PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE OF FOOTBALL CLUBS:
A STUDY OF FOUR GHANAIAN PREMIER LEAGUE CLUBS

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DECLARATION

With the exception of the quoted references and acknowledged sources, I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work written under the supervision of Dr. Margaret Amoakohene, Senior Lecturer of School of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana.

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……………………………..                                           ……………………………………….

DATE                                                                              DATE
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother Hajia Rahmatu Issah, and my late father, Issah Abdul-Rahman
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I’m immensely grateful to God for everything. I would also like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Margaret Amoakohene for her guidance and patience throughout this work. To all the faculty members of the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, I thank you all.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation assessed public relations practice in Ghanaian football clubs by studying four Premier League clubs in Ghana namely; Kumasi Asante Kotoko FC, Obuasi Ashantigold FC, Accra Hearts of Oak FC and Wa All Stars FC. Underpinned by the systems and relationship management theories, the study interviewed heads of administration and public relations officers of the four clubs, leadership of supporters of the four clubs, and some media organizations. Through a qualitative methodology, interviews were conducted to find out whether public relations departments existed in the clubs, the PR roles and functions played in the clubs and the channels of communication used by the clubs. The study also sought to find out how PR roles and functions portrayed management’s understanding of PR as well as how the channels of communication impacted on the clubs’ relationships with their publics. The study established that management of the clubs viewed PR as a management function as well as a tool for maintaining relationship with their publics through media relations, although their understanding of PR was limited to some few roles and functions. The study found that the Public Relations Officers of the clubs mainly played the communication facilitator role and sometimes the technician role as a result of the clubs’ understanding of PR. The study also established that the clubs used channels such as telephone calls, memos, meetings and emails for their internal communication and mass media (radio, television and newspaper), social media and, telephone meetings as channels for external communications. The study found that the clubs managed issues and their image mostly through the mass media in order to either attract sponsors or establish and maintain good relationship with their sponsors. However, it was also established that non-performance and lack of success on the pitch were hindrances to attracting sponsorship.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

The importance of public relations in any organisation has been widely acknowledged by many scholars. This is largely because public relations, as defined by many literature, is an important factor which aids the success of any organization through building and sustaining its corporate image and maintaining mutually beneficial relationship with stakeholders. “Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends.” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p. 7).

Irrespective of an organization’s operation, whether it seeks to make profit or not, public relations practice plays a very important role. Public Relations or communication duties are performed through writing, speaking, editing and designing publications, researching and counseling management to achieve results for their organisations (Grunig, 1992).

For sports teams, particularly football clubs, which have evolved from just being a source of entertainment to big business globally, the role of public relations in their management is equally crucial. (Pedersen, Miloch, and Laucella 2007, p.76) define sports communication as the “process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor share symbols
as they create meaning through interaction.” Sports public relations has the added responsibility of having to deal with growing media hypes and coverage which are associated with team successes or failures, as well as the celebrity status of individual athletes. The media highlight every little thing that occurs within the organization or individual’s life, whereas some organizations do not face this type of scrutiny (Krupa, 1998; Sports Media Challenge, 1992).

Sports public relations or communication, deals with branding, reputation management, community, fans and media relations as well as sponsorship. These core efforts relate back to the central task of providing [stakeholders] with an emotional connection to understand, interpret, and identify with sports, specifically on behalf of an individual player, team or league (Rein, Kotler & Shields, 2006). They further offer five key objectives in effective sports communication:

1. to engage the stakeholder’s interest.
2. to imprint the sports brand’s identity for a longer-lasting impression.
3. to humanize the sports brand.
4. to encourage the [stakeholder] to identify with the sports brand and feel a personal connection with the participants.
5. to place the outcomes of competition in more than just a winning context.

These strategic objectives are critical in relating with stakeholders, sparking interest, continually building the fan base, and retaining the current fan base, they observed. The sports environment is filled with an overwhelming number of messages and channels. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate the sports brand and connect with stakeholders (Rein, Kotler & Shields, 2006).
With the proliferation of the media in Ghana including various social media platforms, sports public relations has even become more essential. This study is of the view that media platforms offer football clubs the opportunity to inter-relate with their various publics, using different channels and messages.

There have been significant transformations in football in the past two decades. Football has been commercialized thereby witnessing a rise in corporate, community and media involvement in the game. Promotional activities for both clubs and footballers have also risen. There has also Due to these transformations, football remains a popular media product which is served on a wide range of media platforms such as television, radio, newspaper and online. These growing interests football by various stakeholders require public relations activities in football clubs to establish and manage relationship with all these stakeholders.

A professional football club serves at least the following publics: internal employees (players, coaches and staff), supporters, community members, sponsors, football regulatory bodies and the media. Due to the varying interests of all these different stakeholders, especially handling sponsor relations during crisis (scandals and poor performances), an effective communication plan in football clubs has become more crucial. The focus for a contemporary football team, apart from achieving results on the field to appease its numerous publics, also aims at making enough revenue to turn a profit. Clearly, sports, particularly football, is one that is result-
-oriented. The success or otherwise of a football team in terms of its relationship with sponsors and fans depends to some extent, on its success on the pitch.

Whether a team is being successful on the pitch or not, it will require public relations activities to communicate with its publics and manage whichever situation it finds itself in. Clearly, managing crises due to nonperformance and player transgressions, managing relationships with sponsors, fans and communities, as well as internal communication with employees are key public relations activities of a football club. There have been studies in other parts of the world which have looked into public relations practices of sports organizations and how effective PR is to these organizations. However, these studies were conducted in countries where the business aspect of sports organizations has existed for some time. Not much studies have been done in Ghana to assess public relations practice in football clubs since football clubs transformed into business organizations hence the need for this study.

It is important to note once again that these studies were conducted in developed countries where the business aspect of sports organizations has existed for some time. The trend in sports management in Ghana, particularly football is changing rapidly hence the need to assess the public relations practice of Ghanaian football teams. Football teams in Ghana only needed to win matches on a Sunday to appease their fans. Now they have many obligations to their different publics including sustainable good relationships with sponsors. In this new situation,
"organizations and publics also need to find an equilibrium, a middle position, between the desired outcomes of each" (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995, p. 48).

This new situation, which has made sports organizations and football teams in developed world to adopt a more effective communication strategy, is what is driving this study to find out the public relations situation of Premier League clubs in Ghana.

1.1 Problem Statement

Football management in Ghana over the past decade has witnessed considerable transformation with massive corporate involvement, community and media interest. Football has been commercialised over the past decade, with the Ghana Premier League signing huge sponsorship deals with various corporate organisations as well as selling media rights to both local and international media. The football clubs have also embarked upon their own sponsorship drives with corporate organizations. The ever expanding stakeholders of football clubs have also seen the expansion of media coverage of football in Ghana. The proliferation of media in Ghana and their accompanying interests in football and affairs of football clubs have placed the clubs high on the agenda of media coverage. Given the increasing economic and social status of football, which go with the creation of many publics or stakeholders, public relations practice has been essential in Ghanaian football clubs in order to ensure mutually beneficial relationships between the clubs and their stakeholders.
Despite the commercialisation of football, concerns have been raised about the slow growth of football and the inability of Ghanaian football clubs to attract and maintain financial sponsorships from corporate organisations. Fan apathy appear to be on the rise as most Premier League matches are played in virtually empty stadiums. Even traditional clubs with large support base were also suffering from such fan apathy.

The management of football has evolved in Ghana with football clubs having to communicate and manage their relationships with players, staff, sponsors, fans, communities and the media through effective public relations practices. This study sought to find out the nature of public relations practised by Ghanaian Premier League clubs in Ghana to find out their understanding of public relations.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The primary objectives of this study were to:

1. Establish whether public relations units existed in the clubs and assess the nature of public relations practiced by four Ghanaian Premier League football clubs.
2. Establish whether public relations was a management function in the clubs.
3. Establish how the clubs communicated with their publics.
4. Assess the effectiveness of communication between the clubs and their various publics.
1.3 Research questions

1. How did public relations roles and functions in the clubs portray management’s understanding of PR?

2. How did the channels of communication the clubs use impact on their relationships with their publics?

3. How did the clubs’ public relations activities affect their relationships with their sponsors?

1.4 Significance of the study

Since the development of football clubs into professional organizations, various studies have been conducted on different aspects of public relations practice in the management of football clubs. In recent times, Ghanaian football clubs have also transformed into professional clubs and are operating as full business entities. In Ghana however, there was not much literature on public relations practice in football clubs. This study therefore, contributed to literature on public relations practice in Ghanaian football clubs. It was also hoped that the findings would improve on the practice of public relations in Ghanaian football clubs, as well as contribute to general literature on PR practice in Ghana.

1.5 Organisation of the study

This dissertation is composed of five chapters. Chapter one offers a general introduction to the study leading to the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions and the significance of the study. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature and also discussed the theory which underpinned the study. Chapter three outlines the methodology
used in the study, which was in-depth interview. It also describes the research design, instrumentation, selection of the sample, data collection procedure and data analysis procedures. The next chapter presents findings and discussions of the findings. Finally, the fifth chapter presents the conclusion, limitations and recommendations.

1.6 Chapter Summary

The chapter introduced the study with a background, outlining the importance of public relations to an organization, particularly football clubs. The chapter also stated the problem of the study and outlined the objectives of the study. Research questions and significance of the study were presented. The chapter also outlined the organization of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter comprises a discussion of the theories underpinning the study and a review of relevant literature. The chapter gives the origin of the theories, their general tenets and how they fit into this study. The chapter also discusses studies related to this study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Considering that this study was about building and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between the clubs and their publics, the study was underpinned by two theories; the systems theory and the relationship management model.

2.1.1 The Systems Theory

The systems theory was propounded by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy as a way to think about and study the constant, dynamic adjustment of living phenomena. Bertalanffy (1968) wrote that since the fundamental character of the living thing is its organization, the customary investigation of the single parts and processes cannot provide a complete explanation of the vital phenomenon. He continued that the investigation gave no information about the coordination of parts and processes, thus the chief task of biology must be to discover the laws of biology systems at all levels of organization. He further observed that the attempts to find a foundation for theoretical biology point at fundamental change in the world picture.
Bertalanffy, (1968) saw the human body as a system with many parts which must inter depend on each other for survival. Even though his study was conducted in the field of biology, it later became the General System Theory and its tenets have been incorporated into public relations fields. Just as Bertalanffy argued with the human body as composed of many inter-dependent parts, so are organizations perceived.

In public relations, (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p. 178) define systems as “a set of interacting units that endures through time within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain goal stated.” According to Cutlip et al, unlike physical and biological systems, social systems are not especially dependent on the physical closeness of component parts. Rather, specifications of organisation-public interactions defines systems.

Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) stated that the systems perspective emphasizes the interdependence of organisations with their environments, both internal and external to the organisation, adding that with the systems perspective, organizations depend on their environment for resources such as raw materials, source of employees and clients or customers for the products or services they produce, while the environment needs the organization for its product or service.
2.1.2 Environmental change pressures

According to (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000, p.174), an organisation’s “relationships are subjected to political, social, economic, and technological change pressures in an ever-changing environment.” They wrote that systems theorists typically define the environment as anything that generates change pressures – information, energy, and matter inputs – on a system. The theory also states that organizations must respond to environmental changes in order to maintain relationships with their publics. “Careful assessment of these forces is essential if organizations are to steer a safe, steady course through uncharted territory in the increasingly global community.” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p.174)

Organizations-public systems must be able to adapt their goals and relationships to accommodate change pressures from their complex and dynamic settings. These change pressures are from the environment and they can be in the form of information, energy and matter input, (Cutlip, Center & Broom 2000).

Circumstances may affect an organization’s relationship with its publics so as part of public relations functions, the PR manager scans the environment to know what is wrong so that steps can be taken to address issues to continue with the organisation’s good relationship with its publics. This study agrees with these principles because football clubs are always affected by environmental change pressure. Technological, economical and political changes in a football environment may affect the operations of football clubs. Other publics of football clubs such as fans, media and sponsors react to issues within the club, especially results and scandals. All organizations generally acquire resources from the larger environment of which they are part.
and, in turn, provide goods and services demanded by the larger environment (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994).

It is therefore important for the PR manager of a football club to continuously scan the environment and adapt to these environmental change pressure from the clubs’ environment. “Public relations specialists must anticipate and monitor such changes in an organisations environment and help interpret them to management,” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p.175). However, the ability of a PR manager to scan the environment and make changes to ensure mutually beneficial relationship depends on the type of systems being practiced by the organisation.

2.1.3 Closed and Open Systems

According to Cutlip, Center & Broom (2000) there are two types of systems; closed systems and open systems. The explain that: “all systems – mechanical, organic, and social – can be classified in terms of the nature and amount of interchange with their environments. The continuum ranges from closed systems on one extreme to open systems on the other. Closed systems have impermeable boundaries, so they cannot exchange matter, energy, or information with their environments. Open systems, on the other hand, exchange inputs and outputs through boundaries that are permeable.” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p.181).

A football club’s PR department or PR manager must adopt the open systems approach to be able to scan through the environment successfully and exchange inputs and outputs with
stakeholders. This will help the PR manager or the department to advise the club’s management for a mutually beneficial relationship between the club and its publics.

According to (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p.181) “social systems cannot be completely closed or totally open, so they are either relatively open or relatively closed.” They noted that a closed systems have impermeable boundaries so they do not exchange matter, energy or information with their environments and since they do not adapt to environmental change, it leads to their collapse. On the other hand, Cutlip et al stressed that an open system has permeable boundary that allows it to exchange inputs and out puts with its environment and that open systems are responsive to environmental changes.

According to Berger and Chaffee (1987), a family is an excellent example of a system. The members of the family are the objects of the system. Their individual characteristics are the attributes. Because families exist in a social and cultural environment, there is mutual influence between families and their environment.

Hall and Fagan (1968), noted that a closed system has no interchange with its environment and may move towards internal chaos and disintegration, whiles the open system receives inputs from its environment and is geared towards life and growth. Football clubs in Ghana need to operate with the principles of the open system in order to avoid the disasters associated with operating with a close system.
Grunig (1985) developed a system theory of public relations with three-fold goals. The first allows managers to monitor their immediate environment, i.e. to know how things are going on. The second is to help managers to decide on how their department should operate, subject to their environment. Thirdly, it is to guide managers in changing their communication subsystem, and institutionalize reforms that enhance effectiveness.

This theory will enable PR practitioners to appreciate and understand what has become the bases for PR initiatives and predict how such initiatives or campaigns can change in response to different environmental conditions.

2.1.4 Subsystems and Suprasystems

As an organisation is surrounded by different stakeholders within the environment it operates, there are also stakeholders within the organisation which it must pay attention to. According to (Cutlip et al, 2000, p. 179) “the organization is itself composed of a set of interacting units. From this perspective, the organisation can also be viewed as a system. Because organisations exist in dynamic social settings, they must modify internal processes and restructure themselves in response to changing environments.”

This study agrees with the tenets of subsystems and suprasystems in the sense that a football club is also composed of sets of interacting units within the football club, which the PR department of the club must pay as much attention to as the outside units within the environment. In a football club for instance, there are non-playing staff, or non-footballers such as accounts officers,
medical officers and other supporting staff who are important stakeholders within the structure of the club and must be interacted with regularly for harmony to prevail within the club.

2.1.5 Significance of Systems Theory to study

This study agrees with the tenets of the systems theory given that a football club does not live in isolation. A football club, like any social organization, lives in an environmental setting and needs inputs from members of the environment to survive.

The systems theory has been used to test the nature of relationships between organisations and their publics and the objectives of this study also fall in line with the systems theory. The theory addresses the roles and functions of the public relations practitioner as well as talks about the kinds of relationships that exist between organizations and their publics.

This study also agrees with the distinction between close and open systems and looks at how football clubs can either be described as functioning as closed or opened within their environments. It also agrees with principles of subsystems and suprasystems. The theory will also guide this study to determine the behavior or communication pattern of the football clubs' internal and external publics. As Cutlip, Center & Broom (2000) said, the systems theory perspective has become the basis for defining public relations and helps to establish and maintain mutually dependent relationships between an organization and publics with which it interacts. Spicer (1997) argued that the systems approach is considered to be one of the dominant paradigms in public relations research, stating that systems theory concepts and
conceptualization help us understand the complexity of interaction between organizational components.

Some studies have have used the systems theory to assess relationship between organizations and their publics. Almutairi, T. (2013), examined the relation between the Kuwait Police Force and the Kuwaiti people using the systems theory as of three major theoretical concept for the study. The study interviewed participants through the sampling techniques of quota and purposive sampling. The study found that the relationship between the police the Kuwaiti community was not cordial and that the key attributes affecting the police-community relationship in Kuwait were; trust, satisfaction, commitment, control, mutuality. The study recommended a more open communication approach between the Kuwait Police Force and the people, a recommendation which is in line with the principles of systems theory, particularly open systems, which this study endorses.

In another study, Thomsen, C. (2010) Accordingly, looked at the feasibility of integrating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into organisational legitimacy as a basis of coherent public relations strategy. Using the systems theory as one of its theoretical concepts, the study examined four Danish small and medium-sized Danish organizations in a discussion of the applicability of CSR in organisational legitimacy for public relations purposes. The study found through crucial components of public relations, reputation management, relationship management and issues management, CSR is able to contribute in the attainment of organisational legitimacy to the extent that it proves advantageous in various ways for organisations of all sizes.
The findings are in line with the principles of systems theory, especially keeping open an organisation's communications with its community. An organisation with a closed-systems may not attain organisational legitimacy through CSR because it does not take inputs from its stakeholders.

2.2 Relationship Management Model

There have been many studies on the essence of organization-public relations. According to Ledingham and Bruning (1998), who propounded the relationship management model, the notion that relationships ought to be at the core of public relations scholarship and practice appears first to have been advocated by Ferguson (1984). According to them, the perspective then advanced through the rapid adoption of a relational definition of public relations in leading texts, such as that of Cutlip, Center & Broom (1987). After the relational perspective emerged as an area for exploration for public relations scholars, Broom and Dozier (1990) suggested a co-orientational approach to measure organization-public relationships, rather than communication efficiencies, as a function of public relations evaluation (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998).

According to Ledingham and Bruning they approached the study of organization-public relationships by identifying dimensions of organization-public relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998a) and by applying the relational perspective to issues such as consumer satisfaction, competitive choice, and media relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d). Eschewing the management approach as inherently manipulative, Wilson (1994) instead focused on the relationship between corporations and community within the social responsibility
perspective. The cumulative effect of this scholarship has been to establish the concept of relationship management as a useful and fruitful perspective for public relations study and education (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998).

The relationship management model establishes that the management of organizational public relations balances the interests of organizations and their publics (Ledingham, 2003). The theory confirms that managing an organization's relations will ultimately lead to a mutually beneficial relationship between the parties involved. In this perspective, public relations is seen as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994, p. 2).

The relational notion has been variously explored in the context of public relations functions, including public affairs (Ledingham, 2001), community relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2001), issues management (Bridges & Nelson, 2000), crisis management (Coombs, 2000), and media relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998a; 1998b).

2.2.1 Significance of Relationship Management Theory to Study

In sports communication or public relations practice in football clubs, establishing effective relationships between sponsors, fans, players, teams, community, and other stakeholders is very important. In cultivating these relationships, each party will be better positioned to fulfill their objectives (Ledingham, 2003). “The proper term for the desired outcomes of public relations
practice is public relationships. An organization with effective public relations will attain positive public relationships” (Center and Jackson, 1995, p.2).

This study agrees with tenets of the relationship management theory as well as the views of Center and Jackson. Indeed, the views of relationship management are in tandem with major theoretical concepts such as systems theory, which is the main theory underpinning this study. The appropriate unit of measurement of public relations impact is the organization–public relationship (Ledingham, 2003). The objectives of this study fell in line with Ledingham's assertion, as the study sought to find out the nature of public relations practice in the four clubs and how it affected their relationships with their publics.

There have been studies stressing the importance of relationship management in sports organizations, using different communication tactics. Garcia (2011), motivated by the relationship management model, looked into the public relations practice of one of the world's leading football clubs, Real Madrid of Spain. Garcia examined how Real Madrid used public relations strategy through relationship management to enhance its branding and economic success. The study also looked into how Real Madrid was able to use public relations tactics to make one of its key publics, the fans, happy despite not being too successful with results on the pitch.

Garcia's findings highlighted the effectiveness of public relations practice in the management of Real Madrid, as the study discovered the applicability and effectiveness of the relationship-
management philosophy in the management of Real Madrid. At the time of the study, Real Madrid had won only one domestic-league title in the last five years and yet it had substantially increased its revenues and brand value during this period. The study attributed this off-field success to Real Madrid's strategy to grow its brand by fostering relationships and expanding its fan base. This strategic use of public relations, according to Garcia, enabled Real Madrid management to protect its brand from the uncertainty of sporting results. Garcia further stated that the business/marketing aspect of Real Madrid remained important to the club during this period and it was a beneficiary of the club’s successful implementation of a relationship-management approach. Garcia again observed that Real Madrid adopted "infotainment" as a feature of its identity, especially as sports audiences became ever more global. According to the findings, Real Madrid accomplished this mostly by feeding the media good stories starring its lead players in stories that fostered suspense, excitement, and emotion.

The study also found that Real Madrid modified the traditional use of press conferences, especially during unveiling of newly-signed players. According to the findings, press conferences only played a minor role; instead Real Madrid transformed these traditional acts of protocol into massive events that could be watched by millions of spectators across the world, beat audience records, and consolidate the club's legend of leadership and success. Garcia also discovered how Real Madrid used various channels of communication such as official club media namely: Real Madrid TV, realmadrid.com, social media (Facebook and Twitter accounts) and other club publications to communicate effectively with its target audience for image building and marketing opportunities.
One limitation of this research was that it was not able to study reaction of supporters of Real Madrid about the failure of Real Madrid to match its off-field success with success on the pitch by winning trophies. Therefore, this research does not answer the question of how sports organizations can use PR to manage the disappointment of its publics during times of failure on the pitch.

