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THE TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN GHANA

BY

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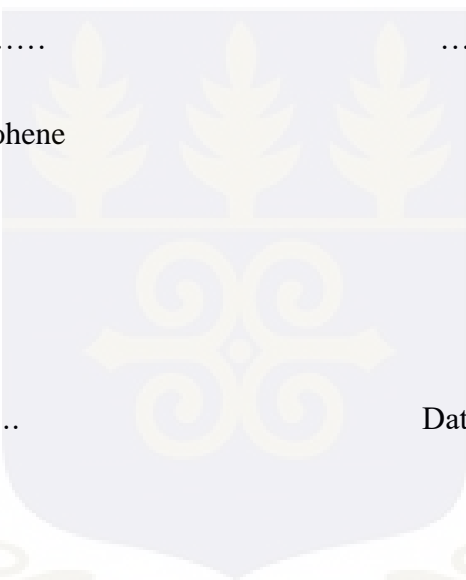

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that the work presented in this dissertation is a result of my own research and findings. All references to other people's work that were used have been duly acknowledged. This work was supervised by Dr. Margaret Ivy Amoakohene.

|                             |  |                         |
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|                             |  |                         |

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God who has been my help in ages past and my hope for years to come; my shelter from the stormy blast and my eternal home.



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**TABLE OF CONTENT**

DECLARATION.....i

DEDICATION.....ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....iv

ABSTRACT.....vii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....viii

**CHAPTER ONE.....1**

INTRODUCTION.....1

1.1 Background of the study..... 1

1.2 History and Evolution of Public Relations in Ghana.....2

1.3 PR and Economic Liberalization in Ghana ..... 5

1.4 PR and Media Liberalization in Ghana ..... 7

1.5 Public Relations Education in Ghana.....9

1.6 Problem Statement.....12

1.7 Objectives of the Study.....13

1.8 Research Questions.....13

1.9 Significance of the Study.....14

**CHAPTER TWO.....15**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED LITERATURE .....15

2.1 Introduction..... 15

2.2 Theoretical Framework..... 15

2.2.1 Key Tenets of the Four Models of Public Relations.....16

2.2.2 Press Agency. .... 16

2.2.3 Public Information..... 16

2.2.4 The two-way asymmetric model ..... 17

2.2.5 The two-way symmetric model..... 18

2.2.6 Critique of the Four Models of Public Relations Theory.....19

2.2.7 Relevance of the Four Models of Public Relations to the Study.....20

2.3 Related Studies.....20

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 2.3.1 Research conducted using the four models of PR.....                               | 21        |
| 2.3.2 Development of public relations in Ghana.....                                     | 23        |
| 2.3.3 Evolution and Development of Public Relations in Africa.....                      | 26        |
| 2.3.4 Development of public relations in countries outside Africa.....                  | 27        |
| 2.3.5 Public Relations Development from a Global Perspective.....                       | 32        |
| 2.3.6 New Media Technologies and Public Relations.....                                  | 33        |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE.....</b>   | <b>36</b> |
| METHODOLOGY.....  | 36        |
| 3.1 Introduction .....  | 36        |
| 3.2 Research Design.....  | 36        |
| 3.3 Research Population.....  | 37        |
| 3.4 Sampling.....   | 38        |
| 3.4.1 Sample Size .....   | 38        |
| 3.5 Data Collection .....   | 39        |
| 3.5.1 Data Collection Instruments.....  | 40        |
| 3.5.2 Instruments Administration.....   | 40        |
| 3.6 Data Analysis .....   | 41        |
| 3.7 Reliability and Validity of Data Collected.....                                     | 42        |
| 3.8 Ethical Considerations.....   | 43        |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>  | <b>44</b> |
| FINDINGS.....   | 44        |
| 4.1 Introduction .....  | 44        |
| 4.2.0 Media and Economic Liberalization’s Role in Transforming Public Relations.....    | 44        |
| 4.2.1 The role of the media in transforming public relations.....                       | 44        |
| 4.2.2 Media liberalization as a threat or an opportunity to PR in Ghana.....            | 46        |
| 4.2.3 Social Media and the relationship between PR practitioners and their publics..... | 47        |
| 4.2.4 The use of social media by various PR departments.....                            | 48        |
| 4.2.5 The challenges media liberalization has created for PR in Ghana.....              | 49        |
| 4.2.6 Public relations departments in private organisations.....                        | 50        |
| 4.2.7 Opportunities available to PR practitioners in an expanding private sector.....   | 51        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 4.2.8 The long term benefits of Ghana’s liberal economy to PR.....                       | 52        |
| 4.3.0 The Changes that have occurred in PR in Ghana.....                                 | 53        |
| 4.3.1 The Impact of expansion in public relations education on PR practice in Ghana..... | 55        |
| 4.3.2 The Relevance of Formal Education to the Development of PR in Ghana.....           | 56        |
| 4.3.3 Improving PR education in Ghana.....   | 57        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE.....</b>   | <b>60</b> |
| DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....   | 60        |
| 5.1 Introduction.....  | 60        |
| 5.2 Discussion of Findings.....  | 60        |
| 5.3 Media Liberalisation and PR transformation.....                                      | 60        |
| 5.4 Economic Liberalization and PR Transformation.....                                   | 62        |
| 5.5 Public Relations Education and PR Transformation.....                                | 63        |
| 5.6 The Changes which have occurred in PR.....   | 64        |
| 5.7 Recommendation and Suggestions for Future Research.....                              | 65        |
| 5.8 Limitations of the Study .....   | 67        |
| 5.9 Conclusion.....  | 68        |
| <b>REFERENCES.....</b>   | <b>70</b> |
| Appendix A- Question Guide for PR Practitioners.....                                     | 76        |
| Appendix B- Question Guide for PR Lecturers.....   | 78        |

**LIST OF TABLES**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1- List of FM stations in Ghana.....   | 8  |
| Table 2- Tertiary institutions in Ghana who teach Communication, Journalism and public relations as at September 2015..... | 11 |

## ABSTRACT

According to Sriramesh (2009) are of the view that public relations (PR) has transformed in several areas and is gaining ground as a profession. Grunig (1992) adds that PR has moved from simply focusing on disseminating information without feedback to relationship building between organisations and their publics.

This dissertation examined how media and economic liberalisation as well as public relations education have transformed public relations in Ghana. Public relations practitioners and public relations lecturers with a wealth of experience in the field were interviewed for the study.

The findings showed that media liberalisation has created avenues for public relations practitioners to disseminate information. Unfortunately, the numerous media options have also created a budgetary challenge for certain PR departments in organisations which were already cash-strapped. Other findings indicated that economic liberalisation had opened several doors for PR because it led to the expansion of the private sector which had created more jobs for practitioners. The private sector also understood PR better than those in the public sector so it allowed for a lot of PR functions to be explored without restrictions.

Other findings indicate that PR education had improved with the increasing number of schools which teach public relations courses but a lot more work needed to be done to ensure that only qualified lecturers were allowed to teach, preferably personnel who possessed ample experience from both PR practice and academia. The study recommended that it was important for public relations practitioners to practice good media relations in order to take advantage of the available media options. There was also the need for public relations lecturers to give students a practical feel of public relations so that they can fit into the available public relations jobs which Ghana's economic liberalisation is creating.

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CPRE: Commission on Public Relations Education

FM: Frequency Modulation

GIJ: Ghana Institute of Journalism

IPR: Institute of Public Relations

ISD: Information Services Department

NAB: National Accreditation Board

NCA: National Communications Authority

PR: Public Relations

PRAG: Public Relations Association of Ghana

PRIA: Public Relations Institute of Australia

PRSA: Public Relations Society of America



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The intellectual body of knowledge of public relations has grown significantly over the years both globally and in Ghana; the profession continues to evolve toward establishing itself as a strong discipline. Unfortunately, the growth and development has occurred more quickly in other parts of the world than it has in Ghana. Nevertheless, public relations, both as a practice and an academic discipline, has received a lot of attention in Ghana and seen significant growth. Typical public relations functions, such as issues management and media relations, are being identified and handled by public relations departments in organisations and practitioners are receiving the required training to excel both locally and internationally.

The profession is also gaining recognition as compared to the period where certain scholars (Cameron & Lariscy, 1998; Sallot & Lariscy, 1996; Ault & Wilcox, 1995; Wylie, 1994; Bivins, 1993; Hainsworth, 1993; Agee et al, 1990) argued that it was yet to be identified as a profession. The growth of public relations can be attributed to the “presence of institutional structures to define its practice and legitimize it” (Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p.1). Just as economic liberalization has transformed public relations in countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and China (Badran, Turk & Walters, 2003), it is important to identify whether it has transformed the practice in Ghana.

Ghana’s economic liberalisation has created the opportunity for several organisations in various industries to thrive. These organisations’ aim of building and maintaining a good image leads them to employ public relations officers to help establish a pleasant relationship

between the organisation and its publics. The proliferation of the Ghanaian media since the late 1990s has given public relations (PR) practitioners several options to use to reach their publics easily. The opportunity created for PR practitioners in organisations has also increased the number of tertiary institutions which teach public relations in Ghana. With the given background, the study sought to investigate the roles media liberalization, economic liberalization and public relations education have played in transforming the profession of public relations in Ghana.

## **1.2 History and Evolution of Public Relations in Ghana**

A brief history of public relations is appropriate in order to properly describe and understand the transformation of the practice. The historical account brings into sharp relief the fact that PR has long moved beyond being “a mere appendage of the corporate governance structure and has become, increasingly, the fulcrum around which organisational image building and public goodwill revolves” (Adjei, 2013, p. 5).

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the history of modern public relations and its evolution can be grouped into four stages; these stages eventually became the four models of PR, the theory which underpins this study. These are the eras of press agency and publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and the two-way symmetrical models. The early and mid-19th century was the era of press agency/publicity. This era of PR is marked by boastful claims and winning support irrespective of the means.

Techniques of press agency were predominant during the American Revolution and subsequent conflicts or situations when it became necessary to garner public support or

power (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman & Toth, 2004). During this period, PR was basically propaganda. Phineas Taylor Barnum (an American businessman, showman and entertainer) was associated with this era. The late 19th century was the journalistic/public information era. According to Lattimore et al. (2004), this was as a result of societal conditions such as the American industrial revolution and the growth of newspapers which was to serve a rising American middle-class market. Industrialization introduced changes such as government regulations, expanding suffrage, trade unions, corporate social responsibility (CSR), workers' rights and in the structure of society which required public relations expertise (Lattimore et al., 2004). It became necessary to pay attention to how one's story was told. PR was therefore meant to secure favourable media coverage by providing information that was generally true and accurate. The works of Ivy Ledbetter Lee (considered the father of modern public relations) symbolized this era of public information. The era of scientific persuasion was during the First World War and the period immediately after the war. (Lattimore et al., 2004).

