of the publics themselves requires that the PR departments of the various government organizations adopt digital PR in their operations. The respondent notes that the publics of the various government organizations have evolved and are now looking to be more engaging with institutions and hence have become more active on social media platforms. Government organizations hence have to also migrate to these platforms to communicate and communicate with these audiences.

Furthermore, this study found that an observed decline in the readership of print forms of communication such as newspapers in preference of digital forms had become a key characteristic

of the decision of government organizations to adopt digital technologies. Thus, since the stakeholders preferred to access information through digital platforms, the adoption of digital PR in government institutions to enable PR professionals communicate more effectively became necessary. The findings made in this study conforms with the findings of Young (2022) who found that government ministries now use digital media platforms to communicate to meet the taste, as well as the habits of the citizenry.

4.2.2.3 Relative Cost Effectiveness

The study also found that one of the motivating factors that had caused the adoption of digital PR within most of the government institutions was the relatively cost-effective nature of digital and social media platforms. The study found that respondents perceived that despite the advantages of traditional public relations tools for government organizations, the application of digital and social media technologies was perceived as less expensive to engage.

The findings indicate that although PR had been widely adopted within government institutions and the regard for PR functions had increased, budgets for the operations of PR departments are often limited. It is therefore essential that cost-effective measures are adopted to perform PR functions effectively. The study found that the cost-effective nature of social and digital media technologies fits this purpose with PR departments of these government organizations spending relatively less while using such platforms as compared to other traditional platform. Munira Karim (2023) noted that “..the cost is so so cheap that you don’t spend anything apart from the data that you buy...and the same data that everybody else is using in the entire ministry. So it is so so easy like that”. This statement indicates the degree to which one respondent perceived that cost-effectiveness of the use of digital platforms. The speaker, in their response, repeated uses the

phrase 'so so' to capture the idea that the use of such digital platforms are really inexpensive and easy to use so far as cost is concerned.

This was further reiterated by another public relations officer, Emmanuel Ansah (2023) who tried to compare digital public relations with traditional public relations, "It is also economical, since you don't have to pay anyone before you can use it. Unlike traditional media where you sometimes have to pay to secure publications". Studies like Fashoro and Barnard (2021) and Arshad and Khuraram (2020) for instance found that the cost effectiveness of social media platforms are beneficial to PR departments in government institutions who often run on lean budgets.

4.2.2.4 Digital public relations supporting institution goals

The public relations officers unanimously emphasized the significant impact of digital public relations in enhancing the visibility, reach, and effectiveness of their government institutions. These people said that the use of digital platforms had made their ministries well-known and made material easy for everyone to find. It must be emphasized that as a government institution, there is a civic responsibility to serve Ghanaians. The officers stressed how important it is to be able to connect with the target audience both locally and globally through social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram:

So for us as a ministry, we decided to rely heavily on digital communication to the extent that we even decided that the media personnel that were attending our briefing sessions should stay at home and follow us on social media, particularly Facebook, for instance. And the mileage that we got compared to using the traditional media, the difference was vast. So for us as a ministry, it did us a lot of good. It's increased our mileage, it's increased

our reach. We even got new publics in addition to what we already had. (Munira Karim, 2023).

The public relations officers also highlighted the support and interest shown by management, particularly the ministers, in embracing digital public relations practices because of how it helps to meet institutional goals. Despite encountering occasional challenges, such as issues with the phone used for updates, they note that management is actively involved in addressing these concerns. This involvement is evidenced by the ongoing process of providing specifications for the kind of phone to be used, reflecting the institution's commitment to leveraging digital tools for communication. The PR Officer specifically noted that:

Okay, as I said, they are very supportive, because they can see how it is impacting the reputation of the ministry positively. I think recently we had a problem with our phone that we use for updating our handouts and in regards to management, as I speak, we are giving specifications for the kind of phone that we want to use for the updates and the process. I think they are supportive. (Naa Korkoi Essah, 2023)

4.3 RQ2: How do Government Institutions Incorporate Digital Platforms into their Public Relations Strategies and Communication Channels?

The study was also interested in understanding how digital platforms or digital media tools had been incorporated into PR strategies and communication channels within the various government organizations. The study found that there existed one core approach that the institutions had engaged in while incorporating digital technologies in PR strategies and activities. The study found that PR departments had engaged in some of hybridization and simultaneous usage of digital

technologies to ensure the proper adoption and use of these digital tools in PR functions and activities.