Walters and Chadwick (2009) qualitatively sought to examine the benefits of corporate citizenship in football by interviewing officials of two English football clubs, Brentford and Charlton. The study identified six strategic benefits that a football club can realise through the creation of a community trust model of governance. These are the removal of commercial and community tensions, reputation management, brand building, local authority partnerships, commercial partnerships, and player identification. This study agrees with the concept of corporate citizenship in football, particularly with many Ghanaian clubs bearing names of communities. With football matches being played in virtually empty stadium, even by community-owned football clubs, this study agrees with the findings as key areas to explore.

Sheth and Babiak (2009) employed a mixed-method approach, including a survey, and a qualitative content analysis of responses to open-ended questions, to explore how professional sport executives in American sports franchises in the National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL) and Major League Baseball (MLB) perceived and practiced their CSR activities.
The study found that sport executives placed different emphases on elements of CSR including a focus on philanthropic activities and ethical behaviors. The study further observed that professional sport executives view CSR as a strategic imperative for their business. Sport executives interviewed indicated that a number of factors influenced the practice of their CSR including: philanthropy (altruistic giving), an emphasis on the local community, partnerships, and ethical concerns.

This research agreed with the findings of Sheth and Babiak’s study in the sense that football clubs, like the sports franchise interviewed, must engage in the important PR activity of giving back to their communities through CSR campaigns.

Wysocki (2012), sought to examine the role of social media in sports communication by analyzing the dynamics of social media in the National Basketball Association (NBA). The study analyzed the dynamic of social media in the National Basketball Association (NBA) in the USA. The study interviewed social media specialists from nine NBA teams and established that NBA teams have emerged into the social media landscape and have begun implementing specific tactics as part of their social media strategy. The study established eight best practices: give quality content; incorporate social media offline; gamify social media efforts; personalize fans on social media; collect fan data; fansource/crowd source; use fans to amplify message; and track, measure, analyze and adjust.

As the means of communication evolves from traditional way of communication to new media, so has sports communication too. As Garcia proved how Real Madrid have been successful in
interacting with their stakeholders through social media, Wysocki's findings support this study's aim at exploring the various channels of communication available to Ghanaian football clubs in managing their relationships with their publics.

In another study, Bakalar (2013) explored the various ways in which social media websites were being used as public relations tools by the sports industry. In a qualitative study which experts in the fields of social media, public relations, and the Cal Poly Men’s Club Lacrosse Team were interviewed, Bakalar stressed that the development and maintenance of such social media websites were crucial for the success of college club teams in regards to increasing their awareness among college students. With today’s constant technological advances, social media platforms are changing traditional sports public relations tactics, giving practitioners new ways to reach desired audiences (Bakalar, 2013).

A study by Hansherick (2011) examined the role that modern technology and social media play in sports journalism, and how those roles will continue to affect the profession in the future. The history of modern sports (1920 – present) was analyzed, with special attention paid to the important technological advancements that pertained to sports in different eras. The study found that the basic structure of sports communication stayed intact until recent years, while the styles changed significantly. The past decade and a half can be viewed in sharp contrast to the preceding 75 years, as sports communication has been rapidly changing and will continue to do so due to technical innovations and the resulting interconnectedness of today’s society (Hansherick, 2011).
The study observed that Sports organizations and individual athletes now use Twitter to communicate directly with their fans as it allows consumers to receive up-to-the-second information – a reporter can tweet a short message about a story before it is even written, and follow up with the details later. Twitter essentially gives its users the same information distributed by their favorite news sources, but in real time. The study further observed that while television and the internet shrunk the news cycle to 24 hours a day and seven days a week, twitter has taken it to a new level. With news breaking almost as the events occur, the cycle has been reduced to 60/60: 60 seconds a minute, 60 minutes an hour.

2.3 Related Studies

Thematic areas of this research such as reputation management, sports marketing and sports sponsorship and studies related to them are discussed.

2.3.1 Reputation Management

Reputation management is a public relations practice used to enhance or maintain an organization or brand image (Harris, 1998; Nakra, 2000). Public relations departments that practice reputation management are there to build or maintain a positive image for an organization (Fearn-Banks, 1996; Harris, 1998). A positive reputation is golden, worth nurturing, and once tarnished, incredibly difficult to recover (Nakra, 2000). Creating and maintaining an image is increasingly more important for athletes than talent. Besides the media attention that requires a positive image, the opportunities in sponsorship money also requires a positive image, thereby, reinforcing the importance of reputation management for the organization or individual
(Sports Media Challenge, 1992). Football clubs are perfect examples of organizations who fall under this public relations requirement, as the media spotlight is always on the team and the individual players, in particular, to manage their reputations.

An organization that wants a good reputation must build it based on mutual relationship; therefore, the organization needs to start listening to its publics (Grunig & Grunig, 1991). Everyone in the organization needs to be involved in reputation and relationship building, whereby a loyalty to the organization by the publics is created (Ledingham, 2001; Young, 1995). In sports public relations or in a football club, everyone connected to the club needs to be involved in the club's reputation management process because any misconduct, be it by a player, a coach, staff member or even fans has the potential of ruining the image of the club, and making it difficult for the club to attract sponsors.

Issues management is one of the most effective public relations steps to manage an organization's reputation. Issues management “is the proactive process of anticipating, identifying, evaluating and responding to public policy issues that affect organizations’ relationships with their publics” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000. p. 17). In addition, issues management is the searching of trends or issues that might affect the organization in the future, whereby steps are needed to adjust the organization to place it in a better situation (Miller, 1999). It is important for a football club to take issues management seriously because there are trends and issues that might affect the image of the club if left unchecked.
If issues management is performed correctly a potential crisis is averted, thereby there is no need for crisis management, which makes issues management a preventative technique for crises. Clearly, if a football club performs issues management correctly, issues that might affect the image of the club, and consequently affect its relationship with other stakeholders such as sponsors, and fans, etc will be averted.

Studies abroad have looked into how some sports organizations managed their reputations and issues and this research has been motivated by their findings. Trosby (2010) examined the Australia Hyundai A-League football clubs and their management of player transgression issues through the use of public relations strategies and tactics. Using the qualitative approach, Trosby interviewed media and communications managers from eight of the ten existing Hyundai A-League football clubs of Australia. The study revealed that majority of the respondents had experienced transgressionary behaviour in their clubs at some point but they did not perceive player transgression to be a problem to their organizations. Trosby also discovered that media and communication managers from eight of the ten Hyundai A-League clubs responsible for public relations activities were mainly doing media relations, as they all shared a common focus on catering for the media and the idea of the media as one of the organization’s most important publics. One key limitation of this research is that it only considered the views of the media and communication managers of certain clubs, although they were in the majority. The study did not talk to other key persons in the clubs like presidents and managing directors to know their views about effective public relations practice in their respective clubs. The questions of why the media and communication managers of the clubs placed much emphasis on media relations and not on all PR activities and why most of the communication managers had journalism backgrounds,
were not addressed in the research. These gaps motivated this researcher to find out whether Ghanaian clubs behaved similarly.

In another qualitative study, Delatte (2003), motivated by Gonzalo-Herrero and Pratt's crisis management model, examined how nine public relations practitioners in the sports industry in USA handled crises. Delatte found that the practitioners did not follow tenets of the model and that the inability of all of these organizations to implement more proactive public relations or to conduct formal research caused these organizations to operate in a reactive manner rather than being proactive. The findings of this study also pointed out the areas in which these sports organizations needed to follow the Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt crisis management model, and points out the areas in which these organizations’ performance is lacking. The areas tended to be planning and research. This study agrees with Delatte’s observations because planning and research in public relations are very important and they are crucial to the success of sports organizations, particularly football.

A qualitative study by Hopwood (2005) used an exploratory case study approach to evaluate the extent of public relations within two English cricket clubs, Durham County Cricket Club and Yorkshire County Cricket Club. Primary qualitative research strategies provided the bulk of the findings. A purposive sample of respondents was identified for semi-structured, open-ended interviews that were conducted face-to-face and via the telephone.
The study found that public relations was extremely important at Durham County Cricket Club, observing that Durham CCC's approach to public relations was the exception rather than the rule amongst the 18 first-class counties. On the other hand, the study observed that Yorkshire CCC did not have a dedicated public relations professional on the marketing team. The study observed further that other commercial techniques seemed to be more important at Yorkshire than public relations. Public relations is essential to the future success of the sport but the reality is that it is not fully implemented to the extent that it should be or that many in the game would like it to be. If cricket is to have a viable future, it must address its image problems and become more appealing to a demographically different audience than has traditionally been the case. Public relations, more than the other elements of the contemporary promotional mix, offers a potential solution (Hopwood, 2005). This study agrees with the above assertions by Hopwood. Although the observations were made in cricket, the same principles apply in football clubs.

2.3.2 Sports Marketing

Sports marketing has been defined as: “the application of marketing concepts to sport products and services; also encompassing the marketing of non-sport related products through some association with sport” (Moore and Teel, 1994; Gray and McEvoy, 2005).

According to Fullerton & Merz (2008), the concept of sports marketing is ambiguous in its meaning for both practitioners and academicians. Discussions about its application in the popular press and in many textbooks include categories ranging from tickets to spectator sports to sport related wagers in legal gambling establishments (Shannon, 1999). Fullerton & Merz (2008)
noted that some tend to take a narrow view about what the discipline of sports marketing encompasses. Some are of the view that the primary task is one of selling tickets and putting fans in the seats at organized sports events (Sports Marketing Surveys, 2002), thereby equating the sports product to tickets for spectator sports.

In an era where big organisations use sports as a tool or a platform to sell their products, which are non-sports products, the above concept of limiting sports marketing to ticket sales is detrimental to the development of sports organizations, particularly football. Narrowing down sports marketing to only ticket sales, is to deny sports organisations the opportunity of making more money through using sports products to market non-sports product.

Shannon (1999) identified that the concept of sports marketing consists of various categories which range from selling of match tickets to betting on sport-related matters in legal gambling institutions. He also posited that sports marketing is concerned with the marketing of sports and marketing with sports. Goldman & Johns (2009) also stated that marketing of sports concerns marketing of sports events, equipment, and facilities. They added that marketing with sports means promoting non-sporting products or services at sporting events or the use of sportspeople to promote non-sporting products or services. Sport as a product can be described as ‘any bundle or combination of qualities, processes, and capabilities (goods, services, and/or ideas) that a buyer expects will deliver want satisfaction’ (Mullin et al. 2007, p. 17). Mullen et al further highlighted the importance of fans in sports marketing by stressing that, spectators who buy
tickets to go and cheer their teams at a sport event are part of the production of the sport product which is marketed to non sports products. The fans add the thrill and excitement around the event venue which contributes to the atmosphere in the stadium which aids in producing the event (Mullin et al. 2007, p. 18).