According to Grunig (1992), this era marked the beginning of the scientific approach to PR which is the conducting of research. Although communication was two-way unlike press agency and public information, feedback from research was to help the organisation change the perception of the public while the organisation continued to behave the same way. Grunig and Hunt (1984) named this practice the two-way asymmetrical approach.

Edward L. Bernays, a pioneer American publicist, was one notable practitioner who employed the scientific persuasion in his work. The fourth and last era, the two-way symmetrical approach was derived from the writings of Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays and John Hill (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). This era was marked by the principle of truth-telling, understanding between client and publics facilitated through research and a mutually

beneficial relationship between the organisation and its publics (Grunig, 1992). Today, these approaches of PR which mark the various stages of development are all practised, at least in the European and North American literature (Sriramesh, 2009). It is necessary to identify whether the same is being practiced in Africa and Ghana to be specific.

The Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR) has played a key role in ensuring that the public relations profession in Ghana is respected and held in high esteem. The profession has moved from the pre-independent era where public relations duties were carried out largely by expatriate information officers (Gyan, 1991) to an era where Ghanaians have acquired adequate knowledge and skills to run public relations departments in both Ghanaian and multi-national organisations.

Public relations in Ghana has evolved from being an expatriate duty which was handed over to the local information officers after independence to a full-fledged department in many organisations. After Ghana's independence in 1957, the Information Services Department (ISD) was in charge of providing information, press and public relations services for all government ministries and departments (Gyan, 1991). The Information Services Department (ISD) which was formerly known as the Ghana Information Service, recruited and trained personnel to perform the role of information officers at the various ministries. Most of these local hires were journalists by profession and therefore had no PR training although they performed PR functions, (Gyan, 1991). At that time, PR was practiced mainly at the ministries and the large multinational companies who had well established PR departments. Practitioners started receiving training when the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) was put up to train PR practitioners and journalists. GIJ became the first school in Ghana to train PR practitioners (Gyan, 1991).

The Public Relations Association of Ghana (PRAG) was formed in 1971 by Hermann Alah and a small group of other practicing journalists-turned public relations practitioners, (Atawura, 2010). Gyan (1991) stated that the association was formed to better improve the profession because it was not recognized by many organisations at that time. Most of the organisations who regarded PR had also subsumed it under other departments.

The Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR) is the sole professional body for Public Relations practitioners in Ghana. As part of its roles, IPR exists to provide a professional structure for the practice of Public Relations and to enhance the ability and status of its members as professional practitioners. The Institute was established in 1972 as the Public Relations Association of Ghana (PRAG). A new Constitution, Code of Ethics, Code of Professional Standards and Bye-Laws transformed PRAG into the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR) in 1991.

### **1.3 PR and Economic Liberalization in Ghana**

According to Sriramesh (2009), public relations has transformed in developing countries - where the majority of the world's population currently resides- because these countries have priorities such as nation building and therefore use public relations as a tool for this purpose. The economic system and level of development of a country also provide different opportunities and challenges to a public relations practitioner. The level of development of a country also provides the infrastructure and environment for practicing public relations. Better developed economic systems make it easier for example, for public opinion polls to be conducted. Understanding publics in developing economies poses much different challenges and requires different sets of public relations strategies and practices. Organisations do not

operate in a vacuum in any society because they are dependent on external influences in the society in varying degrees. The simple truth however is that, “developed (market) economies tend to favor strategic public relations more than developing (managed) ones.” (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003. p.6)

According to Thompson (2015), the economic liberalization in Ghana which was born as a result of democratic rule, allowed for the establishment of several organisations which needed public relations to “project themselves, their image and reputation while establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with their publics” (p. 78). Ghana’s general economic liberalisation has largely been fueled by trade liberalisation which is often considered to be conducive for economic growth (Allotey, 2010). Asiedu (2010) adds that In addition to the comparative advantage argument of the classical economists, trade liberalisation enhances competition, promotes bigger market, transfer of know-how and hence efficiency in production ;economic liberalisation therefore increases competition to improve efficiency in domestic industries so as to enhance economic growth.

According to Sriramesh and Vercic (2003, p. 6), “the more developed an economy is, the greater the number of organizational players and the higher the level of competition among organizations.” This assertion explains why highly competitive organisations such as those in the telecommunications industry, the mining and oil sector as well as the multi- national companies have always had a clear understanding of public relations and the benefits it provides for their organisations. Private institutions as well as the local manufacturing industries have also come to realise the importance of PR functions including media relations, crisis management, issues management and corporate social responsibility. Economic

liberalization in Ghana has also fueled the public relations consultancy industry. According to ghanayello.com (an online business directory portal), there are 57 PR consultancies in Ghana. These consultancies perform specific PR functions for organisations which may either be too small to set up an in-house PR department or require the agency to perform a specific function which the in-house PR department may need assistance with.

#### **1.4 PR and Media Liberalisation in Ghana**

The interplay between media (mass, interpersonal, and now ICTs and social media) and public relations is so indispensable that in many parts of the world public relations tends to be equated with media relations. (Sriramesh, 2006., p. 7)

There is near unanimity among authors of public relations literature (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2002) that the media and public relations have an interdependent relationship. Most public relations practitioners would agree that media relations accounts for a significant portion of their public relations efforts because they use the media for publicity purposes and as a channel to reach their publics among others (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003).

The 2014 freedom of the press data released by Freedom House (an organisation which has been at the forefront of monitoring threats to media independence since 1980) indicates that only 14 percent of the world's population enjoy a free press (Karlekar & Dunham, 2014). The Freedom House annual index contains the most comprehensive data set available on global media freedom. Ghana was ranked 52<sup>nd</sup> in the category of countries with a free press and this position is also favourable for other sectors including public relations to thrive.

The media landscape in Ghana has expanded significantly since the introduction of private media houses. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation which is the only stated-owned broadcasting house in Ghana enjoyed a monopoly in both television and radio from the time it was established in 1954 till the early 1990s. Notwithstanding the initial setbacks with Radio Eye, the first private attempt at radio which was on air for about two months, the establishment of Joy FM in 1995 broke state monopoly of the electronic media (Koomson, 1995). Similarly, the maiden telecast of TV3 programmes on October 1, 1997 broke Ghana Television's (GTV) 32-year old monopoly (Ansu-Kyeremeh & Karikari, 1998). After 1996, several other private radio and television stations have been established. There are currently about 390 radio stations in Ghana (see table 1.)

Table 1: List of FM stations in Ghana

| REGION        | Total Authorised | Public    | Community | Campus    | Commercial | Total No. In Operation | Total No. not in Operation |
|---------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Greater Accra | <b>47</b>        | 5         | 4         | 3         | 35         | 46                     | 1                          |
| Ashanti       | <b>51</b>        | 3         | 4         | 2         | 42         | 43                     | 8                          |
| Brong-Ahafo   | <b>52</b>        | 3         | 5         | 2         | 42         | 45                     | 7                          |
| Western       | <b>67</b>        | 6         | 5         | 2         | 54         | 49                     | 18                         |
| Central       | <b>29</b>        | 2         | 7         | 3         | 17         | 22                     | 7                          |
| Eastern       | <b>34</b>        | 2         | 6         | 1         | 25         | 28                     | 6                          |
| Volta         | <b>42</b>        | 4         | 10        | 1         | 27         | 29                     | 13                         |
| Northern      | <b>38</b>        | 7         | 12        | 1         | 18         | 24                     | 14                         |
| Upper East    | <b>14</b>        | 2         | 3         | 1         | 8          | 12                     | 2                          |
| Upper West    | <b>16</b>        | 3         | 7         | 1         | 5          | 11                     | 5                          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>390</b>       | <b>37</b> | <b>63</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>273</b> | <b>309</b>             | <b>81</b>                  |

Source: National Communications Authority (NCA), 2015

The print media has also experienced changes in ownership since the first newspaper -*Royal Gold Coast Gazette and Commercial Intelligencer*- was introduced by Sir Charles McCarthy in 1822 (Ansu-Kyeremeh & Karikari, 1998). Newspapers have been produced by both the government and the private sector for over two centuries in Ghana some of which include the *Ashanti Pioneer*, the *Statesman*, the *Daily Post*, the *Finder* and the *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Graphic* and The *Ghanaian Times* have been the two main state-owned newspapers for over five decades. It is however notable to state that several private print media such as the *Daily Guide*, The *New Crusading Guide* and The *Insight* have joined the list of newspapers circulating on Ghanaian newsstands.

### **1.5 Public Relations Education in Ghana**

According to Moss, Vercic and Warnaby (2002. p.18), one of the prerequisites of any profession that expects to be taken seriously is the existence of a recognised body of knowledge, and professional standards that bind its members and governs their conduct. In order to give a better account of public relations in Ghana, it is prudent to commence with the origin of formal public relations education.

Public relations education first started in the United States of America (USA) where the first commission on public relations education was established by the official sanction of the public relations division of the Association of Education in Journalism (which was later renamed to the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication [AEJMC]) in August 1973. The commission was co-chaired by seven members including Professor

Scott Cutlip, Dr. James Grunig and Professor Alan Scott<sup>1</sup> (Grunig, 1992). The commission came up with a report entitled, “A Design for Public Relations Education” (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1975). The commission recommended a curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate levels of study which have been used in the USA and other parts of the world.

The first institution to teach public relations in Ghana was the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) which was established in 1959. Before formal public relations education was introduced in Ghana, “many of the beginners learnt on the job and took correspondence courses with international schools like the British Institute of Public Relations” (Gyan,1991, p.31). GIJ introduced public relations to its curriculum in 1961 to train journalists and PR practitioners. The school ran diploma courses for four decades and introduced the bachelor’s degree programme in September 2001. The Department of Communication Studies (formerly known as the School of Communication Studies) was established as the Institute of Journalism and Mass Communication in 1972 and became the School of Communication Studies in 1985. Until 2007, the Department of Communication Studies was the only institution which taught public relations at the post-graduate level.

Currently, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) -the only body in Ghana with the responsibility of accrediting tertiary institutions to teach various courses- has accredited 13 schools in Ghana to teach public relations at the under graduate level and three institutions to teach public relations at the post- graduate level.

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<sup>1</sup> The other members are Carroll Bateman, Milton Fairman, Dr. Otto Lerbinger and Betsy Ann Plank

The table below shows the list of tertiary institutions in Ghana which teach communication, journalism and public relations as at September, 2015.