4.3.1 Hybridization and Simultaneous Use

The study found that to ensure the proper adoption of digital media PR in government organizations, PR departments had engaged in some forms of hybridization and simultaneous of digital technologies together with traditional forms of PR. Thus, as a means of strategy, the study found that the government organizations combined the use of both digital tools and other older, traditional forms of PR to ensure the effective adoption and use of the digital PR. That is to say that the study found that the digital PR tools were not used in isolation within the various government organizations. Instead, there was a conscious effort to ensure that they were drafted as parts of a broader PR plan or strategy which also encompassed normative PR tools and strategies.

The respondents allude that social media is considered as the first strategy in line with other PR strategies which is combined to form a broader PR plan for the organization:

So on our work plan for instance we have social media as one key thing. We prioritise it before any other strategy like stakeholder engagements, media engagements and all that.the integration is such that it helps us get issues across fast, timely and conveniently than any other platform. So when you look at our platforms we are always there making sure that our day to day activities are posted out there. (Issac Offei Baah, 2023)

Furthermore, the study found that in integrating digital media tools and channels into PR departments of the government organizations, the digital tools were used primarily as facilitators

or catalyst channels to get information to stakeholders faster, and with ease. Hence, the study found that some of the respondents believed that in using digital media as PR tools they aided PR professionals to perform their roles faster and with more ease.

There is no way you can do without one. So what we have decided to do is that we have content channeled for digital communication and another content solely for traditional media but we blend both. ...there is that quick or instant feedback you get if you are very interactive and engaging with your audience. Compared to say if you had published an article in the Daily Graphic or any of the newspapers, for instance. People need further details. It means it will have to take the next day or two before you can be reached. Even if it's on television, you now have to go through the various procedures to get the producer or whoever is behind. But for digital communication, the feedback is constant and it makes our work easy. (Munira Karim, 2023)

This study draws from the latent implications of the respondent's supposition that there exist other forms that have been used, however, digital media platforms have been integrated as catalysts and facilitators to ensure that information are shared faster, with more ease and in more convenient approaches. As emphasized by Kim and Kreps (2020) in their analysis of government communication during the covid-19 pandemic, audiences now consume information from diverse sources and government institutions can leverage on digital technologies together with other public relations tools to spread their messages.

4.4 RQ3: What are the Benefits of Digital PR to government Institutions?

The study was interested in understanding the relevance of digital PR in the selected government organizations in Ghana. The study was interested in understanding how beneficial and adoption and use of digital PR had been to the overall activities and effectiveness of government institutions.

The study found that the benefits of digital PR was manifest in four core ways which are improved interactivity and engagement with stakeholders, enhance awareness creation and visibility/recognition, crisis management, and mitigate against misinformation.

4.4.1 Interactivity and Engagement with Stakeholders

The study found that one of the core roles that digital PR play in the effectiveness of government institutions is through how the practice allows PR departments to interact and engage with stakeholders. The study found that respondents perceived that as a result of the adoption of digital and social media technologies in PR departments of the various government ministries they were able interact and engage a lot better with their stakeholders with ease and with immediacy. The findings point out through the use of digital media technologies, PR personnel are able to respond to issues on social media while interacting with followers. The study found that this had had critical implication for the general outlook of stakeholder engagement of the various government ministries.

One of the respondents noted that as a result of the adoption of digital PR strategies and techniques, the PR department has become well equipped to interact smoothly with stakeholders online. The respondent notes that the use of social media in particular had allowed for swift sharing of information between the government organizations and their stakeholders:

Now we are able to really have a smooth interface with our stakeholders. Through digital platforms we can easily reach them. We can easily share inputs...we can easily receive their inputs. Through the digital platforms we are able to follow them to know what they are about. Because as stakeholders whatever they do has direct or indirect impact on our activities. (Isaac Offei Baah, 2023)

The respondents' position on the relevance of digital PR is that the practice has enabled the entire government organization to adopt a more engaging stance where they communicate easily with their stakeholders. The respondent note that they can share and receive inputs from their stakeholders as a means of qualifying the idea of interactivity and engagements with their stakeholders. Furthermore, the respondent notes that digital media platforms enable the PR department follow the activities of their stakeholders which, again, has critical positive implications for how the agency engages with the publics.