This study agrees with the concept of marketing of sports and marketing with sports. Sports organizations, particularly football clubs have moved from merely being a recreational weekend activity to big businesses. Sports organisations should therefore, strive to engage in both marketing of sports and marketing with sports through public relations efforts such as building positive images and managing relationships with their stakeholders in order to attract non-sporting products to market with sports products through sports sponsorship.

Sports marketing has become so important for the survival of sports organisations. It has also become immensely beneficial to business entities. Jeffer & Roos (1999) reported that a 1974 study about the commercialization of sports came to a conclusion that sports would not survive without the financial support of business and industries. What many companies are now realizing is that sports sponsorship is also a valuable way to reach new markets (Shank, 1999). Farrelly et al (2006) explained that sport sponsorship is increasingly used by companies as an image and brand positioning platform. Through sports sponsorship, companies can reach large audience and sometimes communicate with audiences that would be difficult if using normal advertising (Brassiguton & Pettitt, 2002). Sport sponsorship offers high awareness, all-embracing television and press coverage. It also has the ability to attract a broad cross-section of the community and it can reach small specific inches. Most importantly, sport sponsorship has the power to break
down cultural barriers (Bennet, 1999). Companies use sports sponsorship to achieve specific company objectives (Amis, Slack & Berret, 1999).

As Farrelly et al (2006) noted, sports sponsorship or sports marketing is used as an image and brand positioning platform, and this study agrees with this assertion by Farrelly et al. Companies use sports products to project their brand and image but sports organizations ought to be in a good position to produce quality sport product in order to attract the attention of non-sport products to sponsor them. Sports organisations can only produce good sport product through effective public relations effort such establishing and maintaining good relationship with fans and other stakeholders, as well managing their reputations. These are all important areas of this study.

2.3.3 Sponsorship
Sponsorship in public relations is an exchange relationship whereby an organisation helps to fund an event financially or in kind or support an initiative in return for a variety of reasons such as publicity (Tench and Yeomans, 2006). Sponsorship is essentially, a business deal which is intended to be to the advantage of both the sponsor and the sponsored (Skinner, Essen and Mersham, 2007). Sports sponsorship is one of the biggest in the world due to the association of teams and athletes to numerous fans. Sponsorship expenditure, particularly for sport, events and the arts, has grown steadily in recent years compared with other promotional media such as advertising and sales promotion (IEG, 2009).
Many studies have investigated organisational motives for engaging in sponsorship (Quinn, 1982; Abratt, Clayton, & Pitt, 1987; Arthur, 1999; Stotlar, 1999; Nufer and Buhler, 2010). Early studies, especially the one by Quinn, (1982) discovered that businesses engaged in sponsorship mostly as an ad hoc reaction to requests from organizations and individuals. According to Quinn, corporate image development was a secondary motive. This has, however, changed as subsequent studies discovered that organizations used sponsorship as a public relations vehicle for achieving profit-oriented business objectives including increased market penetration, brand awareness, media exposure, and subsequent contribution to revenue (Arthur, 1999; Javalgi, Traylor, Gross, & Lampman, 1994; Stotlar, 1999; Walliser, 2003).

Over the last decades, sponsorship has evolved from a merely philanthropic activity to an effective communication tool. Sports sponsorship, in particular, has become an important source of income for professional sporting organisations and an effective marketing tool for companies aiming at commercial objectives through sports sponsorship (Nufer and Buhler, 2010). This recent motive for companies going into sponsorship with sports organizations such as football clubs, means greater responsibility has been placed on the clubs to manage their relationships well with the clubs. As Nufer and Buler (2010) found, the most successful sports sponsorships are based on a good relationship between sports entity and its sponsor.

A study by Boyle, (2001) sought to determine whether or not sports sponsorship, in this case sponsorship of New Orleans Zephyrs baseball club was an effective way of increasing awareness of a product or brand. Fans at three New Orleans Zephyrs games were surveyed to test sponsor recognition. The study examined various elements of sponsorship marketing including the effects
that gender, age, income, education and attendance frequency had on sponsorship recognition. Additionally, fans were asked if they consciously looked for sponsor messages at games and where they most noticed the messages.

Results showed that all 12 sponsors tested were recognized. Major sponsors were recognized considerably more so than mid-level sponsors and minor sponsors. A little more than half of the respondents reported that they consciously looked for sponsor messages at games, and the majority of respondents noticed sponsor signage the most on outfield fence signs. Attendance frequency had the biggest impact. The more games a fan attended, the more likely they were to correctly identify most sponsors. The study further proved the exposure sports teams and events can give sponsors. While the sponsor marketed its product, the club also benefited financially. The club, however, needs to do a lot through effective public relations tactics to lure and maintain good relations with the sponsor.

In another qualitative study by Abiodun, (2011) he interviewed three organizations in Helsinki to find out why they engage in sponsorship. Among his major findings was that the companies engaged in sponsorship as part of their corporate social responsibility to their communities. Another reason was that they used sponsorship as a tool to ensure market visibility. Another reason the study found was that the companies sponsored a brand if it posed no risk, which brings image management into the picture.

As football clubs become beneficiaries of huge sponsorship money, companies will expect more from them in terms of relationship management. The onus is therefore, on football clubs to take
effective public relations steps to ensure that they establish and maintain good image in other to attract sponsorship and retain their relationships with their sponsors.

Farrelly and Quester (2005) and Buler (2006) supported the management of relationships between a sponsor and a club. They identified five main factors which are essential for successful relationship in sports sponsorship. They are; trust, mutual understanding, long-term partnership, communication and corporation. Nufer and Buler (2010) also recommended that sports organizations should manage their relations with their sponsors well and they proposed the relationship marketing in sports approach, describing it as the establishment and maintenance of positive, enduring and mutually beneficial relations between professional sporting organisations and their stakeholders. These views by Farrelly and Quester (2005) and Buler (2006) fall in line with the tenets of both the systems theory and the relationship management theory, the two theories underpinning this study.

2.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter discussed the theories underpinning the study and also reviewed relevant literature connected to the study. The systems theory and the relationship management model were the main theories for the research, which were discussed. The chapter also discussed the significance of the theories to the study. Literature on sports marketing, sponsorship management and reputation management were also reviewed as well as related studies by other researchers.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the data collection and analyses methods used in the study as well as the study design, sampling procedure and methods of data collection and analysis.

The nature of this research required the use of the qualitative methodology, using in-depth interview as a tool for data collection. The qualitative methodology was preferred largely because it begun with the intention of exploring and interpreting a particular subject by identifying themes in data (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997; Thompson, 1999; Weiner et al., 2001). In addition, qualitative research seeks meaning and understanding (Law et al., 1998) by asking “what,” “how” and “why” questions as well as being problem-oriented (Cook, Meade & Perry, 2001; Harding & Gantley, 1998; Lacey & Luff, 2001).

Qualitative research’s strength lies in validity, its closeness to the truth (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997). Good qualitative research goes beyond skimming the surface of a subject or summing up narratives along thematic lines; it interprets data to develop theoretical insights to describe or explain organizations or experiences (Cook, Meade & Perry, 2001; Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997). Unlike the use of random people or samples in quantitative research, qualitative research requires the use of subjects and subject matter close to the issue in order to gain valuable insight (Greenhalgh & Taylor, 1997; Lacey & Luff, 2001).
Interview was preferred because it provides a window into the key informant’s world capturing the essence of their day-to-day experiences, (Goulding, 2002; Law et al., 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated “researchers usually select persons for interviews only if their experience and knowledge is central to the research problem in some way” (p. 173).

3.1 Population

The population of this study was the Premier League Football Clubs in Ghana, which was made up 16 clubs. They were: Aduana Stars from Dormaa in the Brong Ahafo Region, Asante Kotoko from Kumasi in the Ashanti Region, Bechem United from Bechem in the Brong Ahafo Region, Amidaus Professionals from Tema in the Greater Accra Region, Ashantigold FC from Obuasi in Ashanti Region, Berekum Chelsea from Berekum in the Brong Ahafo Region, Ebuswa Dwarfs from Cape Coast in the Central Region, Edubiase FC from Bekwai in the Ashanti Region, Hasaacas from Takoradi in the Western Region, Heart of Lions from Kpando in the Volta Region, Hearts of Oak from Accra in the Greater Accra Region, Inter Allies, Tema in the Greater Accra Region, King Faisal from Kumasi, Liberty Professionals from Dansoman in the Greater Accra Region, Medeama FC from Tarkwa in the Western Region and Wa All Stars from Wa in the Upper West Region.
3.2 Sampling

Teddle & Yu (2007) categorised sampling into two as probability and purposive sampling. Teddle & Yu explained that probability sampling techniques are primarily used in quantitatively oriented studies, while purposive sampling techniques are primarily used in qualitative studies. Teddle & Yu further defined purposive sampling as “selecting units (e.g. individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions” (p.77). According to Marshall (1996), qualitative studies aim to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and are most useful for answering humanistic 'why?' and 'how?' questions, why was exactly what this study sought to do.

Therefore, the purposive sampling was selected since the study required that specific people who could give certain information needed be interviewed, which was in agreement with Maxwell (1997), who said purposive sampling was a type of sampling in which, “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices’’ (p. 87)

The sample was drawn from four Premier League football clubs namely Kumasi Asante Kotoko, Accra Hearts of Oak, Ashantigold and Wa All Stars. These four clubs were chosen because they represented the four characteristics of ownership of the sixteen Premier League clubs. Clubs in the league are either traditionally owned, individually owned, a limited liability company or a subsidiary of a major corporation. Asante Kotoko is a traditional club owned by the Ashanti Kingdom and Accra Hearts of Oak is a limited liability company with shareholders. Ashantigold
is a subsidiary of a corporate organization, Anglogold Ashanti and Wa All Stars is owned by an individual, Mr Kwesi Nyantakyi.

The Chief Executive Officers of Kumasi Asante Kotoko, Ashantigold and Wa All Stars as well as the Head of Finance and Administration of Accra Hearts of Oak were interviewed. The study also interviewed the leadership of the supporters groups of the clubs as well as journalists from the four cities the clubs were based.

3.3 Data Collection

The study used primary source of data which included data collected from the interviews through in-depth interviews. Interview was preferred because, it provides a window into the key informant’s world capturing the essence of their day-to-day experiences, (Goulding, 2002; Law et al., 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated “researchers usually select persons for interviews only if their experience and knowledge is central to the research problem in some way” (p. 173).

The interview process started with official visits to the respective offices of the clubs requesting for interview opportunities with all those identified above. The requests were granted and contact persons of all those to be interviewed were given by the clubs involved. They were contacted on phone and appointments for face-to-face interviews were scheduled with them on different days. However, interviews with those in Obuasi, home of Ashantigold were conducted
on phone except the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Kudjoe Fianoo. In all, it took about one month
to complete the data gathering.

An outline with questions was used as a guide for the interview. Even though respondents were
allowed to express themselves freely, the guide helped to examine some aspects of the interview
in-depth. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed into themes and reports, taking into
consideration objectives for the study. The areas of focus for the interviews were; roles and
functions of public relations, communication channels and sponsorship relation.