Table 2- Tertiary institutions in Ghana who teach Communication, Journalism and public relations as at September 2015.

| Institution                                  | Programme                                | Date of Commencement            |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Ghana Institute of Journalism                | Diploma in Public Relations              | September 1961                  |
|  | B.A. Communication Studies               | September, 2001                 |
|  | M.A Journalism                           | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2013 |
|  | M.A. Public Relations                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2013 |
|  | M.A. Media Management                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2013 |
|  | M.A. Development Communication           | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2013 |
| School of Communication Studies              | M.A./ MPhil Communication Studies        | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 1998 |
| Christian Service University College         | B.A. Communication                       | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2011 |
| Advanced Business College                    | Diploma in Journalism                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2008 |
| Jayee University College                     | Diploma in Journalism                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2008 |
|  | B.A. Journalism                          | 1 <sup>st</sup> January, 2009   |
| African University College of Communications | Diploma in Communication Studies         | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2004 |
|  | B.A. Communications                      | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2013 |
| University of Professional Studies, Accra    | Diploma in Public Relations              | September, 2009                 |
|  | Degree in Public Relations               | 1 <sup>st</sup> April, 2015     |
| Central University College                   | B.A. Communication Studies               | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2014 |
| Islamic University College                   | B.A. Communication Studies               | 1 <sup>st</sup> January, 2011   |
| Pentecost University College                 | B.A. Communication Studies               | 1 <sup>st</sup> July, 2011      |
| Wisconsin International University College   | B.A. Communication Studies               | 1 <sup>st</sup> September, 2014 |
| University of Education                      | MA/MPhil Communication and Media Studies | September 2007                  |
| University of Cape Coast                     | B.A. Communication Studies               | September 2011                  |

Source: Amoakohene (2015)

## 1.6 Problem Statement

In 1992, James E. Grunig conducted a study known as the 'Excellent Project' which later produced the excellence theory (Grunig, 1992). Based on the Excellence Project, Vercic, Grunig and Grunig (1996) came out with certain generic principles that, they argued, could be used to set up global public relations practices. The authors also proposed that five environmental variables can be used by public relations practitioners to design public relations strategies specific to a given country.

The five variables are: political ideology, economic system (including the level of development of the country's economy), the degree of activism (the extent of pressure organizations face from activists), culture and media system (the nature of the media environment in a country). Public relations practitioners in countries such as Brazil, China, South Africa and Russia have conducted studies which link PR to these variables. This study sought to tackle two of the five environmental variables i.e. economic system and media system to identify the roles they have played in transforming public relations in Ghana.

The economic and media system will be tackled because Ghana has seen an improvement in these areas since attaining a stable democracy and this has an impact on PR (Thompson, 2015). It is necessary to find out how the growth of these sectors has affected public relations so as to understand and possibly predict the future of public relations in Ghana based on the economic and media environment.

A third area was selected for this study based on Gyan's (1991) recommendation concerning the education and training of practitioners to adequately equip them with the necessary skills to practice public relations. Twenty four years down the line, there was the need to find out whether public relations education had improved and whether or not formal education in PR had an effect on the profession in anyway. This research sought to fill the gap which has been created by the limited literature in Ghana which links public relations to media liberalization, economic liberalization and training of public relations practitioners.

The purpose of this study is to find out the roles media liberalisation, economic liberalisation and public relations education have played to transform public relations in Ghana.

### **1.7 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are;

1. To examine how media liberalization has transformed public relations in Ghana.
2. To explore the association between the increasing number of institutions offering public relations and the development of the practice in Ghana.
3. To investigate the role economic liberalization has played in transforming public relations in Ghana.

### **1.8 Research Questions**

RQ1: To what extent has media liberalization transformed public relations in Ghana?

RQ2: To what extent has public relations education changed public relations in Ghana?

RQ3: What are the changes that economic liberalization has brought to public relations in Ghana?

### **1.9 Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the economic and media systems in transforming public relations in Ghana. The study also investigated the role public relations education played in transforming the profession. Another significance of this study was to add a Ghanaian perspective to the global theory of public relations.

This study will also serve as literature for future research in the field of public relations and add to the body of knowledge of public relations in Ghana. The findings of the study also give specific information about how PR education, media and economic liberalisation support the profession.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinnings for the study. The study was guided by the models of public relations proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984). The second part of this chapter also provides a review of the available literature related to the various factors leading to the transformation of public relations.

#### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the four models of public relations proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984). The models were based on communication, research, and ethics. Since that time Grunig and a team of scholars have proposed new models that have enriched the understanding of how public relations is practiced. The four models of public relations also described organizational communication activities. These models are: press agency, public information, two way asymmetrical, and two way symmetrical. Research conducted in countries such as the United States, India, Taiwan, and Greece (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Y. Huang, & Lyra, 1995) have indicated that Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models describe the practice of public relations internationally. These findings lead to a conclusion that the four models could be also practiced by public relations practitioners in Ghana. Grunig and Hunt (1984) characterized these models as abstractions and simplifications that help to describe the reality and give insights into "the history and progress of formal public relations" (p.21).

### **2.2.1 Key Tenets of the Four Models of Public Relation**

The first four models of public relations were developed in an effort to describe the different ways public relations is practiced. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the models described typical ways in which public relations uses two dimensional combinations of directions of communication, which are the one-way and two-way modes. They also described the models by using purposes of communication which are asymmetrical and symmetrical.

### **2.2.2 Press agency**

The first model of public relations which is press agency was developed in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it was explained by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as “public relations-like activities”. According to Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002), this model uses persuasion and manipulation to influence an audience to behave as the organization desires. The goal of practitioners of press agency is publicity and propaganda. They also proposed that those practitioners “seek attention for their organization in almost any way possible” (p.308).

Practitioners of this model use a one-way, source-to-receiver communication model. Grunig and Hunt (1984) postulated that the Press Agency model is characterised as one-way communication, primarily through the mass media, to distribute information that may be exaggerated, distorted, or even incomplete to propagate a cause, product, or service.

### **2.2.3 Public Information**

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the public information model which is the second model was developed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to the attacks of journalists on corporations and government agencies. This model uses press releases and other one-way

communication techniques to distribute organizational information. Journalists were employed by organizations and corporations to inform the public about the organizational actions and activities and the circulated information is perceived as accurate and is generally favorable to the organization (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). McDonald (1998) identified that organizations that practice press agency and public information models need technicians to implement outward communication from the organization to target publics.

Communication staff are not involved in strategic planning and problem solving under the press agency model. The model is used as a way to disseminate information relying on very little research and no feedback from the public. The public information is also a one-way model. The process is one way; the practitioner is a skilled communicator who is not involved with monitoring the environment but simply provides external communication for decisions made and action taken by others. The public information model is a truth-oriented approach to public relations. The practitioners strive to provide accurate information to the public and do not disclose unfavorable information voluntarily.

#### **2.2.4 The Two-way asymmetrical model**

The two-way asymmetrical model is the third model of public relations. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), it was founded on behavioural and social sciences during World War I. This model uses research to determine what communication channels and messages are most likely to produce support of an organization's publics without changing the organization. Grunig and Hunt (1984) noted that practitioners of the two-way asymmetrical model use research to learn about attitudes and behaviours of publics in order to manipulate them in a manner that suits the organization. In the two-way asymmetrical model, communication is

balanced in that it adjusts the relationship between the organization and its publics through negotiation and compromise. The practitioner of this model uses planned communication to manage conflict and to improve understanding with publics. The practitioner uses research to facilitate understanding and communication rather than to identify messages most likely to motivate or persuade publics (Rhee, 2004)

### **2.2.5 The Two-way symmetrical model**

The fourth model identified by Grunig and Hunt (1984) is the two-way symmetrical model. Grunig and Grunig (1992) proposed that the two-way symmetrical model is used by organizations that practice excellent public relations. They described this model as the most ethical model which enhances organizational effectiveness. Formative research is used to facilitate understanding and dialogue between the organization and its publics.

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), this model of communication is grounded on a free exchange of information that is used to alter attitudes in both the organization and its publics. The two-way symmetrical model uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its publics. In the two-way symmetrical model, “understanding is the principal objective of public relations” rather than one-sided persuasion (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, p. 289). The two-way symmetrical model is also characterized by unstable, one-sided communication. Practitioners of this model use social science theory and research on attitudes and behaviours to persuade publics to accept the organization's point of view or to behave as the organization wants (Rhee, 2004). Petersone (2004) observed that this model “is the most ethical model and enhances organizational effectiveness” (p.18).

### 2.2.6 Critique of the Four Models of Public Relations Theory

Scholars such as Murphy (1991) and Van der Meiden (1993) have argued that the symmetrical model of public relations is a normative model which cannot be attained practically. Grunig et al. (2002) contended by providing evidence from Grunig and Grunig's (1989) extensive review of studies that explored the practice of the four models. These studies demonstrated that the four models are genuinely practised. Grunig and Grunig (1989) concluded that these studies confirm the four models and describe how public relations is actually practiced in different organizations.

Leichty and Springston (1993) and Van der Meiden (1993) later argued that the practice of the two-way symmetrical model would involve the setting aside of the organisation's "self-interest" to accommodate the interests of the organisation's publics (Van der Meiden, 1993). These authors added that the two-way symmetrical model is unrealistic. Grunig et al. (2002) reacted to this argument by clarifying that "the concept of symmetry implies a balance of the organization's and the public's interests. Total accommodation of the public's interests would be as asymmetrical as unbridled advocacy of the organization's interests" (p. 314).

Another criticism came from Karlberg (1996) who believed that most of the current public relations research and models identified PR on behalf of powerful business and government organizations. He admitted that the two-way symmetrical model "contains valuable insights and prescriptions and is undoubtedly an ethical and responsible step forward" (p. 272), but further suggested that "the resource-poor segments of the population" do not have the communication expertise and means to reach "communicative symmetry" (p. 273). Karlberg pointed out three barriers that prevented less powerful groups from practicing

"communicative symmetry." First, many citizens do not know how media organizations work and how they can be accessed. Second, even if the citizens knew how media organization operated and how these media organizations could be accessed, the citizens still would not be able to make use of this access because they lacked resources to contact the media. Third, citizens, who do not have skills and resources to communicate symmetrically, are afraid that they will be ignored by media organizations if they do not engage in behaviours that are "extreme and confrontational" (p. 274).

### **2.2.7 Relevance of the four models of Public Relations to the Study**

Public relations in Ghana started from a stage that can be described "as reflecting Grunig and Hunt's (1984) press agency and publicity" because practitioners used the media to "project themselves or their organisations by publicising what the organisation was doing" (Thompson, 2015, p.73). Public relations in Ghana gradually progressed to the public information stage because practitioners started using communication techniques such as newsletters and notices to disseminate information. Thompson (2015) identified that PR in Ghana is moving towards the two way symmetric model which has become "the standard for effective public relations and reflects a professionalization of the field in Ghana" (p.80).