The study further found that digital PR has even more importance for stakeholder engagement and interactivity purposes as the government ministries that were studied have publics who are situated beyond the borders of the country. That is to say that the study found that respondents believed that digital PR enabled the government ministries to reach, interact and engage with international publics. Some of the respondents noted that as a result of the far reaching and borderless nature of digital and social media platforms, the government ministries are able to interact with international publics with speed and in real time.

We look at it from the fact that we deal with international partners. It is very ideal when you have adopted digital strategies and you are able to be out there knowing that as you

are here, your international partner or whoever outside is able to reach you although you are not with the person and all of that. I must also mention that there are sometimes when they will look out for you on such and such platforms. (Naa Korkoi Essah, 2023)

The extract points out that the adoption of digital strategies in the operations of PR in government ministries have been essential in managing interactions and engagements with international publics and stakeholders who are interested in the activities of the government ministries.

It is essential to note that one critical element that encapsulates the concept of interactivity and engagement that the study found to be beneficial to government ministries is feedback. The study found that PR departments relied very heavily on feedback from publics and stakeholders. This was found to be essential in actuating real-time interactivity and engagement with stakeholders. The study found that digital PR allowed the PR departments of the sampled government ministries to have access to feedback very quickly while responding to key issues. Consequently, these feedback generated from online interactions and engagements have become essential in understanding the position of stakeholders and developing new policies or responding to existing ones.

If want to know what is happening I just put a question out there and the world will respond. So if the world responds to it, it means that we know exactly what they want us to do or the direction they want us to go. For example, I make a post about breast cancer and someone comes to ask when are you posting the next batch of nurses. And then when you take a scroll at the comments you realize that that particular question comes about seven, eight, nine. So it is a matter of concern to the public. So I inform my honourable minister about it. So it helps me get the fact on the ground and report it that look what we want to

put out there is not what the people want. This is what the people are expecting from us.
(Kenneth Anang, 2023)

You are able to get instant feedback compared to traditional media. Because if you are very engaging with your publics on any of the social media platforms, you pose a question or you drop something there is that quick or instant feedback that you will get if you are very interactive and engaging with your audience. (Munira Karim, 2023)

The extracts above gives the indication that respondents perceived that digital PR had been essential in collecting feedback towards addressing issues as a result of interactions and engagements with key publics. The respondent notes the feedback generated from interactions with publics had critical implications for policy direction in the long run.

A study conducted by Graham (2014) found that PR departments in government institutions use digital media tools primarily to collect feedback from online followers. This study therefore agrees with the findings of Graham (2014) that digital PR relies critically on the collection and use of feedback from online followers in policy direction. Graham (2014) as well as Moreno et al. (2015) have argued that government institutions now maintain high levels of interactivity and engagement with the citizenry through digital media platforms as a means of developing perceptions of inclusiveness and hence, generate favourable perceptions in the minds of citizens.

4.4.2 Awareness Creation and Recognition

The data gathered from the interview sessions with the PR professionals of the selected government institutions indicate that digital PR has implications for improving the presence of levels of recognition of the government ministries among stakeholders.

The findings made in the study indicate that the use of digital and social media technologies improved the recognition of the government ministries while also making stakeholders aware of the activities of the various government institutions. The study found that by having a good social media and digital media presence in general, the government ministries also assumed a heavy presence among stakeholders as well.

The study noted that this was perceived as one of the most important relevance that digital PR presents to government organizations. Some of the respondents opined that by putting information on digital platforms and informing stakeholders through these channels, people become aware of the ministries making these them well recognized among stakeholders.

One of the respondents noted that social and digital media platforms enable information sharing which has critical implications in making the government institutions popular among stakeholders. In the extract presented below, the respondent aver that such platforms make stakeholders aware of policies and the activities of the ministry. By doing so constantly, the social presence of the ministry had been affected positively with more people recognizing the ministry.

I will say that there was the need for us to be out there to let people know what the ministry does, share our policies, share...create awareness on what we do and things like that... so first of all, it makes the name of the ministry of communications a household name.