3.3.1 Data Collection Instrument
An interview guide with specific questions to help elicit responses and information for the
objectives of the study was developed. The interview guide was, however, not followed
chronologically because the questions were not asked in the order they appeared on the guide.
The researcher sometimes asked the respondent follow-up questions before moving to the next
question. All the interviews were recorded and notes were also taken alongside the recording.

3.4 Data Analysis
The information gathered from the interviews was reported in this study. The data was collected
through recorded interviews. After collecting the data, it was transcribed before analysis were
carried out thematically to meet the objectives of the study. Themes centred on PR roles and
functions, communication channels and the clubs’ relationship with supporters, media and
sponsors. After transcribing, the findings of the research were discussed with reference to theories and related studies which were discussed earlier.

3.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter outlined the data collection and analysis methods used for the study. The Chapter also presented the study design, sampling procedure, methods of data collection and analysis. The chapter also discussed the population for the study; Ghana Premier League clubs and further outlined how a purposive sampling method was used to determine who to collect data from through interview.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction
This chapter presents findings of the data gathered from the study in an organized manner in order to make it easily understood.

4.1 Roles and functions of PR
It was gathered from the interviews with three Chief Executive Officers and the Head of Administration of (Accra Hearts of Oak) that they all acknowledged the importance of PR in the management of a modern football club.

In Kumasi Asante Kotoko, the Acting Chief Executive Officer, Samuel Opoku-Nti, said due to the number of fans the club had, it was necessary for the club to have a PRO who would be a link between the management of the club and the supporters. As a result, Kotoko had two people appointed as PROs in charge of PR.

The public relations officers help us to carry the plans and decisions of the management to supporters and our stakeholders. They also act as the official spokespersons of the club. When there is a damaging story, he is the one who corrects it. He also managed the branding of the club and makes the supporters understand the right branding (Opoku-Nti, Kumasi Asante Kotoko, October 2014).

It was discovered that the two PROs were part of the management of the club and they attended management meetings to take part in decision-making. The presence of the two PROs during management meetings enabled them to transmit management decisions to their supporters and other stakeholders. From the interview with one of the Kotoko PR officers, Solomon Fosu-Ware,
he confirmed their functions as being the link between management and the supporters of the club as well as the media.

We communicate the management’s programmes and that of the technical and playing body to the media and supporters, through the national circles council - the supporters group of Kotoko (Fosu-Ware, Asante Kotoko, October, 2014).

As part of their duties, the two PR officers engaged the leadership of the club’s supporters union, the National Circles Council (NCC) to explain management decisions to them as well as take back the supporters’ grievances to management. Through their meetings, the two PROs were able to advice management against taking decisions which would not go down well with the club’s supporters.

We are part of management. We attend management meetings, we meet the supporters and we know what the supporters want so sometimes when a decision is being taken and I know it will help the supporters or they will not like it, I tell management about it (Fosu-Ware, Asante Kotoko, October 2014).

It was further established that Kotoko owned a newspaper, official website and social media accounts but the two PROs were not responsible for the management of these official club media. All the club’s official media were being managed by different people who were not under the direct supervision of the two PROs. The two PROs only provided club information to both the newspaper and the website. Staff of the newspaper handled both the facebook and twitter accounts of the club, and they had their contacts within other management members. They didn’t always rely on the PROs for information. The functions of the two PROs also included organizing press conferences which were held before every home match of the club in Kumasi as well as special press conferences anytime the club wanted to unveil newly-signed players. The PROs were also responsible for ensuring that the right colours and logos for both Kotoko and sponsors were in place during press conferences.
The Chief Executive Officer of Ashantigold Football Club, Mr Kudjoe Fianoo also acknowledged that the role of PR in the administration of a football club was very important. For Ashantigold, he said they had a PR officer who played a crucial role in the management of the club’s communication with its publics.

PR is very vital in football administration. That is the tool you use to communicate with your supporters and other publics. It is normal that every football club must have a PR person (Fianoo, Ashantigold, October 2014).

The management of Ashantigold saw the need to manage relationship with its publics, which included internal employees, supporters, media and the community through communication. It was found that the club didn’t have a PR department but it had appointed a part time PRO. Due to the PRO being a part-time employee, he was not responsible for many PR activities in the club. For instance, internal communication management was not handled by the PRO. It was handled by the chief executive officer himself. It was also revealed that the PRO also worked as a full-time journalist for a radio station in Obuasi. Even though the PRO was a part time worker, he attended some management meetings, but he was excluded from crucial management meetings.

He attends management meeting but he is not a full time employee. He works in a radio and works on part time for us and we pay him allowance. For instance he doesn’t attend board meetings and some management meetings, he does not attend (Fianoo, Ashantigold, October 2014).

As part of his duties, the Ashantigold PRO, Kofi Yawson said he was responsible for communicating decisions of management of the club to supporters and the media and also informed management of the club about the grievances of the supporters through his contacts with them. When he was not present at some crucial management meetings, the club’s
management briefed him on what to tell the supporters and the media. As part of his functions, he distributed press releases to the media, which were prepared by the management of the club. The PRO had no hand in the writing of the press release. He only explained the content to the media and the supporters.

The Ashantigold PRO was also the person in charge of facilitating meetings between the club and the supporters as well as community leaders. Sometimes he met the supporters and community leaders and listened to their views on the club and reported the same to management. He also gauged the mood of supporters through radio phone-ins and advised management on what to do to appease the supporters.

My presence at management meetings help me to inform the management about decisions that will not auger well for the supporters or the image of the club so I advice the management about it. Because I am a radio presenter, I am able to get much information about the concerns of the supporters so I take these concerns to management (Yawson, Ashantigold, October, 2014).

At Accra Hearts of Oak, the Head of Finance and Administration, Hackman Aidoo viewed PR practice in the administration of the club as very essential due to the size of the club, which he said needed a PR department to manage communications with its publics.

Looking at the structure of Hearts of Oak, it is very big and we wanted to be very professional so we set up the PR department so that all communications and other related issues will be managed by the PR department (Aidoo, Hearts of Oak, October 2014).
It was found that Accra Hearts of Oak had PR department with the head of the department being the PRO. The PRO of the club was a management member, who attended management meetings and reported directly to the Managing Director of the club.

As the PRO, he deals with supporters or he coordinates interaction between the outside world and the club. So he advises management on decisions with regards to our public relations (Aidoo, Hearts of Oak, October 2014).

The PRO of Hearts of Oak, Muheeb Saeed confirmed his roles and functions as outlined by Hackman Aidoo. The PRO said, as part of his duties, he advised management in terms of the clubs relations with its publics; that is the supporters, players, former board members. He was the link between the club and the outside world as he was the one responsible for facilitating communication between the club and the world. The interview found it was the responsibility of the PRO to monitor the mood of supporters and also solicit their opinions and concerns so that he could communicate them to management for appropriate action to be taken. The PRO did this through media monitoring.

As the PRO, I advice management in terms of its relations with the club’s publics, that is the supporters, players, media etc. When they have issues to put across, they do so through me so I’m able to guage mood, tamper opinions so that I inform management about it. We are also on the ground, we monitor radio stations, we monitor social media so we are able to advice the management on issues bothering the club so they take our advice serious (Saeed, Hearts of Oak, October 2014).

The PRO was also responsible for meeting the club’s supporters and explaining to them key management issues or facilitating meetings between the supporters and the management of the club. It was also found that Hearts of Oak owned a newspaper, website, facebook and twitter accounts. The PRO was directly in charge of the website and the social media accounts but the newspaper was being managed differently although he had some level of supervision.
What is very important is that, we keep emphasizing to them that they should know that whatever they are writing is a PR function, so whatever they are writing should bring the club together, and they should take into consideration the image of the club (Saeed, Hearts of Oak, October 24).

It was gathered that the PRO also engaged in the writing of some press releases and news materials. But sometimes press releases were also prepared or issued directly by the managing director.

At Wa All Stars, the Chief Executive of the club, Samuel Oduro-Nyarko viewed PR as having an important role to play in the management of a community-based club like Wa All Stars.

Public Relations is very important so that it will help us protect the image of the club and project our activities and project the club to make our activities known to the town (Oduro-Nyarko, Wa All Stars October 2014).

It was found that there were PR activities in the club such as employee relations, corporate image building, issues management, media relations and community relations but the club’s PRO was a management member in charge of media and supporter relations.

He is a member of management in charge of media relations. He attends management meeting and when we discuss at management meeting, he takes them up and informs the public. So he picks reactions and informs management at the next meeting (Oduro-Nyarko, Wa All Stars, October 2014.)

He was responsible for communicating management decisions to the supporters and facilitating communication between the club and the media. As the link between the club and its publics, especially the supporters, the PRO was in charge of informing the publics of management decisions and picking feedback on management decisions and reporting to management about it.

It was found that although the club rarely issues press release, whenever they did, the release was neither prepared by the PRO nor signed by him.
When it comes to press release, it is management which decides what must be put out, and the PRO is the conduit for circulation (Oduro-Nyarko, October 2014).

As part of his responsibilities, the PRO also conducted research in the form of scanning the environment to know how the people perceived the club, how they perceived the club’s activities, and what they wanted management to do. “We take feedback seriously because the PR person always informs management about what the people feel” (Oduro-Nyarko, October 2014).

4.2 Channels of communication by the clubs

At Asante Kotoko, it was found that Kumasi Asante Kotoko was one of the biggest football clubs in Ghana with a large support base across the country. The club had various channels of communication which it used to communicate with its publics which included; staff, players, supporters, sponsors, media and the Ghana Football Association. The channels of communication Kotoko used were; the mass media (radio, newspaper and television), social media such as facebook and twitter, meetings, mails, emails and telephone calls, txt messages, inter personal discussion. Each of these channels were used depending on the issue and the target audience.

For its internal communication, the club used emails, telephone calls and meetings to communicate with staff and players, while it used mails, emails and telephone to communicate with GFA, the regulatory body of football in Ghana. To communicate with the supporters, the club used the mass media because their supporters were spread throughout the nation. The club
sent press releases to various media houses when it wanted to communicate with its supporters and other stakeholders through mass media. The study found that Kotoko owned mass media channels for communicating with the club’s supporters such as the official newspaper Asante Kotoko Express and the official website of the club www.asantekotokofc.com. The club also had social media accounts and it used its facebook and twitter accounts to send information about the club to the media and the fans, as well as interact with them.

The club also organized press conferences before every home match, where the coach and the club PR officers attended to address the media to whip up enthusiasm. Periodic press conferences were also organized to outdoor new players and sometimes to announce important decisions. It was further discovered that Kotoko placed much importance on face-to-face meetings with its publics, especially sponsors and the supporters. Through meetings with the leadership of the club’s supporters, the club was able to explain club policies as well as inform them of certain decisions which could make them angry.