### **2.3 Related Studies**

There is a substantial amount of literature relating public relations to the media, the economic system as well as public relations education worldwide. In order to provide a broader understanding into the study, related studies were reviewed. These studies were also used to analyze the findings at the end of the study. This study is aimed at exploring the extent to which economic and media liberalization as well as public relations education have combined

to transform PR, both as a profession and an academic discipline in Ghana. In line with this objective, the literature review has been organized based on how this phenomenon has been studied in other countries by different scholars. The rationale is to enable the researcher give a global outlook on how the three factors of media pluralism, economic liberalization and upsurge in educational institutions offering PR, have shaped public relations.

To this end, the literature review has been organized in a manner as to give related studies which have been conducted using the four models of public relations. The literature review also shows how this study has been conducted in Ghana previously. Also, the study went beyond Ghana to see how PR evolved in other African countries, while a significant portion of this section was dedicated to studies that have been conducted in other parts of the world, apart from Africa. The final portion of the literature focused on how emerging new media technologies have influenced PR practice and the prospects of the profession.

### **2.3.1 Research conducted using the four models of public relation**

Several studies have been conducted using the four models of public relations. One of such studies which is closely related to this research is one which was conducted in Russia.

Ragozina (2007) conducted a study on the status of public relations in Russia. The purpose was first to determine how the political, economic and media liberalisation in Russia had transformed the profession. The study's other focus was to determine whether public relations practitioners in Russia practise Grunig and Hunt's (1984) press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical models of public relations. Interviews were conducted with ten Russian public relations practitioners to seek their opinion. The study revealed that the political, economic and media liberalisation had

transformed public relations from a field which solely dealt with propaganda especially during the transition from a soviet state to one which used research and established a mutual relationship with its publics. All the four models of public relations were also practised at different stages of the transformation of the profession in Russia.

Huang (1990) conducted a study in Taiwan and discovered that all four models of public relations were practiced, but the use of a model changed after the country's political regime changed. A case study was conducted involving a government owned corporation that tried to get approvals from the government to construct a nuclear power plant. The study explored the corporation's public relations activities across a longer time period. The periods were within the time when Taiwan was under an authoritarian regime, the period when the political regime liberalized and the first activists emerged and when martial law was lifted in Taiwan. The findings showed that during the authoritarian regime, the press agency model was used to disseminate biased information that was favourable to the corporation. During the second time period, with a less authoritarian regime and the first traces of activism, the corporation tried to educate the publics by using the public information model. Finally, when martial law was lifted, the corporation used the two-way asymmetrical model by trying to convince its publics to support the construction of the nuclear plant. Huang (1990) also observed that the corporation tried to use the two-way symmetrical model, but the practice of this model was not possible because the activists did not trust the corporation. The findings of the case study led Huang (1990) to conclude that participative political regimes increased the ability of public relations practitioners to implement the two-way models.

Rhee (2002), who studied public relations and the effects of culture on public relations in South Korea, discovered a similar relationship between political regimes and public relations. In the 1970s, under an authoritarian government, South Korean organizations practiced the press agency model to avoid being criticized and having negative coverage of their organizations. When the political regime democratized and the first activist and social interest groups emerged, Korean organizations started practicing advanced forms of public relations.

### **2.3.2 Development of Public Relations in Ghana**

One study which has proven to be a necessity for understanding the origin and emergence of PR in Ghana in the early 1990s was conducted by Gyan (1991). This study is crucial because it was conducted at the twilight of Ghana's return to democracy after more than a decade of military rule under the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC). The regime was noted for its flagrant abuse of media freedom and freedom of expression, a situation which inhibited the growth of PR in Ghana, since it thrives on media liberalization to function effectively.

It is in respect of the above circumstances that Gyan's (1991) study is hailed as having laid the foundation for empirically understanding how the forces of economy, media and education combined to shape the public relations practice in Ghana. To address these objectives, Gyan (1991) conducted a study on a profile of public relations practice in Ghana. sixty self-administered, in-depth and largely unstructured questionnaires were sent to thirty purposively-sampled organisations in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The findings of the study suggested that PR had a low place in many organizations and was accorded very little respect and recognition. The study recommended a greater need for education and training of

practitioners to adequately equip them with the necessary skills to face the modern challenges of the practice. Another recommendation was for qualified practitioners to enter the classroom to share their knowledge and experiences so that students could have a better understanding of what happened on the field.

In what seems to be a fulfillment of Gyan's (1991) recommendations, Amoakohene (2015) found out that since the study by Gyan (1991), the number of educational institutions rose from two in 1990 to 13 in 2012. The study by Amoakohene (2015) analysed the changes and development which have occurred in public relations education since Gyan's (1991) study of public relations practice in Ghana. The study was conducted through a rigorous analysis of data from the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), Ghana and the National Accreditation Board (NAB). Amoakohene (2015) identified that the increase in the number of communication training institutions from two as of 1990 to 13 in 2012 was commendable. The findings further suggested that although the number of institutions that taught public relations in Ghana had increased, the fact that the majority of those institutions awarded bachelor's degrees and diplomas made it difficult for practitioners to take up managerial roles.

Just like Amoakohene (2015), Kotia's (2010) study also focused on the contribution of education to the development of public relations in Ghana. To meet the aims of the study, a content analysis of the public relations curricula used by four accredited institutions in Ghana was conducted. Kotia (2010) further relied on the 2006 recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) as a benchmark for the analysis of the data. The findings indicated that although seven institutions had been accredited by NAB as of 2009, only four were actually teaching public relations. Further findings showed that teaching and learning of Information Communication Technology (ICT) was very basic to the profession

but received very little curriculum attention. It was also identified that institutions which started teaching public relations since their establishment, relative to institutions that grafted public relations onto already existing programmes showed a relatively higher level of adherence to CPRE recommendations.

Gleaning from these studies (Amoakohene, 2015; Kotia, 2010), eleven educational institutions started offering PR as a new academic programme between 1990 and 2012, with six of such institutions receiving their accreditation between 2009 and 2012. These studies provide the framework for understanding how expansion in the PR education has transformed the profession. They also help in understanding the increasing demand for experts and professionals with public relations background. It is important to state that the transformation in PR education began taking shape since 1992, when Ghana returned to constitutional rule. However both studies did not establish whether the new wave of democracy accounts for this or not. On account of this, Thompson (2015) sought to place the development of PR in Ghana's political context.

Thompson (2015) wrote a paper on the evolution of public relations in Ghana's emerging democracy. The paper outlined the stages through which public relations has evolved in Ghana. The stages are public relations in pre-independent Ghana as well as during the independence struggle; the second stage is the period between independence and the 4th Republic. And the last stage is public relations in the stable democracy of Ghana's 4th Republic.

The study found that the traditional chieftaincy institutions in pre-colonial Ghana practiced some kind of public relations prior to colonization. Between the independence era and the Fourth Republic, public relations was handled by the Information Services Department (ISD). Thompson (2015) further identified that during the colonial period, the press agency model was most dominant. Between the first and third republics, along with the military governments, public relations in Ghana was used as a government tool which mainly reflected the public information model and a bit of the press agency model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

### **2.3.3 Evolution and Development of Public Relations in Africa**

Odedele (2012) opines that the history of public relations practice in Africa can be classified into ancient and modern practices. The ancient practice encapsulates the pre-colonial practice of PR and mainly focused on “how to record and communicate information about religion and government” (Odedele, 2012, p.14). This involved the use of written scripts, such as hieroglyphic and papyrus scrolls, to record and transmit information. Odedele (2012) argues that some of the communication tools and media that were in use are gong, talking drum, moon-light storytelling, folk tales telling, village square gathering, sporting activities. The modern practice comprised the colonial and post-colonial practice of the profession, which was heavily characterized by the four public relations models of press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical.

Otubanjo and Umajo (2010) conducted a study which traced the history and development of modern public relations practices in Nigeria over a hundred and fifty (150) year period, 1859 to 2009. This objective was achieved via a conceptual review of existing academic and

professional literature concerning Nigerian media history, public relations management, business studies and mass communication studies. This study dismissed the widely-held idea that modern public relations practices began in Nigeria with the creation of a public information unit by the United African Company (then a British multinational) in 1949. The study presented evidence indicating that modern public relations practices actually began with the establishment of the first newspaper in 1859 by the late Henry Townsend (a British missionary). Findings from the study also indicated that the transformation of public relations has gone through four major eras. These include public relations broadcasting era, political propaganda era, public information era and the professionalization era.

#### **2.3.4 Development of Public Relations in Countries outside Africa**

The review of literature on the evolution of PR outside the African continent will start from Europe, specifically in Spain where Grau (1994) provided a detailed chronology of the most important historical developments that aided the advancement of PR into its current modern standards. The findings indicated that new political, economic, social and media realities in Spanish and European societies in general have shaped the course of the public relations profession. For example, the study findings suggest that given the dynamic media environment and growing consumerism in Spain, media relations and corporate identity have assumed greater importance to PR practitioners. These findings are consistent with Tilson and Perez's (2002) study.

Eight years after Grau's (1994) study, Tilson and Perez (2002) conducted a study on how economic development and the media growth have combined to shape public relations practice in Spain. The researchers sought to understand how the nation's political, economic

and media landscape have influenced the public relations profession in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study employed in-depth interview and textual analysis as the research methods. Semi-structured interview guides were used to obtain data on economic, political, industry, higher education and historical developments of PR from corporate, media practitioners and public relations educators. The textual analysis provided additional insights on key messages, strategies and tactics employed by PR practitioners in Spain.

Tilson and Perez (2002) found out that political, economic and media developments in Spain had provided the fertile ground for PR to flourish. In more specific terms, the findings revealed that PR practice in Spain, especially in the private sector, received a major boost in 1978 when the country transitioned from dictatorship to democracy. The findings indicated that the effective functioning of democratic institutions made Spain one of the ideal European countries for foreign investment in the late 1980s. It also enabled free flow of information, which is a prerequisite for the growth of PR. Tilson and Perez (2002) also found out that the growth in media institutions was also propelled by burgeoning democracy. Commenting on how the growth in the media affected PR growth in Spain, Tilson and Perez (2002) asserted that “with the liberalization of political institutions and the economy, other measures were taken to increase personal freedoms, including that of the press, all of which contributed to the growth and development of the public relations profession” (p.128).

The findings from the two studies (Tilson and Perez, 2002; Grau, 1994) do not differ. The similarity in the findings seem to suggest that there is a positive correlation between media, economic, and political liberalization and the growth of public relations. These two studies from Spain also corroborate the findings from the studies conducted in Ghana (Amoakohene,

2015; Thompson, 2015; Gyan 1991). This current study will throw more light on the subject matter, particularly from the Ghanaian perspective.