Everything else that we do is out there. People are able to find us per what we do. (Naa Korkoi Essah, 2023)

The study further found that awareness creation and social presence as exacted by digital PR in government organizations had critical implication for improving the credibility of the various government ministries. One of the respondent opined that by making people aware of the policies and activities of the government institutions and making people aware of the existence and functions of the ministries, stakeholders gain some levels of confidence in the ministry and hence allude some credibility to the organization. According to Munira Karim (2023) the use of digital media has helped improved awareness creation efforts by government ministries:

For us as a ministry I think that the constant flow of information from us to the public has done us a lot of good. You know that information is a huge resource for power. For the citizenry to make informed decisions they need information. So, if there is a gap, it is going to be difficult for people to know what actually government is doing...if you need people to have access to information it means that you have consistently bombard them with information on all sector of the economy...so I think that it has enhanced trust in government communications. Hitherto it was not like that...it has built some level of trust and created a lot of awareness in what government ministries do. (Munira Karim,2023)

Cartwright et. al (2021) in their study noted the digital media platforms are essential in giving organizations the needed social presence and recognition. This study agrees with these authors that digital PR has crucial consequences in improving the overall social recognition of government institutions in Ghana.

4.4.3 Crisis Management

This study further found that digital PR is crucial in aiding efforts towards the management of crisis situations within government institutions. This study found that the use of digital PR tools and social media has some relevance to preventing and managing crisis situations for government organizations.

The respondents perceived that key characteristics of digital and social media platforms that have been integrated into PR activities of the various government institutions had crucial consequences on how crisis situations are managed or even prevented. The study found that respondents perceived the real-time information sharing characteristic, interactivity as well as immediacy of feedback that are characteristic of digital and social media tools and strategies aid in solving conflict situations between government institutions and their publics.

Some of the PR personnel sampled for this study were of the view that constant communication as well as interactivity on social media especially, were key in aiding the various PR departments respondent quickly to issues that may in the long run, result in large-scale crises. Hence, the study notes that PR professionals perceived the use of digital PR in managing crisis situations as effective.

One of the respondents opined that digital and social media platforms enables the PR department of their organization follow potential crisis issues as they are happening in order to strategize effectively against them. The respondent gave an example of an issue that occurred concerning the ministry they worked in and how social media monitoring enabled the department to prevent a potential crisis from occurring:

We are able to get prompt attention, issues that are coming against us so that we do not wait to listen news. Maybe you have an issue... example is this AVR drugs that happened at the ports last week. If we want to wait maybe it will come six in the evening. Now you want to wait and come back on Monday. Come and sort clearance from directors meanwhile the thing happened Saturday. By that time people have the other side of it already...and so it helps you also get your back. (Issac Offei Baah, 2023)

The extract supposes that in handling crisis situations, social media as well as other digital media tools that are often engaged in digital PR are critical in being proactive while tackling possible crisis issues.

Secondly, the extract also gives the indication that as a result of the adoption and use of digital PR in government institutions, crisis management done fast and proactively but to a large extent, the crisis is managed firsthand with very little need of other third-party media. The implied meaning of the opinion of the respondent is that due to the availability and use of social media, the institution does not need to wait for traditional media platforms to have access to details of crisis situations before dealing with them. Through interactions with online stakeholders, PR professionals can have access to the information they need and subsequently strategize against the crisis situation.

One of the respondents perceived that by sharing information online, crisis situations that often start as small conversations on social media platforms could be managed or even prevented. He stated that, "It minimizes crisis. Such that we do not have to wait until we have issues before we give them what is happening and stuff like that" (Emmanuel Ansah, 2023).

This finding is consistent with the findings of Tam et al. (2021) as well as Young (2022) who have argued the relevance of digital media technologies in managing crisis and issues for government

institutions. Young (2022) in particular notes that the use of social media as a government communication tool has key implications in aiding quick government response to issues as and when they emerge. Furthermore, Young (2022) notes that the interactions engaged in by government institutions on social media also has critical consequences for crisis communications as well.

4.4.4 Mitigate against Misinformation

The study found that one critical implication of digital PR adoption and use in government institutions in Ghana was found in the practice's role in reducing misinformation about government issues and activities. The study found that as a result of the adoption of digital PR tools and strategies, PR professionals are able to communicate more effectively with occurrences of misinformation being reduced drastically.

The findings made from the interview sessions present that by being in direct contact with stakeholders and communicating directly with them through digital and social media platforms, misinformation on critical government issues, decisions and activities, the PR departments of government institutions are able reduce the levels of misinformation that circulate often in the media.