It was discovered that the most used channel of communication by Kotoko was the mass media through its official newspaper, which came out twice in a week on Tuesdays and Fridays. The reason given for the newspaper being the most used channel of communication was that the newspaper belonged to the club and they could put as much information in it as possible. They also said meeting was an effective channel for both internal and external communication because it ensured instant feedback.
Our channels of communication include radio stations and television stations, newspapers, our own newspaper Kotoko Express and our website, meetings, press releases, press conferences, letters etc. Sometimes we organize press conferences to outdoor new players, before every home match or to inform supporters about developments in the club. We also use social media but the accounts are not handled directly by the PR team just as the newspaper and the website (Fosu-Ware, Asante Kotoko, October 2014).

At Accra Hearts of Oak, it was established that the channels of communication available to the club were; mass media, direct telephone contacts, mails, emails, social media, memos, interpersonal, group meetings etc. Each channel of communication was used depending on the issue and who among the publics was being targeted. For internal communication with staff and the players, channels such as emails, telephone calls, text messages, face-to-face meetings and internal memos were used. When communicating with players, the club communicated with them mostly through inter-personal communication or face-to-face meetings because it afforded management of the club the opportunity to understand player’s issues as immediate feedback was assured. The club however, used memos to communicate with the players on decisions it wanted to document such as fines or sanctions against any player.

Hearts of Oak’s external publics included their supporters, the media, sponsors and the Ghana Football Association. The club used mass media channels to communicate with the supporters across the country. Press releases and press conferences were two ways the club communicated through the mass media. Whether a press release or press conference was preferred, depended on the issue at stake. For instance, the club would issue a press release to announce major management decisions such as appointment or resignation of staff, details of an upcoming match or to respond to issues which had been misrepresented in the media. The study also found that a
press conference would be preferred if the issue at stake was about unveiling newly-signed
players or senior management appointments. During the study, the club organized a press
conference to unveil its new Managing Director. The club also organized press conferences
before every home league match to whip up enthusiasm towards the match.

We issue press releases when we have made important decisions such as resignation,
appointment of key staff and sometimes to state our side of stories that have generated
arguments, or as rejoinders to issues that have been misrepresented. For press
conferences, we organize them to whip up interests in our home matches. We organize at
least 10 press conferences within a season (Saeed, Hearts of Oak, October, 2014).

Aside sending press releases and organizing press conferences, the club owned a newspaper,
Hearts News as well as a website, www.accraheartsofoak.com, which were part of the club’s PR
set up even though the official newspaper was operated outside the club’s PR office. The club
used these official mass media channels to communicate with its supporters throughout the
country. Another mass media channel the club used was its official social media platforms.
Hearts used both its twitter handle and facebook account to engage its literate supporters, as well
as monitor their grievances and report to management.

It was also found that Hearts of Oak used meetings to explain club policies to the leadership of
its national supporters, the National Chapters Council as well as other publics like sponsors. For
Accra Hearts of Oak, the most used channel of communication was the club’s official
newspaper, which comes out twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays.

The favourite channel of communication is the club’s official newspaper, Hearts News
because of its wide reach. Even those who cannot read buy the newspaper because they
can even relate to the pictures of the players. The other channels like social media require
a certain level of literacy so we use that to send messages to the media. (Saeed, October
2014).
At Ashantigold FC, it was found that although the club used mass media channels of communication, it was only restricted to two local fm stations in the Obuasi town. The club sent announcements to these radio stations through its PRO. The club did not frequently use press releases as a means of communication and the reason given by both the CEO and the PRO were that Ashantigold was a small club with most of its supporters based in Obuasi.

However, the club issued press release to national media when it had to make major announcements such as signing of players or major appointments in the club and wanted the entire country to know about it. Another channel of communication used by the club were meetings with community leaders and leadership of the supporters. As a community club, it was discovered that Ashantigold placed much importance to meetings and the reason offered them the opportunity to dialogue with community leaders and supporters. The club also used the public address system at the Obuasi Len Clay Stadium to communicate with supporters of the club. They used the public address system to make major announcements about the club during football matches.

There are two radio stations that we use to communicate to our supporters. We also organize meetings with the leadership of the supporters so sometimes we meet them to explain important information to them. We also organize periodic meetings with community leaders. (Fianoo, Ashantigold, October 2014).

For internal communication with staff, the club used interpersonal discussion, emails, face-to-face meetings, text messages and telephone calls. Ashantigold did not own any social media account nor a newspaper. The club, however, owned a website but it was inactive. The most used channels of communication for Ashantigold was through the two local radio stations in Obuasi.
and the PRO explained it was because the fm stations spoke the language the local people understood, as well as meetings with the fans to explain issues to them.

For Wa All Stars, another community club, it was found that the club used inter personal communication, text messages, emails, memos, telephone calls and meetings as channels for internal communication.

For its external publics, the study found that because the club didn’t have its own official mass media channel like a newspaper or a website, it used local radio stations to communicate with the supporters. The club also used bill boards in the Wa township to promote its activities as well as communicate with the locals, especially before their home matches. The study also found that the club sometimes used national mass media channels when it wanted to communicate beyond the local community.

It was established that the club organized regular meetings with supporters and community leaders. Aside regular meetings with community leaders, the club also organised public forums at the community centre in the town to engage the supporters and explain issues to them. The study found that these meetings and public forums offered the club instant feedback.

We don’t have a newspaper but what we do is to use the local radio stations and bill boards for directional signs. We also sometimes use the national newspaper when we want to communicate beyond our supporters in Wa. When we want to communicate
nationally, we use the national media and we meet our supporters regularly through meetings and sometimes public forum. (Oduro-Nyarko, October 2014).

4.3 Relationship between clubs and supporters

At Asante Kotoko, the study found that the supporters received hints and news about their club mostly from fm stations but official news came through the official media channels of the club such as Kotoko Express or the website. The Chairman of the national supporters union of the club, Kwaku Amponsah said the club occasionally communicated to the supporters through the union, especially on major club policies. He said that apart from such arranged meetings, official communication was through the mass media, especially the Asante Kotoko Express newspaper. The study also found that the supporters sent information to management of the club through its representative on the management of the club as well as by writing formally to them. They could also do so through face to face meeting. But for the mass supporters, anybody could communicate to the club through email or through any of the club’s official media channel. The leadership of the club’s supporters said it was satisfied with how the club communicated to them. However, they wanted the club to further engage and consult with the supporters in order to deepen their relationships. They also felt the club should find a way of releasing timely information in order to prevent the media from speculating on issues about the club because many media reports on the club turned out to be false.

An official of the National Chapters Committee, the official supporters group of Accra Hearts of Oak, said they received news about their club mostly from fm stations before confirmation by the
official media channels of the club such as the PRO, Hearts News, the websites, etc. In terms of
the supporters’ communication with the clubs, he said the leadership of the supporters did so
through mails, telephone and meetings. For the mass supporters, they used the same club media
channels to communicate with them, as well as through meetings, which they described as
effective.

The official expressed satisfaction at their level of interaction with the club but they felt there
could be an improvement. The official was of the view that the leadership of the supporters
should be consulted more through meetings before certain crucial decisions were taken to avoid
misunderstanding. He also expressed concern about the way club information got to the media
before the official club channels published them and called on the club to manage information
well.

For Wa All Stars, it was established that supporters of the club had formed a union and elected
leaders to be the link between them and management of the club. The Chairman of the supporters
union, Safianu Abdullah, said the club sometimes met with supporters of the club through
meetings. He however, said the supporters leadership did not initiate meetings with management
of the club. He said the supporters relied also on the mass media for news on the club. The
leadership of the supporters said they were not too happy with the level of communication with
the club. They said, previously, the level of dialogue was low but the situation had improved
since a misunderstanding broke out and the management organized a forum to explain issues to
the supporters. The supporters leadership called for more of such dialogue to further improve on their relationships.

At Ashantigold, it was established that supporters of the club had formed a group known as the Shaft which was based in Obuasi. The supporters elected their leaders, who interacted with the management of the club regularly to be abreast with happenings in the club. The General Secretary of the supporters union E.K. Nimoh-Poku said the channels for receiving and sending information between the supporters and the club’s management were telephone calls, letters and face-to-face meetings. It was also discovered that management members of the club led by the CEO availed themselves anytime the supporters wanted to meet the management of the club. The club also engaged the leadership of the supporters and sought their views on decisions before they were made public. The study found that leadership of the supporters were happy with their relationship with management of the club.

4.4 Relationship between the clubs and the media

It was found that some of the media in the towns from which the clubs were based pursued the clubs more for news about the clubs than the club sent them information. Those interviewed explained that due to the competitive nature of the media industry for news and the quest to break news first, the media did not rely on official club channels such as the PROs or club newspapers for news on the clubs.
For instance in Accra, the study found that journalists had their own sources within the management of Accra Hearts of Oak who would give them scoops on the club. The media did not wait for the club to issue formal press release or confirmation because they believed they had to break the news to the clubs followers. The only time the media contacted the PRO was when they wanted him to speak to an issue or to clarify a rumour they had heard. Otherwise their sources of news were within the top management or even board members.

In Kumasi, the media also had their own ways of getting information on Kotoko from top management members. The media didn’t rely on the two PROs for news. They sometimes broke stories about the club before the club confirmed the stories days after through their official news channels. It was however, established that the media did not always get such stories right. Sometimes, their sources ended up feeding them with false information or half truths. This ended up creating panic situations among the supporters and the club PRO would use the same media to correct misinformation and misconception by the club.

In Wa, the home of Wa All Stars, it was established that there were three fm stations and the scramble for exclusive news on the team was not so intense. According to Tony Goode, a journalist with Radio Upper West in Wa, there was no clear channel of receiving message from the club as the club did not issue press releases nor organized press conferences. He said the was reluctant to use the media except when it wanted to promote a big match or any activity of the club. In order to inform their audience, the media used its contacts within the club or called the
PRO to get news on the club. “If you want to know something about Wa All Stars, you have to call them (Goode, October, 2014). He said the media was ready to help the club in its community relations, and wished the club could do more to ensure easier and faster flow of information to the media.

In Obuasi, it was found that there were two fm stations in Obuasi; Shaft fm and Time fm who mostly covered Ashantigold fc. According to Salamatu Shaibu, a journalist with Shaft FM, Shaft fm had a very good working relationship with the management of the club including the chief executive because the PRO of the club also worked with the fm station as a broadcast journalist. Shaft fm got news about Ashantigold directly from the CEO of the club through personal phone calls. It was also discovered Time fm was particularly unfriendly with the management of the club because it felt the management favoured Shaft fm when it came to release of club information.

4.5 The clubs’ public relations activities and relationship with sponsors

At Accra Hearts of Oak it was found that they had one sponsor, with Metro TV as their media partner. The club also had sponsorship obligations in sponsored competitions they participated in such as the MTN FA Cup and the First Capital Plus Premier League. Hearts of Oak were, therefore, obliged to manage its relationship with these sponsors. The PRO of the club said that one of the ways through which the club maintained their image and relationship with their sponsor was establishing regular communication between the club and the sponsors. This regular
communication was done through meetings, telephone calls, visits. Hearts also extended courtesies to its sponsors by providing them with complimentary VIP tickets of their matches, copies of their newspaper as well as sending their sponsors messages on special occasions such as during corporate success by the sponsor.