Beyond the European context, quite a number of scholarly materials have been published on the development of PR in the Australian and the Antarctic region. Singh (2000) conducted a survey of the historical development and current status of public relations in Australia. The study also offered insight into the growth, maturation and professionalization of public relations in the 21st century.

The findings showed that public relations was progressing into a serious academic area of study and a profession. Singh (2000) attributed this development to the rapid and increasing opportunities which the profession offered both nationally and internationally, as a result of globalization and internationalization. The survey findings revealed that investment and advancement in new media technologies, coupled with stabled economic conditions meant that the PR profession would become a major player in the next century. Furthermore, Singh (2000) noted that educational institutions were continuously reassessing and updating their curricula to meet these challenges arising out of the sudden interest in pursuing higher education in PR. This assertion was later corroborated 14 years later by Fitch (2014).

Fitch (2014) investigated the perceptions of Australian public relations education during a period of significant growth. The study analysed in-depth interviews with 14 practitioners and educators in conjunction with Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) archives. Four themes emerged from the analysis: education, professionalization and gender; theory and practice; developing academic legitimacy and practitioner perspectives in the curriculum. Participants understood education within a professional narrative, that is, as offering a way of

establishing Australian public relations as a distinct field of expertise and confirming its professional status. The findings show that from the practitioner perspective, education could usefully reposition public relations as a business discipline, address industry training needs, improve standards of practice and counter the threat of its feminization.

Similar studies have been conducted in some Asian countries. Chen and Culbertson (2003) conducted a study on public relations education in China. The paper discovered that PR education in China had experienced several ups and downs since the 1990s. However, there had been a more recent growth which had diversified public relations education in China. The course was offered as a four-year degree programme as well as in two-year technical colleges. Public relations is also taught through television distance learning which largely focused on the older, non-traditional students in China (Chen & Culbertson, 1996).

The study revealed that the PR professors had succeeded in striking a realistic balance between theory and practice. The study suggested that PR education in China combined Western perspectives with classic Chinese philosophies and the ideologies of Confucius. One striking finding was that public relations lecturers relied heavily on guest lectures and also worked to arrange internships in order to give students a hands-on experience concerning the profession. According to Chen and Culbertson (2003), the internship was very crucial because although the professors were academically brilliant, some of them lacked the necessary practical experience to teach certain aspects of the course appropriately.

In Japan, Watson and Sallot (2001) sought to assess how the economic recession in the country affected public relations. The study also aimed to find out how present management

styles had impacted public relations practice in Japan. A survey was conducted involving 151 corporate public relations professionals in Japan.

Findings from the study suggested that current public relations practices in Japan aligned more closely with the mixed models of public relations practiced in Western societies. The transformation of public relations in Japan from its hybrid function with advertising to a mixed model comparable to practice in the United States may be attributed to the high regard of management in Japan for public relations.

Sallot, Cameron and Lariscy (1998) surveyed 251 accredited members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) to find out their educational background and whether or not they had any education in public relations. The findings revealed that 62% of the accredited members had bachelor's degrees and 32% possessed post-graduate degrees. Interestingly, only 6% of those surveyed said they had a degree in public relations.

The findings also stated that neither accreditation nor licensing was mandatory for practitioners to engage in public relations activities in America. The challenge however was that when those practicing public relations did not have similar educational backgrounds, confusion resulted about the exact duties of the practitioner, among other things. If most, or all, practitioners had an education in public relations, and that education had a standardized format, there would be consensus among them about what services the profession should provide. Thus, the criterion of providing a unique public service would be met when some consensus was achieved about the services practitioners should provide.

### **2.3.5 Public Relations Development from the Global Perspective**

Sriramesh (2009) conducted a study on the various environmental variables which have aided the development of public relations globally. The aim of the study was to establish the factors that account for the global growth of PR, both as a profession and an academic discipline, as well as its prospect. The author was of the opinion that the growth of PR is highly linked with globalisation, which is “credited for moving the public relations body of knowledge toward greater cultural relativism in order to make it more relevant to practitioners who are faced with the challenge of communicating effectively with the diverse publics of the emerging markets of Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa” (Sriramesh, 2009, p.1).

Drawing on the works of notable PR scholars (Bentele and Wehmeyer 2009; Al-Badr, 2004; Grunig and Hunt, 1984), Sriramesh (2009) argued that contrary to popular assertion that PR is a 20<sup>th</sup> century activity, the profession can be traced to as far back as the pre-biblical era, where certain activities with semblance to modern day PR were performed. However, Sriramesh (2009) conceded that modern PR practices began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an assertion which makes PR a relatively young field compared to other professions and academic disciplines.

Through a thorough historical analysis of the evolution of PR, the paper identified four main variables which support the development of PR. These variables are economic development, rise in media and communication technologies, increasing democratization of nations and

increased homogenization of cultures. These factors, Sriramesh (2009) contended, were offshoots of globalization. The study discovered that countries with centralised economies tended to emphasise public sector undertakings where the government became the ‘sole public’ for public relations practitioners. However, the capitalistic economies favour private enterprise where public relations would be needed to communicate with multiple publics. The study also identified the “pluralistic democratic system as the environment where public relations is most advanced and practiced in a strategic manner” (Sriramesh, 2009, p.5). The print and broadcast media, according to the findings, still took much of the focus of public relations practitioners regardless of the inception of new and social media.

The study by Sriramesh (2009) rightly captures the crust of the current study, in that it establishes a clear relationship between PR development and economic and media liberalization. It provides direction to the current study, especially for the purposes of comparison. Sriramesh’s (2009) study gave a global outlook of the factors that propelled public relation evolution, the current study being undertaken will seek to affirm if these variables apply in Ghana or not.

### **2.3.6 New Media Technologies and Public Relations**

Eyrich, Padman and Sweetser (2008) conducted a study in the United States of America on PR practitioners’ use of social media tools and communication technology. Public relations practitioners filled the survey questionnaires online and the data collected was analysed to reveal the findings.

The findings showed that practitioners had clearly adopted the more established and institutional tools such as e-mail and intranet. They also seemed very comfortable with blogs and podcasts. On the other hand, they were slower to integrate more technologically complicated tools that cater to a niche audience such as: text messaging, social networks and virtual worlds.

Five years after Eyrich, Padman and Sweetser's (2008) study, Wilson and Supa (2013) conducted an exploratory study in America to find out how emerging technologies had transformed the media relations role of public relations practitioners. Sixty six public relations practitioners responded to a survey which was used to gather data. Respondents were asked to select their most preferred new technology.

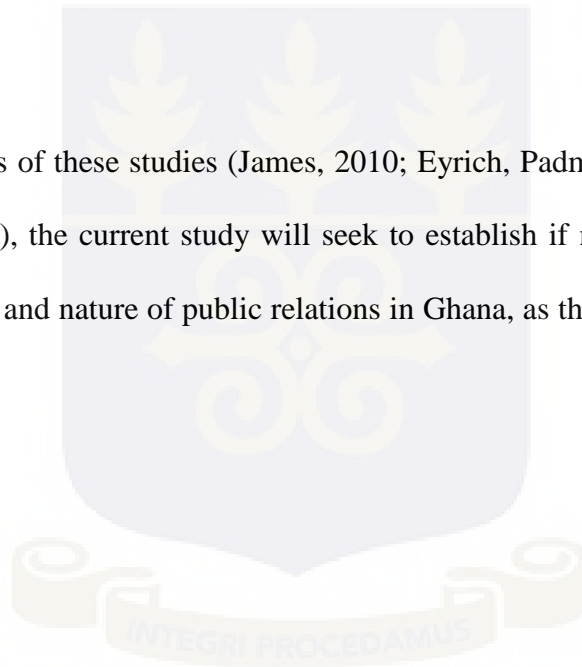
The findings showed that overall, public relations practitioners seemed to indicate that 'Twitter' had the potential to be beneficial to public relations practitioners. Twitter also had the ability to increase quality and speed of information sharing and that collaborating via Twitter had potential benefits in the media relations relationship. The findings further revealed that unfortunately, although the practitioners preferred Twitter, the actual use of Twitter for both individual work and media relations purposes was not occurring. More substantial relationships with practitioners could be formed by adding Twitter as a communication vehicle.

James (2010) wrote a paper on the current and future challenges posed by new media to public relations. The findings indicate that public relations educators may need to review course curricula in light of new media developments and industry responses. The findings

also suggest that many public relations practitioners are struggling with the impact of new media, and especially the Internet, on their practice.

On the other hand, a study conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) found that courses taught in public relations classrooms in the UAE were heavily oriented toward new communication technologies (Badran, Turk, & Walters, 2003). The study further revealed that public relations in the UAE had developed quickly because of the rapid economic development in the country.

Drawing on the findings of these studies (James, 2010; Eyrich, Padman and Sweetser, 2008; Wilson and Supa, 2013), the current study will seek to establish if new media technologies are shaping the practice and nature of public relations in Ghana, as these studies conducted in other countries suggest.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods of data collection and analysis that were used for the study. It also provides information on the population, sample size and sampling process for the study. The study was structured qualitatively in order to do an in-depth assessment of the information sought. The ethical considerations the researcher took note of were all mentioned in this chapter.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The study was exploratory in nature and for that matter employed the qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Data was collected using in-depth interviews in order to allow the researcher to probe further and ask follow-up questions when the need arose. The qualitative approach also helped the researcher to gather rich data. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) posit that the wealth of detailed information provided by the in-depth interview serves as a great advantage to the researcher.

This method therefore helped in gathering a wealth of knowledge and understanding into the transformation of public relations in Ghana. According to Potter (1996, p.27), a quantitative approach would not allow the researcher to capture “diversity among people...and how each human creates meaning...from a different set of experiences”.

### **3.3 Research Population**

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) define a population as a group or class of subjects, variables, concepts or phenomena. Babbie (2013) also defines a population as the theoretically specified aggregation of study elements. The first target population for this research was all public relations practitioners who have practised in Ghana for ten years or more and are members of the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR).

The second target population consisted of all public relations lecturers who have taught public relations in Ghana for ten years or more and are members of IPR. The Institute of Public Relations, (IPR) Ghana is the only professional association for public relations practitioners in Ghana so it was necessary for respondents to be members in order for them to be sampled. Morse (1986) as cited in Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identified a respondent as someone who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed and is willing to participate in the study.

### **3.4 Sampling**

Wimmer and Dominick (2011) define a sample as “a subset of a population that is representative of the entire population”. The non-probability sampling approach was adopted for this study. The purposive sampling method was used to identify respondents who can give the required information. According to Opoku-Amankwa (2009, p, 18.), in purposive sampling, “the respondents or elements are intentionally selected for the study based on certain characteristics or qualities to meet the needs and requirements of the study.” One of the members of staff at the IPR office helped the researcher to identify members of the institute who had taught or practiced for ten years and above. This list was used to draw the sample.