It helps reduce false publication. Nobody will go and dilute what you are saying. If I scan this document and I post it on our website it is the same thing. But I give it to the media, they may use this same sheet for more than five or six stories, which may not be what I want to say. So to us the social media is helping in that regard. (Isaac Offei Baah, 2023)

For us as the Ministry of Information, we are employing all of these strategies to see how best we will be able to help curtail the spread of misinformation. We are always monitoring and responding to issues that are not true. We even share information from other ministries. (Munira Karim, 2023)

This findings is at variance with the study by Hilary and Dumebi (2021) which had established digital media as a major source of misinformation. However, in this study we realize that public relations officers are rather beginning to use digital media as a tool to combat misinformation.

4.5 RQ4: What are the Challenges Experienced by Government Institutions in Adopting Digital Public Relations?

The fourth objective of the study was focused on investigating the challenges that are experienced when adopting and using digital PR in government institutions in Ghana. The study was therefore interested in understanding the core issues that PR departments of the various government organizations had experienced while adopting and using digital and social media tools, techniques, and strategies in performing PR functions.

The findings made from the interview sessions with the PR professionals indicate three core challenges that inhibit digital PR adoption and use within government ministries. These include connectivity issues, digital media knowledge deficiencies and hacking.

4.5.1 Connectivity Issues

The study found that despite the benefits associated with the adoption and use of digital PR in government institutions in Ghana, there exist some critical challenges associated with the full-scale adoption and use of the practice. The study found that one of the key challenges was in regard with technical issues relating to the use of digital and social media.

The study found that government institutions were often faced with critical technical issues with the use of digital media tools which inhibited the effectiveness of the use of digital communication tools. The study found that crucial within this regarded the availability of safe and stable internet connections. The study found that often, PR professionals in charge of social media and other internet-enabled digital communication activities were unable to perform their tasks effectively as a result of the lack of stable quality internet connections.

Some of the respondents noted that the general quality of internet in the country did not aid in updating social media websites while engaged in field work in remote areas. In the extract below for instance, the respondent narrates how the lack of internet in remote areas limits flow of information sharing on social media.

When you are in a faraway community and you want to update your handles or...most of the time, getting ministry give you credit (internet)...I know we are requesting for credit and stuff and stuff and stuff but...well in our quest to want to succeed we actually overlook all of it and update or use the digital strategies to make sure that our work is being done the way we should do it but if you are out of town in a place where there is no connection and internet is a problem then it makes doing all of this a bit difficult. (Naa Korkoi Essah, 2023)

The study also found that another critical issues worth noting as a technical issues challenge concerns issues of website hosting and management. The study found that the websites of some of the government institutions, on some occasions run into technical problems that cause them to be brought down temporarily. Thus, respondents believed that managing the technical parts of websites was challenging as the websites were often likely to encounter glitches. Kenneth Annag (2023), one of the respondent, indicated that “sometimes you can have sites (websites) going down... on and off... and you might want to send something out that moment...yeah those are the challenges”.

4.5.2 Digital knowledge deficiencies

The study found that one of the core challenges associated with the adoption and use of digital PR regarded the availability of skill personnel as well as training of PR personnel in the use of digital media technology tools. The study found that in a majority of the government institutions, official social media platforms for instance, we handled by PR professionals who may not have been qualified social media literate. The study found that this inhibited the effectiveness of the use of the tools. In line with the unavailability of social media experts in the PR departments of the various government organizations, the study also found that very little trainings on social media and digital technologies were organized for personnel of the various PR departments.

Some of the respondents noted that they engaged in social media management themselves despite having limited knowledge about the professional use of the various platforms. One of the respondents noted that as a result of the lack of training of personnel on social media use among

PR professionals, the tools have become largely underused this practitioners only able to simple update posts, send messages and check for feedback.

We also are not able to train people to do the assessment of these digital platforms. So the is one-way usage like let me read stories, let me read messages let me go on this and check this and check this. (Isaac Offei Baah, 2023)

In the above extract the respondent makes reference to the idea that the lack of training of PR personnel on social media and other digital tools curtails the effective use of these platforms to their full potential. The respondent uses the term one-way use to draw out the idea that how social media and digital platforms are being used in government institutions are largely basic with a lack of proper holistic use of the platforms. In this sense, it can be said that public relations officers are using digital media like how traditional tools function. This is as a result of the lack of training on the digital PR tools.