It was found that Hearts used its official media channels to enhance its image by putting in positive stories about the club. They also maintained good image through a strict disciplinary code for its players to avoid the break-down of discipline in the club. Also, regular press conferences were organized before every home match as well as when a new player was being outdoored. These press conferences, according to the PRO, to offer the sponsors a platform to maximize their investment through media because the sponsor’s logos featured on a backdrop

It was established that Asante Kotoko had many sponsors and as such were also obliged to maintain cordial and professional relationship with its sponsors. Apart from the club's contractual obligations to sponsors of competitions Kotoko took part in competitions such as the MTN FA Cup and the First Capital Plus Premier League, Kotoko had to establish and maintain a direct relationships with the club’s own sponsors. According to the both the CEO of the club and the PRO, one of the ways it maintained relationship with its sponsors was through regular meetings to discuss issues regarding their agreement and relationship. It was also discovered that one of the main tasks of the two PR officers was to manage brand identity for both Kotoko and their sponsors at all times, especially during events such as press conferences and home games of the club.
The PROs ensure that the right logos and colours for both the club and the sponsors are in place and that there is no infringements on the rights of the sponsor by the club or a supporter of the club during our official programmes (Opoku-Nti, Asante Kotoko, October 2014).

It was also discovered that the press conferences which were organized before every home match provided the club’s sponsors a platform to be projected through the mass media. The study also found out that the club was keen on image management. According to the PRO, part of the club's image management was ensuring that the club did not involve in any controversy, and this was achieved through media monitoring. The outlook of the players, in terms of how they dressed in the club's corporate colours was also found to be a way of maintaining good image for the club. The club also used its official media channels, the Kotoko Express and the website to create positive image about the club. Avoiding player transgression and maintaining winning performances, were also revealed as part of the ways to maintain the clubs’ sponsors, as well as woo new sponsors.

Even though Ashantigold and Wa All Stars did not have any sponsor, it was found that they also made some public relations efforts to win sponsors. For instance, the CEO of Wa All Stars said part of their community relations was meant to establish and maintain positive image for the club in order to win them sponsorship.

4.6 Discussion of findings

The findings which were reported in the previous section are discussed thematically in this guided by the research objective and the research question. This discussion is also against the backdrop of the two theories which underpinned this study.
4.6.1 How PR Roles and Functions Portrayed Club’s Understanding of PR

The study sought to find out how PR roles and functions in the clubs portrayed management’s understanding of public relations. The findings indicated that management of all the four clubs acknowledged the importance of public relations to the management of their respective football clubs, stressing that they could not operate without any public relations activity. The findings showed that there were different types of public relations practice in the clubs, confirming the assertion of (Cutlip, Centre & Broom, 2000) that there are different types of public relations such as investor relations, which deals with an organization and its investors; internal and external relations, which deals with an organization and its employees and other publics respectively. Even though it was established that different types of public relations practice existed in football clubs, the four clubs did not perform the same PR types, roles and functions. The findings established differences and similarities in PR roles and functions in the clubs. These differences and similarities, as the findings established, were as a result of management’s portrayal of PR, as well as the size of the club. In other words, how the management of the club portrayed PR reflected on the kind of PR roles and functions practiced in the club, and the size of a football club also determined the roles and functions played in the club.

One similarity the findings established was that all the four clubs saw PR as a management function and made their respective PROs members of management who attended management meetings to take part in decision making. This is in tandem with the definition of public relations by (Cutlip, et al., 2000, p.6) as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually
beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics on whom its success or failure depends. As a management function, other top management members of all the clubs such as the chief executive officers performed various PR functions such as lobbying and relationship management alongside the PROs.

Another similarity which was established as a result of management’s portrayal of PR was the roles played by all the four PROs. Management of the four clubs portrayed PR largely as the facilitation of communication between their respective clubs and their publics. This meant that all four PROs mainly played the communication facilitator roles, and this led them to play functions such as liaisons or interpreters of club communication to supporters and the media. They also communicated feedback to management, in line with the principles of the open system. Media relations particularly came out as one area of public relations all the four PROs gave more attention to. This confirmed the findings of a study by Trosby (2010), which established that PROs from eight of the ten Hyundai A-League clubs in Australia were mainly doing media relations as they all shared a common focus on catering for the media and the idea of the media as one of the organization’s most important publics.

The findings indicated other PR roles such as the expert prescriber, the problem solving facilitator and even the technician role, were performed in the clubs but not all these roles were performed by the PROs as should be the case. Management of the clubs took up some of these roles and their functions, with the PROs playing bit parts. However, for the PRO of Accra Hearts
of Oak, the findings indicated that he played more roles and functions than the three other PROs, even though he also concentrated more on the communications facilitator role. For instance, he played the technician role by writing press releases, speeches and managing the clubs website as well as the social media accounts.

In terms of differences of PR practices in the four clubs, the findings showed that the size of the clubs influenced management’s views of PR practices in the club, and ultimately the functions. For instance, Accra Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko were found to be two of Ghana’s biggest football clubs with many fans throughout the country, while Ashantigold and Wa All Stars were found to be community-based clubs with most of their supporters at their base in Obuasi and Wa respectively. As a result, Hearts and Kotoko performed more roles and functions than Ashantigold and All Stars. For instance, due to the number of nationwide supporters they had and its accompanying expectations Hearts and Kokoko performed more PR functions like media relations, supporter relations and issues management than the two other clubs. Again, the findings established that Hearts and Kotoko had sponsors, while Ashantigold and All Stars didn’t, so Hearts and Kotoko did more investor relations functions than the two other clubs. While Hearts and Kotoko concentrated more on media, supporter and investor relations, All Stars and Ashantigold concentrated on community relations. However, irrespective of their size and support base, the findings showed that all the four clubs took internal communications seriously, even though internal relation functions were not performed by their PROs.
4.6.2 How the channels of communication the clubs used impacted on their relationships with their publics

The interview sought to find out how the channels of communication the clubs use affected their relationships with their publics and the findings indicated that all the four clubs had identified their respective publics and had dedicated channels of communication for every stakeholder. This is in line with the systems theory, one of the theories underpinning this research which asserts that for organizations to be successful, they must identify their publics and maintain good relationships with them. Although the findings established some common and similar channels of communications in relation to some publics, it also showed differences in some instances depending on the club involved.

With internal communication, the findings showed that all four clubs had similar approaches and they used channels such as memos, emails, telephone calls, text messages, interpersonal and group meetings to communicate with their internal employees, which were made up of secretarial staff, players and members of the coaching staff. The findings showed that management of all four clubs saw their internal publics as very important, which is in line with the view that “an organization’s most important relationships are those with employees at all levels. The terms internal publics and employee publics refer to both managers and the people being supervised. These publics represent an organization’s greatest resource. (Cutlip, Centre & Broom, 2006, p. 223). It was also established that the most used internal channel of
communication for all the clubs was meetings because it offered management of the clubs the opportunity to get instant feedback.

With regards to communication with external publics, the findings indicated that the four clubs had different channels. As was the case in earlier discussions, the size of a club had a bearing on its external publics and also had an impact on the channels of communication used. The findings showed that Asante Kotoko and Hearts of Oak had similar channels of communication for their external publics, which were slightly different from the channels for external communication employed by Wa All Stars and Asantigold. The two big clubs; Hearts and Kotoko, with many supporters across the country, employed channels such as national mass media (through press release, and press conferences), social media, official club media channels to communicate with two of their most important publics, the media and supporters. Hearts and Kotoko’s successful use of these different media channels including their own official media channels to communicate with their publics, especially the fans, confirmed a study by Garcia (2011), who observed that Real Madrid Football Club in Spain employed similar channels of communication including official club channels like Real Madrid TV, realmadrid.com, social media (Facebook and Twitter accounts) and other club publications to communicate effectively with its target audience. In Ghana, both Hearts and Kotoko have been successful in communicating with their fans using these channels as the findings indicated that supporters of these clubs were informed of developments in their clubs through these channels and the channels also provided the opportunity to interact with their clubs.
Pedersen, Miloch, and Laucella’s (2007) definition of sports communication as the process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor share symbols as they create meaning through interaction, was supported by Asante Kotoko as the club connected with their fans through interaction on these channels. Supporters were able to connect, especially through the official channels of the club since both clubs admitted that their official newspapers and websites played significant roles in club communication. The findings also showed that both clubs used letters, telephone calls and face-to-face meetings to relate to their sponsors, and both clubs were content with the mutual relationships resulting from the two-way communication the channels ensured. The interactive nature of most of these channels Hearts and Kotoko use agrees with the principles of the open system, which says that organizations must operate with an open boundary to be able to take inputs from their publics.

For their relationship with the media, the findings established that the media were aggressive in their coverage of these clubs and as such disregarded the club’s laid down media channels in pursuit of news. The findings showed that the media in Accra and Kumasi often disregarded the clubs’ PROs and made contacts with top management personnel including board members for scoops on the clubs even before the club officially announced such stories. As the findings indicated, the media was of the view that clubs normally delayed in releasing club information because they wanted to pass it through their official websites and newspapers but used the other mass media when it wanted to clarify something or promote something. Football is a passionate game which generates excessive coverage by the media and the extent to which the Ghanaian media went to cover the clubs confirmed the assertion that the media highlights every little thing
that occurs within a sports organization’s life, whereas some organizations do not face this type of scrutiny (Krupa, 1998; Sports Media Challenge, 1992). The manner in which the media go beyond the PRO to solicit information from other top management members of the club does not augur well for the clubs, as far as information management is concerned.

The observations of Wysocki (2012), who established eight best practices in social media communication after examining the role of social media in sports communication by National Basketball Association (NBA) in USA, could help address the concerns of the Ghanaian media. His study established that NBA teams had emerged into the social media landscape and had begun implementing specific tactics as part of their social media strategy. Wysocki’s established eight best practices were: give quality content; incorporate social media offline; gamify social media efforts; personalize fans on social media; collect fan data; fansource/crowdssource; use fans to amplify message; and track, measure, analyze and adjust. Social media has become not only a channel for interactive discussion between a football club and its publics, but also a channel for fast delivery of news and information.

With Ashantigold and Wa All Stars, the findings showed that the two clubs used similar channels to communicate with their external publics, who were mostly based in Obuasi and Wa. Unlike Hearts and Kotoko, Ashantigold and Wa All Stars did not own official mass communication club channels like newspaper, website and social media accounts. Ashantigold, however used to own a website but it emerged that it had been inactive for some time. Although both Ashantigold and Wa All Stars used mass media channels to communicate, they only limited their mass media
communications to local fm stations in Obuasi and Wa. Communication through the local stations proved to be effective for both clubs as their PRO’s were able to communicate and got feedback through monitoring same media. Since most of their supporters were based in Wa and Obuasi, the two clubs also employed telephone calls and face-to-face meetings to communicate with their supporters and community. The findings established that these channels were effective to all parties; the clubs, supporters and the communities as it offered them the platform to share mutual information and enjoy harmonious relationship just as the systems theory and relationship management theory assert.