The type of purposive sampling used was intensity sampling. According to Patton (1990), an intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely). With intensity sampling, one selects participants who are experiential experts and who are authorities on a particular experience. Using the logic of intensity sampling, the researcher seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest.

#### **3.4.1 Sample Size**

Ten participants were selected for this research. The sample size was based on the recommendations of McCracken (1988), who suggested that a sample size of eight was sufficient for qualitative interviewing because it was essential to work in-depth with fewer participants. The ten participants or respondents comprised of six public relations practitioners and four public relations lecturers. The six PR practitioners had been practising

in Ghana for at least ten years while the four lecturers had also been teaching PR for at least ten years. These practitioners were all members of the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR). The researcher drew the sample size from the 2014 list of IPR, Ghana members in good standing. The list contained a total of 425 members.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The main aim of this research was to find out how media liberalization, education and economic liberalization had transformed public relations in Ghana. In-depth interviews were used to collect data. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) defined an in-depth interview as an extensive one-on-one personal interaction in which much more information can be obtained while Bingham and Moore (1959) simply described qualitative interviewing as “a conversation with a purpose.” (p.4)

The interviews were used to explore the views, experiences and opinions of the individual respondents. Both the public relations practitioners and lecturers were asked questions which required them to provide their personal and professional experiences. Respondents were asked questions such as the role formal education has played in transforming public relations as well as the role media proliferation has played in transforming public relations, (see appendices A and B).

Each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes often because of illustrations that respondents gave to explain their points and at other times due to official interruptions during the interview. The transcription of all the interviews took about 27 hours to complete. After

transcribing, a report was produced which followed the objectives and themes guiding the study.

### **3.5.1 Data Collection Instruments**

Two semi-structured interview guides were designed to guide the direction of the interviews. One to be answered by public relations practitioners and the other to be answered by lecturers who taught public relations. The semi-structured interview guides were to give the researcher the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on the responses that were provided. According to Mason (2002), the defining characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that they have a flexible and fluid structure, unlike structured interviews, which contain a structured sequence of questions to be asked in the same way for all interviewees. Mason (2002) also posited that the aim was usually to ensure flexibility in how and what order questions were posed. This method also helped to establish how particular questions might be followed up and developed with different interviewees. This helps to shape the interview according to the interviewee's own understanding. The PR practitioners answered a 14-item question guide while the PR lecturers responded to a seven-item question guide, (See appendices A and B).

### **3.5.2 Instruments Administration**

All ten interviews were conducted within three weeks. Emails were sent to ten practitioners and ten lecturers concerning the interview. Six practitioners and four lecturers responded with the date and time when they will be available for the interview. The venue for each interview was also provided. All the respondents were given clear and elaborate explanations concerning the objectives of the study as well as the goal of the study.

Gordon (1980) asserts that effective in-depth interviews entail creating a shared concern for each other in which both the interviewer and the respondent understand the contextual nature of the interview. All the interviews were conducted between late August and early September, 2015. An audio tape recorder was used to record responses from all the interviews after which the interviews were transcribed. Notes were also taken during the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in English. There was no need for the researcher to recruit and train additional interviewers to assist in the data collection since the interviews could be conducted single-handedly over the given period and none of the interview schedules coincided.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The transcribed data was coded for emergent themes based on the objectives of the study to identify the transformations that have occurred in public relations in Ghana in relation to education, economic liberalization and media proliferation. The themes were analysed manually and they include the changes that have occurred in public relations in Ghana, the threats or opportunities that media liberalization poses to PR in Ghana as well as the importance of formal education to PR in Ghana.

The data analysis also revealed similarities and differences in opinion from the various respondents. The findings of this study were discussed in relation to the four models of public relations theory used in the study, the concepts and the related works which have been discussed in earlier chapters. The findings were also supported by direct quotations from the respondents.

### **3.7 Reliability and Validity of Data Collected**

Daymon and Holloway (2002) stated that Maxwell (1996), Kvale (1996), Hammersley (1998) and Silverman (2001) are among those who promote the value of applying reliability and validity benchmarks to qualitative research. They argue that these offer the most effective means of evaluating the quality of research. This is despite the fact that reliability and validity are measurements of objectivity, which is a central research issue in quantitative research. In qualitative research, however, subjectivity is the more salient research issue. (p. 89). There are several benchmarks for ensuring reliability and validity and this study employed three of them. The researcher employed the member checking method which was suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) as a way of building credibility in qualitative research. The researcher asked each respondent to read transcriptions and notes from their individual interviews to identify whether all that the latter said was accurately recorded and quoted. The researcher also employed Creswell's (1998) debriefing method to aid verification. Debriefing gave participants a chance "to interact further with the researcher, to ask questions and to hear further explanations" (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Peer debriefing was also introduced; the researcher gave the study to an individual outside the project to read and question the methods and interpretations of the researcher.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

The participation of respondents in this study was strictly confidential. The respondents' names and the names of their organizations were withheld throughout the study. Their gender, specific titles, affiliations and anything that can be used to identify them was not identified throughout the dissertation.

The researcher understands the obligation to approach the issue of confidentiality with the greatest respect. The participants were advised in relation to the procedures that relate to data maintenance and reporting of the findings. With the permission of the respondents, the interviews were audio-taped. The statements and quotes of participants have been presented completely anonymously in the research.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter four presents the findings from the in-depth interviews which the researcher conducted with the public relations practitioners and public relations lecturers. The findings have been divided into two parts, the first part is for the interview with the PR practitioners while the second part is for the interview with the PR lecturers. The findings have been presented under themes which the researcher identified based on the objectives of the study. In order to maintain their anonymity, the public relations practitioners were identified in the findings as PRP (public relations practitioner) 1, 2,3,4,5 and 6. The public relations lecturers were also identified as PRL (public relations lecturer) 1, 2, 3 and 4.

#### 4.2.0 Media and Economic Liberalization's Role in Transforming Public Relations

The public relations practitioners answered questions on the role media liberalization and economic liberalization have played in transforming public relations. The respondents also spoke about general changes which have occurred in public relations in Ghana over the years.

#### 4.2.1 The role of the media in transforming public relations

All the six respondents mentioned that the media options available as a result of media liberalization had helped public relations in Ghana by making many media channels available to practitioners to spread their messages. PRP4 and PRP5 both stated that, media proliferation had helped PR practitioners to reach all their target audiences using different channels. PRP4 explained further by saying that

Several years ago, you had only Radio Ghana, you had just GTV and you were limited to that and not too many people had even access to radio and television but today, people listen to radio on their phones, people listen to or watch television on their phones and therefore if you are able to strategize properly, it will go to your advantage.

PRP5 also spoke about the platforms available to the public relations practitioner due to media liberalization:

What it has done with PR practice is that it's given the practitioner a lot of platforms on which to tell their stories. So whereas before you only had a handful of media platforms to tell your story -PR is basically storytelling-, now you have a chain of platforms where you can use to reach your publics. For me that is the significant change.

In as much as the respondents agreed that media liberalization has contributed to transforming public relations, PRP6 stated that media liberalization has also made the work of PR practitioners more challenging.

You have to continually do your research to try to know the communication needs of your publics or of your stakeholders, you are better placed on where to reach them and how to interact with them. This can be challenging because you now have a plethora of channels where you constantly need to be on top of to be finding out what is being said about your brand in order to meet up the challenges.

#### **4.2.2 Media liberalization as a threat or an opportunity to PR in Ghana**

With the exception of one respondent, all the respondents saw media liberalization as a “big” opportunity for public relations practitioners to “do their work even better”. PRP3 identified that the numerous media options available helped the practitioner to “boost the image of the organisation at all times”

PRP2 also gave an instance where media liberalization can be an opportunity for PR practitioners:

So if you have so many media houses around you, the opportunity has been thrown to you to be able to defend your organisation whenever it is being attacked. So that you wouldn't have the excuse of 'oh I didn't have anybody to interview me, I didn't have anybody to talk to'. You have options to choose from now.

Although PRP1 saw media liberalization as an opportunity for public relations, he was still worried about one issue which affects a lot of PR departments;

There is the threat of budgetary constraints in there because in an increasingly difficult economy, budgets are been cut everywhere and one of the first places where managers always cut the budget is the PR budget because many of the organisations have not seen the contribution of PR to the bottom line. However it behooves on PR practitioners to demonstrate clearly to management the value of PR.

#### **4.2.3 Social Media and the relationship between PR practitioners and their publics**

All the six respondents agreed that social media had “greatly” improved the relationship between public relations practitioners and both their internal and external publics. PRP1 and PRP2 spoke about social media’s affordability and how PR practitioners who were facing budget cuts could advertise on social media at an affordable rate. PRP1 further proposed that PR practitioners in organisations who do not have intranet services could use social media to communicate with their internal publics.

PRP5 recalled that social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook were used to reach most internal publics at the respondent’s organisation because they worked on a factory floor and therefore seldom went to the notice board. They neither checked for intranet messages nor had access to email so social media was an “excellent idea” which helped PRP5’s department “to reach internal publics as quickly as possible”.

In spite of all the advantages of social media, PRP3 raised the concern that in as much as social media gives practitioners the opportunity to disseminate information quickly and easily, the “false and damaging information” that certain individuals deliberately put out to tarnish the image of organisations can take months of crisis management to repair. PRP3 added that the danger occurs when the PR practitioner does not see or hear about the concocted story on time and it spreads.

PRP4 also added that in order for public relations practitioners to use social media to the fullest, they need to “have a good monitoring mechanism”. The PR practitioner may have to employ more hands to help with social media monitoring. PRP4 concluded by saying that

“the monitoring that we have known as PR practitioners did not include the social media but now if you understand it properly, you will be able to use them to your advantage”.

PRP6 stated categorically that “most public relations practitioners are still lacking social media skills”. Although PRP6 agrees that social media has influenced the relationship that PR practitioners have with both their internal and external publics,

There is a whole realm of reputational management that wasn't there before and this is online reputational management and because most PR practitioners don't have those skills, it's becoming difficult to effectively manage online reputation. And especially for us who are the chief brand monitors of our various organisations, it means that you need to also be up to date as to what is also been said about your brand on social media. So if you don't have the skills, then it means that also becomes almost like a challenge for you.

#### **4.2.4 The use of social media by various PR departments**

Three of the respondents admitted to using social media at their various PR departments. The other three had not yet started making use of social media. PRP1's organisation had started using social and selected specific platforms for a start;

We have identified social media as one of the tools that can help...to get...messages out to the publics and so we have started social media not too long ago. We are doing twitter, and we are also doing Facebook. We intend to see how these go and then we will explore the other social media platforms. But for now we are doing the two.