Additionally, the respondent notes that PR professional were not trained on the assessment of these digital tools. Thus, the study draws that as a result of the lack of training, PR personnel who handled social media were unable to engage the right tools and techniques to assess social media performance. This had critical implications on how social media is used effectively in the ministries.

Another respondent notes that there had been one training on how to use social media as digital PR tools. However, the latent implications of the extract presented below implies that although there has been some form of training, the training was inadequate. Hence, the study found the need for more digital PR related trainings to be organized in this regard:

The PR practitioner must be trained. I personally have organized trainings for PR practitioners from other ministries and my team mates. At that training we were taught that things that posted should be strictly official things. So even the choice of words, how you handle looks, issues, and all of that. I think that if everybody else have that training it would give a better look to government institutions. So I will strongly recommend that that is done. (Naa Korkoi Essah, 2023)

4.5.3 Hacking Issues

The study also found that one critical challenge associated with the use of digital PR in government institutions was the occurrence of hacking of digital communication tools of the government institutions. The study found that this was a key challenge that was often faced with social media and website platforms.

One of the respondents noted that people often attempt to hack websites and social media platforms of government institutions. The findings note that while this challenge did not occur often, the risk of it happening was existent with PR practitioners fearing that some crucial information may be lost, or their platform completely taken away from them.

The issue of hacking where people have to block your site and use it to do all manner of things it always has to put you on your toes that every day you are very sure that you do not these things to go out like. (Isaac Offei Baah, 2023)

This poses serious challenge to the government ministries, since most public relations officers are not abreast with the various steps, they must take in order to mitigate this challenge.

Even though social media has a very great benefit for users, people also go on and they are easily hacked. Yeah. You have people cloning your sites mostly. Yeah. Sometimes you

see some message out there, it's not coming from you. That is one aspect that I want to really have to know how to be able to check to see who is actually getting on to your platform. Yeah. That's one major issue. (Kenneth Annag, 2023)

This finding is consistent with findings of Tettey(2020) who recommended the implementation of strong cybersecurity protocols to ensure that government ministries are not exposed to cybercrimes which includes hacking.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter of the study presented discussions on critical issues concerning the adoption and use of digital PR in five selected government ministries in Ghana. The discussions were presented in line with the four core research questions developed to guide this investigation. The findings made in the study point towards critical issues that dwell on adoption strategies, benefits of digital PR to the selected government organizations as well as crucial challenges that affect use of digital PR in these institutions.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The study sought to investigate digital public relations practice within government institutions in Ghana. The core of this study was to ascertain the adoption of digital public relations among selected government ministries in the country.

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the key findings made in the study. The study also concludes on a number of issues and arguments raised in this study in line with the key findings made in the study. This chapter also discusses some critical recommendations developed towards policy formulation and implementation as well as further research based on the findings made from the study.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The objective of this research was to identify the driving forces behind the adoption of digital technologies by government ministries in their communication efforts. The study first looked at how widely digital technologies were used and embraced inside the chosen government organizations. In order to determine the extent to which digital technologies had been incorporated into the ministries, the researcher conducted a digital media audit of the digital platforms used by the government entities. The researcher continued by ascertaining the variables that have affected the firms' adoption and application of digital public relations.

According to the findings, government ministries maintained active and useful organizational websites. Additionally, the data shows that social media adoption was rather strong, because at least three separate social media platforms—Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—were used by all of the organizations. Digital media channels were also commonly employed for stakeholder communication within the sampled institutions according to the digital media report. For example, the results of the digital media audit show that press releases, live updates, and live streaming of events and sessions were all performed on organizational websites, which were found to be operational and utilized for essential information sharing purposes.

After discovering that government ministries had adopted and used digital media tools at a notably high rate, the study set out to find out what variables drove the adoption and use of these technologies as public relations tools in the government organizations that were included in the sample. The study discovered that a wide range of factors have influenced people's decisions to use digital PR. According to the study, the government ministries adoption and utilization of digital PR was driven by the need for information sharing, the nature of stakeholders, the affordability of digital PR and how digital public relations supports institutional goals.

Table 2: Specific factors that influence the adoption of digital public relations by government ministries.

Reasons for Adoption	Summary
Information Sharing Needs	To inform the public about activities and policies, using digital platforms as strategic tools for information sharing.
Cost-Effectiveness and Efficiency	Low-cost dissemination of information.
Nature of Stakeholders	Reaching varied audiences irrespective of locations.