With today’s constant technological advancement, social media platforms are changing traditional sports public relations tactics, giving practitioners new ways to reach desired audiences (Bakalar, 2013). Ashantigold and Wa All Stars have to adapt to the technological advancement in information delivery by introducing social media. For Wa All Stars in particular, they have to improve on their relationship with the leadership of the club’s supporters union through regular meetings and not just public forum for the entire supporters or the community. This will expand their reach and help them expand their support base as studies have proved. Most big football clubs began as community-based clubs but grew to become nationally and internationally known clubs through sustained achievements coupled with effective PR strategies.
For Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko who are already using social media, they have to adopt effective strategies in the use of their twitter and facebook accounts. Just as Real Madrid in Garcia’s study. The effective use of social media channels by the clubs will help them address the intensity of media competition to get exclusive news on them. This is because news delivery through social media is swift and inexpensive, and it can also reach millions of audiences throughout the world.

4.6.3 How the clubs’ public relations activities affected their relationships with their sponsors

The interview sought to find out how did the club’s PR activities affect their relationships with their sponsors and the findings indicated the clubs with sponsors, Hearts of Oak and Kotoko performed similar PR activities in their quests to maintain a good positive image which would enhance their relationship with their sponsors. It also emerged that despite not having sponsors, both Ashantigold and Wa All Stars took the management of their reputations and image seriously by constantly addressing issues with the media and the community.

Creating and maintaining an image is increasingly becoming as important for athletes as talent. Besides the media attention that requires a positive image, the opportunities in sponsorship money also requires a positive image, thereby, reinforcing the importance of reputation management for the organization or individual. Football clubs are perfect examples of organizations who fall under this public relations requirement as the media spotlight is always on
the team and the individual players, in particular, to manage their reputations. (Sports Media Challenge, 1992).

The four clubs’ PR practices to manage their reputations and keep a positive image are in line with the above assertions. For Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko, managing their relationships with their sponsors through two-way communication channels such as telephone calls and face-to-face meetings fall in tandem with the assertion that an organization that wants a good reputation must build it based on mutual relationship; therefore, the organization needs to start listening to its publics (Grunig & Grunig, 1991; Young, 1995).

In a football club, everyone, especially the footballer must be involved in managing reputation and the effort by Hearts and Kotoko to get their players involved in the clubs’ reputation management through disciplinary codes agrees with the view that everyone in the organization needs to be involved in reputation and relationship building, whereby loyalty to the organization by the publics is created (Ledingham, 2001; Young, 1995).

Creating and maintaining a positive image is a good way for clubs to repay the investment of sponsors in the clubs. This is because sponsors use sponsorship as a public relations vehicle for achieving profit-oriented business objectives including increased market penetration, brand awareness, media exposure, and subsequent contribution to revenue (Arthur, 1999; Javalgi,
Traylor, Gross, & Lampman, 1994; Stotlar, 1999; Walliser, 2003). Sponsors would not be able to achieve all these in a football club without a good image.

Even though the findings indicated that both Kotoko and Hearts had good relationships with their sponsors through their public relations efforts, it also emerged that Kotoko was more successful in wooing new sponsors than Hearts. Kotoko had more sponsors than any other Ghanaian club and they kept winning new sponsors. Kotoko’s PR tactics appeared to have had more impact on their supporters than Hearts of Oak. This could be as a result of their successes in recent times. Kotoko had recorded more successes than Hearts at the time of the study, as they had won the Ghana Premier League three times in a row since the 2010/2011 football season past two seasons as well as the FA Cup in the 2013/2014 seasons.

Hearts on the other hand hadn’t won any trophy since the 2008/2009 season, a five-year trophy drought period. In spite of Hearts’ PR efforts the Hearts fans were apathetic, especially towards attending matches, while Kotoko regularly registered massive supporter turn outs during their matches. But Hearts could employ the PR strategy of Real Madrid, who successfully kept their supporters happy and increased their fan base despite winning only one title in five years. Garcia (2011) attributed this off-field success to Real Madrid's strategy to grow its brand through strategic use of public relations by feeding the media good stories starring its lead players in stories that fostered suspense, excitement, and emotion.
4.7 Chapter Summary

The chapter presented findings of the data gathered from the study. The presentation was done in an orderly manner on various themes such as roles and functions of PR of the clubs, channels of communications of the clubs, relationship between leadership of supporters and the clubs, relationship media and the clubs, as well as the club’s relationship with their sponsors.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of the study and also states limitations to the study. Recommendations are also made for future research into areas which the study was unable to look at due to time constraints.

5.1 Summary of findings

The study assessed public relations practice in Ghanaian football clubs by studying four Premier League clubs in Ghana namely; Kumasi Asante Kotoko FC, Obuasi Ashantigold FC, Accra Hearts of Oak FC and Wa All Stars FC. The study sought to establish the clubs’ understanding of PR and the nature of public relations being practiced by the clubs to know how it impacted on the clubs’ relationship with their publics. The study established that management of the clubs viewed PR as important in the management of the clubs, as well as a tool for maintaining relationship with their publics. The clubs, however, did not have a well-structured PR departments, and they also relied more on media relations. The study found that the PROs mainly played the communication facilitator role and sometimes the technician role. The study also established that the clubs used channels such as telephone calls, memos, meetings and emails for their internal communication and mass media (radio, television and newspaper), social media and, telephone meetings as channels for external communications. The study found that the clubs managed issues and their image mostly through the mass media in order to either attract
sponsors or establish and maintain good relationship with their sponsors. However, it was also established that non performance and lack of success on the pitch were hindrances to attracting sponsorship.

5.2 Limitations

A major limitation to the study was that only four out of the sixteen Ghanaian Premier League clubs were studied due to time constraints. Another limitation was that the study could not interview internal employees of the clubs studied, especially the players, to know their views on the effectiveness of internal communications channels in the clubs. The study could not also interview sponsors of the clubs to find out about their relationships with their clubs. Finally, the study could not interview supporters of the clubs to understand their relationships with their clubs were. Only leaders of the clubs’ supporters groups were interviewed.

5.3 Recommendations

The study recommends further expansion of this study to include interviewing internal staff, particularly players to know their views on the effectiveness of internal communication channels. Also, future studies should consider interviewing more of the clubs supporters apart from the leadership of the supporters groups as well as sponsors of the club.

The study established an appreciable level of public relations practices in Premier League clubs in Ghana. However, to improve on the public relations practice in Ghanaian football clubs, it is
recommended that Ghanaian football clubs should make it a matter of club policy, possibly at the board level, to establish public relations departments. These PR departments should be set up in line with the principles of PR such as making it an integral part of management and empowered to perform the various PR roles and functions. Although the PROs of the respective clubs studied were all members of management of the clubs, their roles and functions were limited because they were ‘one man PRO’ without a department with staff. Defining how public relations should be practiced in the clubs should not be left for whoever is the chief executive to decide because their understanding of PR had a direct impact on how the clubs practiced public relations. It is therefore, recommended that the clubs should hire outside PR counsels to help them set up their PR departments. This will help them bring together all the other roles and functions of PR in the clubs under one department.

Finally, the study recommends that Ghanaian clubs should adapt to technological advancement in communication by taking social media more seriously. Social media has become a powerful, effective and inexpensive channel of communication for organizations. Organizations like football clubs with dedicated and passionate supporters must take full advantage and expand their reach and support base through communication with social media channels.
5.4 Conclusion

The objective of the study was to assess the nature of public relations practices by four Ghanaian football clubs by establishing whether public relations practice in the clubs was a management function and to find out how these clubs communicated with their publics. The study also set out to assess the effectiveness of communication between the clubs and their various publics. The study established that the clubs viewed PR as an important element in the management of the clubs. However, their understanding of PR was limited because they did not handle it like a management function, resulting in PR officers of the clubs not performing all the required roles expected of any PR manager. As a result of the views on PR held by the clubs, the study found that the PROs mainly played the communication facilitator roles and sometimes the technician role. These also reflected on the functions they performed, which were mainly media and investor relations.

The study also established that the clubs used channels such as telephone calls, memos, meetings and emails for their internal communication and mass media (radio, television and newspaper), social media and, telephone meetings as channels for external communications. These channels had a positive impact on the clubs’ relationships with their publics, although there were instances where breakdown in communication affected relationships with supporters and the media in particular. Meetings came out as the best channel of communication in the clubs’ communication due to the instant feedback it provided. The clubs’ own media channels such as Kotoko Express and Hearts News came out as frequent and reliable channels for communication between the clubs and supporters because of their wide reach.
The study found that the clubs performed PR activities such as image management and relationship management to either attract sponsors or establish and maintain good relationship with their sponsors. However, it was established that these efforts were not enough to attract sponsors. Non performance and lack of success on the pitch were also found as hindrances to attracting sponsorship.

In view of all the findings, the study concludes that public relations practice in football clubs in Ghana is not bad but a lot needs to be done in terms of the organization of public relations in the clubs to be able to adjust to modern trends in sports communication. The clubs need to establish full PR departments with the head of the department empowered to play all the roles and functions of PR activities in the club.

5.5 Summary of Chapter

The chapter discussed the findings of the study in detail and in thematic areas according to the objectives of the study. The chapter also stated limitations to the study and also made recommendations for future research into areas which the study was unable to look at due to time constraints.
REFERENCES


Walters, G. & Chadwick, S. 2009. ‘Corporate citizenship in football: Delivering strategic Benefits through stakeholder engagement’. Management Decision, 47(1); 51–66


APENDIX I

Interview Questions to club CEOs/Chairmen

1. Why did you employ a PR person?

2. What does he do as a PR person?

3. What is your assessment of his performance?

4. Where is the PR person placed in the management structure of the club?

5. What are the various channels of communication available to the clubs?

6. What is the most used or favourite channel of communication and why it is considered so?

7. How are these channels used or what informs the use of a channel?

8. Which channel does your club use to communicate with specific publics such as players, sponsors, media, community and fans?

9. How do you communicate with the supporters to appease them when the team is not doing well?

10. How does the club measure the success of its communication with the various publics?

11. What can be done to improve on your communication channels?

Interview Questions to club PR persons

1. What functions do you play in the management of the club as the PR person?

2. How many staff members do you have in the PR department and what does each person do?

3. Do you attend management meetings?
4. If yes, how does your presence at management meetings affect your work as a PR officer. And if no, how does your absence at management meetings affect your work as a PR person?

5. What are the various channels of communication available to the clubs?

6. What is the most used or favourite channel of communication and why it is considered so?

7. How are these channels used or what informs the use of a channel?

8. Which channel does your club use to communicate with specific publics such as players, sponsors, media, community and fans?

9. How do you communicate with the supporters to appease them when the team is not doing well?

10. How does the club measure the success of its communication with the various publics?

11. What can be done to improve on your communication channels?

**Interview Questions to clubs’ supporters leadership**

1. How do you receive news about your club?

2. How often does the club communicate to you?

3. How do you send information to the club?

4. Are you satisfied with the manner the club communicates with you?

**Interview questions to media**

1. How do you get news about the club?

2. What is the most frequent channel of communication the club uses to send official news to your media organization?
3. How often does the club send official information about the club to you?

4. Is your media organization satisfied with its communication with the club?