PRP3 was the first public relations practitioner to introduce social media to PRP3's organisation.

When I came...the social media wasn't active. But now it is. We have our website and on our website, we interact with those who...visit our website. We make it interactive, you go there you find Facebook there...you get everything you need to know that rolls on our Facebook pages all over and I think that it is now helping because we find it easier to disseminate information.

PRP5 said social media was used very often at his organisation "but it was mainly amongst ourselves. Amongst managers and amongst colleagues to share information. We were not using social media with external publics. For us in PR, we were using social media purely for our internal publics".

#### **4.2.5 The challenges media liberalization has created for PR in Ghana**

All six respondents identified at least three challenges that media liberalization posed for PR in Ghana. Three of the major challenges which ran through the responses were the cost of putting out messages on all or most of the media platforms for publicity purposes. The second major challenge was the need for public relations practitioners to know and understand the media habits of their audiences in order to use the various media options available judiciously. And the third challenge was the public relations practitioner's inability to monitor the various media platforms to find out what is being said about one's organisation or institution.

PRP1 suggested that PR practitioners may have to “resort to third party organisations because there are organizations that do media monitoring and they share results with organisations that request for them so that is another channel by which PR practitioners can access the impact of their messages and whether it actually got to their target audience”.

PRP2 advised PR practitioners to establish good media relations in order to avoid conflicts with the media. PRP3 stated that one very worrying challenge was the difficulty practitioners faced in monitoring radio stations due to limited radius each station covers. Certain “damaging news” can be aired on radio stations which are out of the practitioner’s coverage area and it may take a while “to hear about it and fix it”.

#### **4.2.6 Public relations departments in private organisations**

Each respondent had a different view on how well private organisations had fared in establishing PR departments. PRP5 was convinced that although it is said that public relations in Ghana started in the public institutions, “for me, if you ask me, they were not practicing PR. It was more of that glorified messenger kind of thing”. PRP5 further emphasised that the private sector understood PR better than the public sector.

PRP1 also stated that “many private organisations have not used PR to its fullest. Many private organisations are now only beginning to value the role of PR in their organisations”.

However, PRP1 added that there are;

a lot of opportunities for growth for the practice in the country and as organisations begin to identify the importance of PR and begin to create those departments and roles in their organisations, then there is hope for the profession and it can only grow. I know of many private organisations that have only begun to create PR departments within

their set up or are having to elevate the role of PR from whichever department they may have subsumed it to previously for it to stand on its own and get onto the executive board and all of that. So PR is growing, the private sector is catching on very fast so there are a lot of opportunities for PR practitioners to expand their frontiers and to ensure that the practice of the profession grows in this country.

Although PRP2 says private organisations are still “discovering the benefits of PR”, PRP5 is of the view that, the private sector appreciate public relations because when they do discover the benefits, “they put PR in its proper place and identify the PR person as the one who advises management on how to establish a good relationship with both internal and external publics”.

PRP4 stated emphatically that the multi-national organisations and other large corporate institutions have done very well in the use of PR. Their success may be attributed to their connection with their “mother organisations or sister organisations where PR has been seen as a preferred way of handling many of the problems and issues of organisations”.

#### **4.2.7 Opportunities available to PR practitioners in an expanding private sector**

All the respondents agreed that the expansion of the private sector due to media liberalization has created “endless” opportunities for PR practitioners in Ghana. PRP3 stated that one important opportunity is the jobs which are created for PR professionals as the private sector expands. Aside the job opportunities, PRP4 said PR is practiced better in the private institutions because “management in those organisations have a better understanding of PR. In many of those organisations, the management personnel themselves have had some

amount of training in PR, basic training so they understand what PR can do for them unlike the public ones where it is seen in a different way”.

PRP4 added that PR practitioners will be utilised more effectively in the private sector when they are employed there. In spite of all the opportunities available, PRP6 is of the view that “the negative perception that our practice has as well as those derogatory tags that we have such as spin doctors, glorified messengers”, need to be worked on “so it’s up to us PR practitioners and indeed...IPR to push our profession up a bit more just like legal just like marketing just like HR”. PRP6 concluded by saying that “PR itself has to do its own PR well in order to show that we can offer value to our organisations”.

PRP5 explained that the PR person also benefits the private organisation where he or she is employed because “the person who has been trained to communicate properly with the publics” is now going to professionally manage the organisation’s communication.

#### **4.2.8 The long term benefits of Ghana’s liberal economy to PR**

All the respondents agreed that public relations in Ghana had come a long way and still had a future with limitless opportunities. PRP6 stated that the long term benefits for PR were endless. She added that;

the opportunities are limitless in the sense that if you know public relations is what drives anything I mean communication is what drives anything. Communication is what makes anything move so if we position ourselves well, we stand to give a lot, we stand to offer a lot to the economy to the

development of the country, we just have to position ourselves well and show our value and what we can do

PRP5 also mentioned that “without communication, nothing can get on so if you take PR as that communication machinery in the organisation, then there will be neither confusion nor misunderstanding”.

#### **4.3.0 The Changes That Have Occurred In PR in Ghana**

Five out of the six respondents stated that public relations in Ghana had changed over the years. Respondents identified that the change “stems from the global trends which have taken a toll on the practice in Ghana as well”. PRP2 categorically stated that:

Public relations in the past was mostly recognized as protocol and a lot of organisations used public relations practitioners for running errands. But now I can say for sure that there are a wide range of organisations that have accepted public relations as a management function and therefore public relations officers are performing actual roles of management which have impacted greatly on the performance of the organisations and for that matter, a lot of organisations have also expanded their PR units where they have various units performing specific roles like media relations, protocol, event management and others.

PRP1 said PR has transformed to the extent that “there are organisations in Ghana who had placed ‘goodwill’ on their balance sheets and provide enough funds for it”. PRP3 said “previously, public relations was considered to be just an outfit to give out maybe ‘soli’ (money) to reporters. That was how people perceived the profession. Over the years, there

have been changes and people have gotten to know that when we talk about public relations, it's all about helping to lift the image of an association”.

PRP6 did not think that public relations had changed that much over the years.

The practice of public relations in Ghana hasn't changed over the years. Sadly, public relations is still stuck in the first two models. The press agency publicity model and then the public information model. Most practitioners are not doing much of the two-way symmetric type. You know they are not doing the two-way symmetric type so PR is still in the first two models.

PRP4 added that although public relations has seen some transformation over time, there have been challenges in certain organisations;

there are some other places where the limitations are there because either management of those institutions themselves have difficulty in understanding the role of PR or the people who are assigned the responsibility of PR themselves are not clear in their minds what PR is. One of the reasons is because many organisations tended to be interested in people who have practiced in the media because they think that PR is all about media relations, your stories are in the newspapers, on air and that kind of thing.

#### 4.3.1 The Impact of Expansion in Public Relations education on PR practice in Ghana

The public relations lecturers answered questions on the role public relations education has played in transforming public relations in Ghana as well as the importance of formal public relations education to the profession.

All four lecturers agreed that it was good to have a lot of institutions teaching public relations. But the major issue for all of them was whether the “right calibre of people were teaching the course?” PRL2 cautioned that “it’s always good to have a number of institutions teaching PR in order to raise the level of competition but there is also an issue of the quality of programmes which are offered”.

PL4 gave an example of an incident which occurred involving two schools which were seeking accreditation to teach PR.

I have had a situation of being involved in accreditation of two PR programmes that I have recommended that they should not be accredited. One was a programme that was coming from outside and that programme was said to be equivalent to a master’s degree but one of the things that drew my attention to the fact that it might not be up to the standard and therefore requires further investigation was that the one text book that was being recommended was ‘PR made Simple’ by Frank Jefkins. I mean Frank Jefkins is a respected PR person but anybody at the master’s level who is dealing with a book titled PR made Simple cannot just be serious. There was another school that I went to but that was at the under-graduate level and they didn’t have any books at all on PR so you begin to wonder what kind of things they’ll be teaching the students.

PRL3 also held the opinion that the lecturers who teach public relations must have the “combined experience of industry and academia”. PRL3 explained further by saying that “if they are one-sided and they only come from academia, then yes the knowledge base is good but the lack of practicality on the lecturer’s part affects the kind of output that come out from the university. The students need to leave the course having a well-rounded view of what public relations is all about”.

Aside being unsure of the quality of lecturers teaching PR in certain institutions, PRL1 commended the increasing number of schools. He said “it has helped to increase the number of practitioners. It has also helped to bring in some people who otherwise would have been practicing without any form of training”.

PRL2 emphasised that although “accreditation of the programmes is the job of the national accreditation board, the Institute of Public Relations as a professional body must be able to determine those who qualify to go through its accreditation process. So we also have a responsibility as Institute of Public Relations to review some of the programmes that are being offered and to advice the accreditation board accordingly and accreditation board will take our advice”.

#### **4.3.2 The Relevance of Formal Education to the Development of PR in Ghana**

There was no doubt among the respondents that formal education was very crucial to the development of public relations. According to PRL1, formal education provided “knowledge

in the principles and theories of the public relations profession which is linked to the practice”.

PRL1 also added that people without formal training in PR tend to overlook certain important aspects of the profession and focus on or are “interested in just an aspect of PR which might not even be called PR”. PRL2 gave a clearer understanding by saying that:

There are a number of people who are confused by the term ‘public’ in public relations and they think that the ‘public’ refers to the general public. If it refers to the general public then any nicely dressed person who can speak well and so on should be able to perform that role. But PR is a technical issue. You know, we’re talking about the management of stakeholder relationship and it can be a very technical issue. So formal education signals to organisations that you need a certain calibre of people to practice PR.

PRL3 and PRL4 held the opinion that although formal education was good, “it wasn’t thorough”. The students therefore needed hands-on experience to understand the practice better.

#### **4.3.3 Improving PR education in Ghana.**

Each respondent had a different view on what could be done to improve upon public relations in Ghana but all the views were around the quality of lecturers, the nature of the course curriculum as well as the education of managers and management students about public relations.

PRL1 advised that “those in academia themselves must improve upon themselves by reading more, interacting better and getting access to publications and then also having opportunities to interact with other academics beyond our shores by attending conferences”.

PRL2 was also of the view that public relations education is not meant for public relations practitioners alone:

The education must be extended to the managers who are coming out or students who are coming out with management degrees and so on so that they are sensitized to the role PR can play within the organisations and that is why we were teaching PR in management schools so that they can have a greater appreciation of PR.