Reasons for Adoption	Summary
Supporting Institutional Goals	Significant impact on enhancing visibility, reach, and effectiveness of government institutions' initiatives.

Source: Field Interview (2023)

The study also sought to determine how digital public relations had been incorporated into the overall communication strategy of the government ministries. The findings revealed that the institutions had adopted hybridization and concurrent use of digital technologies as a way of ensuring digital tools were properly adopted and used in PR tasks and activities.

The third goal of the study was to determine the various benefits of digital public relations to government ministries. The findings of the study revealed that government institutions were benefiting from improved crisis management, enhanced awareness generation and recognition, enhanced interactivity and interaction with stakeholders, and the mitigation of disinformation.

Table 3: Benefits of digital public relations for government ministries

Benefits of Digital Public Relations
1. Improved crisis management
2. Enhanced awareness generation and recognition
3. Enhanced interactivity and interactions with stakeholders
4. Mitigation of disinformation

Source: Field Interview (2023)

Examining the challenges that have been encountered in implementing and utilizing digital PR in Ghanaian government organizations was the study's fourth goal. Therefore, the study sought to

comprehend the fundamental problems that the PR departments of the different government ministries encountered when implementing and making use of digital public relations. The results of the PR specialists' interviews pointed to three main obstacles government departments are facing with the practice of digital public relations. These included connectivity issues, digital media knowledge deficiencies and hacking.

Table 4: Challenges with the adoption of digital public relations by government ministries

Challenges with the Adoption of Digital Public Relations
1. Connectivity Issues
2. Digital media knowledge deficiencies
3. Hacking

Source: Field Interview (2023)

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the key findings of the study on the digital public relations practice in selected government institutions in Ghana, the following recommendations could be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of digital public relations (PR) practices in these institutions:

1. Addressing internet connectivity issues, especially for government ministries is crucial. Governments should invest in improving internet infrastructure to ensure seamless and real-time updates on digital platforms.
2. Given the highlighted concerns about security and the risk of hacking, government institutions should prioritise the implementation of robust security measures to safeguard

their digital platforms. Regular security audits and updates are essential and must be conducted.

3. Recognising the dynamic nature of the digital landscape, continuous training and capacity-building programmes for public relations officers (PROs) and relevant staff are recommended. This ensures that they stay abreast of the latest digital tools and strategies.
4. Institutions should continue customising content for each digital platform, considering the unique characteristics and preferences of users on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Utilising diverse formats, such as videos and infographics, can enhance engagement.
5. The creation of a policy guideline or guidebook specifically for PR officers could provide strategic ideas without prescribing specific actions. This can serve as a reference to maintain professionalism and relevance in digital correspondence.

By implementing these recommendations, government institutions can navigate the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities presented by digital PR, fostering a more effective and resilient communication strategy.

5.2.1 Suggestions for Further Research

Drawing from the insights gained in this study, further studies could be conducted to assess the effectiveness of digital public relations efforts by government institutions from the perspective of the audience. This could involve tracking changes in public perception, stakeholder engagement, and the overall effectiveness of digital communication strategies over several years.

Moreover, further studies could explore and compare digital public relations strategies across different government institutions or countries. This could provide insights into variations in approaches, challenges faced, and the effectiveness of strategies in diverse socio-political contexts.

5.3 Conclusions

The overall objective of this study was to investigate the practice of digital public relations by government institutions in Ghana. The study was segmented into five chapters. Chapter one set the tone for the study and outlined various research objectives that would guide this study. In chapter two, literature was reviewed, highlighting similar studies and the various theoretical frameworks. Chapter three focused on the methodology and data gathering mechanism used. While chapter four focused on the findings and the final chapter concluded the study, which led to the following conclusions, government institutions must proactively use digital media in order to improve communication efficacy. One major benefit of digital platforms is its cost-effectiveness, which makes information transmission affordable and facilitates timely feedback. Furthermore, digital PR techniques greatly aid in crisis management, institutional goal achievement, and general reputation building due to their worldwide accessibility and exposure.

Ultimately, there are challenges involved in implementing digital public relations (PR) tactics in government organizations. Problems with internet access, internet security, are major obstacles to the smooth operation of digital public relations.

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APPENDIX

A: Interview Guide

Interview Consent Form

Participant ID: _____

Introduction

My name is Nathaniel Alpha, and I'm conducting this study as a requirement for my MPhil in Communication at the University of Media, Arts and Communication- Institute of Journalism. The purpose of this interview is to collect data pertaining to what motivates government institutions to implement digital public relations practises, as well as some of the strategies government institutions use to incorporate digital platforms into their public relations strategies.

Interview Description

The duration of the interview is estimated to be 40 minutes. The interview will be recorded so that precise information can be gathered. Your answers and identity will remain anonymous and confidential during this interview. The data we collect will be accessible only to the researcher and the research team. The data gathered will only be used for educational purposes.

Voluntary Participation

This interview is completely optional, and you may leave at any time without any repercussions. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please let me know and I will go on to the next one.

Consent

By signing here, you confirm that you have been informed about the study and agree to participate in the interview. Your participation in this interview indicates your agreement that it may be recorded and that any data obtained will be used only in research. Kindly note that your name will be mentioned in this study as a respondent. This interview is completely optional, and you may leave at any time without any repercussions.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How long have you been working as a Public Relations Officer?
2. Which Government Institution do you work for?
3. What specific factors or events influenced the adoption of digital platforms for communication and engagement with the public?
 - a. Probe (How did the adoption occur? How the factors mitigated the adoption processes; what factors enhanced the adoption processes more and what factors did not)
4. How has the evolving landscape of communication and technology influenced your institution's decision to incorporate digital platforms into public relations strategies?
5. Have there been any external pressures or demands from stakeholders that led to the adoption of digital PR strategies?
6. How do you perceive digital public relations as contributing to the overall goals and objectives of your government institution?

7. In what ways do you believe digital PR enhances your institution's ability to engage with the public
 - a. Probe (how does it help in building trust; how does it aid in fostering transparency?)
8. Can you describe the specific digital platforms and channels that your government institution utilizes for public relations and communication with the public?
 - a. Probe (How are each of them used, in what situations, what are they strategies for using them to ensure engagement with stakeholders)
9. How do you integrate these digital platforms into your overall public relations strategy to effectively engage with the target audience and stakeholders?
10. What types of content and messages do you typically share on these digital platforms to communicate with the public and promote transparency?
11. Are there any particular strategies or tactics that have been particularly successful in enhancing public engagement and participation through digital channels?
12. What are the main benefits that your government institution has experienced since adopting digital public relations practices?
13. How has the use of digital platforms enhanced your institution's communication with the public and stakeholders?
14. In what ways has digital PR contributed to improving a) transparency and b) building trust between your government institution and the public?
 - c. Probe for real life examples and instances
 - d. What specific challenges or obstacles have you encountered during the implementation of digital public relations strategies, and how were they addressed?

- e. How do you assess the overall effectiveness and impact of your government institution's digital PR efforts in achieving your communication and engagement goals?
 - a. Probe (what is financial impact, impact on stakeholder engagements, impact on shaping perceptions about the organization etc.

B: Structured Digital Media Audit Form: Digital Public Relations Channels Assessment

This form will be used to collate data from the digital media platforms of the Government ministries used for this study. The researcher will visit the official digital media platforms and apply the questions below to the indicators that are on the platforms and record them.

Government Institution: _____

Digital Communication Channels: [Website, Social Media Accounts]

1. Presence of Digital Communication Channels:

Does the government institution have an official website?

A. Yes B. No

Does the government institution have official social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)?

A. Yes B. No

If “Yes” note them

2. Assessment of Content Shared:

Do review the official website and social media accounts of the government institution and answer the following questions based on your observations:

Website:

What type of content is prominently featured on the website's homepage? (e.g., news updates, announcements, press releases)

Is there a dedicated section for public relations or communications-related content?

A. Yes B. No

How frequently is the content on the website updated?

A. Daily B. Weekly C. Monthly D. Infrequently

Social Media Accounts:

What types of content are commonly shared on the social media accounts? (e.g., news articles, event updates, multimedia)

How often are posts shared on the social media accounts?

A. Multiple times a day B. Daily C. Few times a week D. Irregularly

Do the social media posts actively engage with the audience through comments, likes, shares, or other interactions?

A. Yes B. No

4. Please provide any additional comments or observations you have regarding the content and management of the government institution's digital communication channels