PRL3 suggested that schools teaching PR must adjust their curricula to cater for both theory and practice:

Changing of the curriculum to make it to have a balance between theory and practice and actually steering it towards more practice than theory and knowledge. The knowledge is good but the students must leave the classroom with certain skills. They must have skills. They needn't go on the job and be trained on how to do basic things.

PRL4 said the public relations students must be taught “to be very professional and that is why teaching of PR at the tertiary level now is quite welcoming because the PR practitioners need to understand what it is that they are doing and should be able to make these things very clear you know, so and there have been a few instances where when the PR person has demonstrated that he (or she) knows what the job is about, management has left a lot of things to him (or her)”.

PRL3 continued by proposing that after students had been given a foundational knowledge in PR, their assessment should be more practical:

The assessment of PR students should be moved from the examination written type of assessment to practice where they go into industry to solve problems. They are presented a problem from an industry, they come as a group or as an individual and they solve a problem. That is what I think will be critical to improving PR education in Ghana.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and interprets the findings from the data gathered. The findings are analysed using the theory underpinning the study and the literature reviewed earlier. The chapter subsequently outlines the limitations of the study, provides a conclusion and gives recommendations for future research.

#### 5.2 Discussion of Findings

Overall, the responses from the in-depth interviews conducted helped the researcher to identify the opinions of the public relations practitioners concerning the roles the media and economic liberalization in Ghana have played to transform the profession. Responses were also given concerning the long term benefits for public relations in the present media and economic environment of Ghana. Selected public relations lecturers also provided their views on PR education and the transformation of the profession. All the challenges that need to be addressed in order to strengthen PR education in Ghana were pointed out. The relationship between the findings and related studies are discussed.

#### 5.3 Media Liberalization and PR Transformation

Media liberalization is considered as one of the essential tools needed for the growth and sustainability of public relations in any society (James, 2010). The findings of this study demonstrate this assertion by James (2010) because the PR practitioners who were interviewed for this study confirmed that the high number of mass media channels have

widened their scope and provided them with options in terms of publicity. Again, the findings of this study were similar to that of Grau (1994) who found out that in Spain the diversity of the media has helped shape the course of public relations and develop the profession in general, particularly the media relations function of the profession.

Social media does not play significant roles among the various activities performed by PR practitioners in Ghana. This finding differs from the studies by Wilson and Supa (2013) who found out that Twitter, a social media tool, plays prominent roles in the activities of PR practitioners in the USA. However, the findings support James's (2010) study which also identified that many public relations practitioners were struggling with the impact of new media, and especially the Internet on their practice. The study subsequently suggested that the onus lies on public relations educators to review their course curricula in light of new media developments and industry responses.

The emphasis on media liberalization as a good move for the growth and practice of PR in Ghana also has some theoretical basis for the four models of public relations postulated by Grunig and Hunt (1984). In terms of press agency, which is concerned with publicity and propaganda (ibid), the liberalized media atmosphere, which has culminated in the establishment of numerous media outlets, means press agents have a variety of channels for their activities. The public information component of the model is also enhanced because the multiplicity of the media indicates that PR practitioners can now segment their audience and use specific media channels to reach them.

The two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical models appear to be the most important beneficiaries of the current free media atmosphere. Organizations can take advantage of the

situation to foster an effective relationship through the numerous communication channels available. It means organizations can engage their public through various communication media, and get feedback within the shortest possible time.

#### **5.4 Economic Liberalization and PR Transformation**

“A country’s economic development provides public relations professionals with opportunities as well as challenges” (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003. p.6). This assertion by Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) was corroborated by the study. The participants in this study confirmed that public relations in Ghana is becoming more strategic and advanced due to the development of the economy.

Furthermore, Tilson and Perez (2002) established in their study that economic growth creates the enabling environment for businesses to thrive and also increases private sector participation in the economies. The findings from the current study suggest that not all the private sector organizations give full respect and recognition to public relations. Respondents from this study affirmed this statement when they noted that private organisations who did not understand PR, merged the department with others including marketing, human resource and the legal department. This is consistent with findings from Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) that public relations is not yet considered to be a core organizational function in organizations worldwide, but rather “it languishes as a superfluous appendage in organizations” (p.6).

It is important to state that the findings of this study differ slightly from Watson and Sallot (2001), whose study findings indicated that the benefits resulting from economic growth would boost the advertising industry more than public relations.

Similarly, the finding of this study is not consistent with that of Otubanjo and Umajo (2012) who did not identify economic liberalization and deregulation as crucial determinants of the evolution and development of public relations.

### **5.5 Public Relations Education and PR Transformation**

The study findings corroborate studies by Amoakohene (2015) and Thompson (2015) that interest in PR education has grown significantly. From the findings, it is clear that although public relations lecturers were excited about several schools teaching public relations, they were worried about the quality of lecturers teaching and whether or not the lecturers had adequate experience from both public relations practice and academia. Regardless of the fears, the lecturers agreed that the increasing number of institutions is good for the public relations profession in Ghana. These findings are consistent with Hornaman's (2000) findings on a study conducted on PR education in Florida which states that public relations educators acknowledge the importance of public relations education and its relevance to the profession.

Aside from public relations education, the findings also stressed the need for students of PR to acquire some practical skills aside the theoretical knowledge. Fitch's (2013) findings were also consistent with these findings because her study found that some participants were of the view that university education did not develop work-ready graduates and that graduates lacked practical PR skills. It was therefore important for students to gain some practical skills before they left school. This finding is at variance with Chen and Culbertson (2003) who discovered that public relations lecturers in China were bridging the gap between theory and practice by relying heavily on guest lectures and also working had to arrange internships in order to give students a hands-on experience concerning what goes on in the real world.

Regarding the models of public relations, the findings suggest that due to the interest in the acquisition of sound knowledge and skills in PR through education, practitioners have come to understand immensely how the profession works.

### **5.6 The Changes which have occurred in Public Relations**

The study findings show that not all the four models of PR postulated by Grunig and Hunt (1984) are practiced in Ghana. With the exception of one respondent who was of the view that public relations in Ghana had not seen much change because it was still operating with the press agency/publicity model and the public information model, most of the practitioners agreed that the profession had moved from handling mainly protocol services in organisations to becoming a department to reckon with in organisations.

The findings indicate that most of the practitioners are now utilising functions such as issues management and crisis management in their organisations. This differs slightly from Gyan (1991) whose study identified that PR professionals did not play important roles in their organizations, hence they were relegated to the bottom. Public relations in the past was mostly recognized as protocol and a lot of organisations used public relations practitioners for running errands. But now there are a wide range of organisations which have accepted public relations as a management function and therefore public relations officers are performing actual roles of management which have impacted greatly on the performance of their organisations.

According to the findings, gone are the days when organisations looked for people who had a background in journalism or the media field to handle public relations duties. This is typical of the press agency or publicity model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) which only focused on disseminating information without soliciting feedback. Organisations now have a better understanding of public relations and its importance to their organisations and are willing to employ competent professionals to take up such positions.

### **5.7 Recommendation and Suggestions for Future Research**

The first recommendation from the findings is for public relations practitioners to know and understand the media habits of their audiences in order to make the best out of the media liberalization Ghana currently enjoys. A good knowledge of one's audiences also helps to cut down on the budget for publicity.

PR practitioners also require some amount of training on how to use social media and other new media and communication tools available in order to diversify the channels which can be used to reach their audiences; both internally and externally.

PR practitioners are also advised to strengthen the media relations between their organisations and the various media platforms in order to have the opportunity to speak for their organisations on various platforms in times of crisis or during events with short notice.

Online reputational management is a new form of reputational management which is appropriate for social media and new media. Practitioners need to be familiar with this system in order to manage the reputation of the organisation appropriately.

The findings suggest that management of both state-owned and private organisations need to have some basic training in public relations in order to understand and appreciate the profession and the role it plays in an organisation.

The findings state that Institute of Public Relations (IPR), Ghana as a professional body must advice the National Accreditation Board (NAB) on the institutions and lecturers who qualify to teach public relations in order to uphold the quality of practitioners that go into the field.

Aside public relations practitioners getting adequate training in public relations, students taking management courses must also have basic knowledge in public relations in order to appreciate its role in an organisation and make the best out of it rather than subsuming it under other departments and constantly cutting down on PR budgets.

Vercic, Grunig and Grunig (1996) proposed five environmental variables but only two variables were considered for this study. Future studies can look at the other three which are political ideology, the degree of activism (the extent of pressure organizations face from activists) and culture. According to Sriramesh (2006, p. 507), “sadly culture has yet to be integrated into the public relations body of knowledge”.

Sriramesh proposes that research on the role people’s culture plays in developing public relations in their society will produce a better understanding as well as provide empirical evidence which can link culture directly to public relations. Research conducted into Japanese and Chinese cultures have revealed that certain idiosyncrasies unique to their culture have affected how they practice public relations (Sriramesh, 2006). A similar research into Ghana’s culture will be very helpful to increase the understanding of and understanding into how the various cultures in Ghana play into the profession in Ghana.

Future studies should also investigate how IPR (Ghana's professional PR body) uses PR to boost its own image and the image of the PR profession in Ghana.

Future studies need to also look at the media relations function of public relations in Ghana and how it has developed the profession. This is because Sriramesh (2009) discovered that empirical data from most parts of the world show that organisations and institutions expect their public relations units to almost exclusively establish and maintain a good relationship with journalists in order to seek their help to 'place positive stories in the media' (p.7).

### **5.8 Limitations of the Study**

The findings in the study were based on the perspective of public relations practitioners and public relations lecturers. The sample size was limited because of the difficulty in reaching and interviewing a larger number of respondents.

In-depth interviews were used as the methodology for this study. The study can be conducted quantitatively to cover a larger sample size and reduce the elements of bias. Nevertheless, the information gathered serves as a strong foundational study upon which future studies can be developed from.

The study also placed a lot of emphasis on the transformation of public relations stemming from economic and media liberalization as well as the expansion of institutions teaching public relations. Other factors which may lead to transformations in the profession were not looked at.

## 5.9 Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to investigate and identify the roles media liberalization, PR education and economic liberalization have played in transforming public relations in Ghana. To achieve this goal, three research objectives were formulated. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations was used as the theoretical underpinning for the study. The qualitative research approach was used to guide the methodology and a review of related studies was conducted to lay the foundation in regards to the nature of the literature available in the field.

In drawing a conclusion about the transformation of public relations in Ghana, the empirical findings were compared to the literature and it was evident that similar findings had been discovered in other parts of the world concerning the relationship between the media, the economy and education on public relations.

From the findings, PR in Ghana has seen changes over the years specifically in the functions of practitioners. The various media options have also given PR practitioners the opportunity to spread their messages further. The expansion of the private sector as a result of economic liberalisation has opened doors for public relations practitioners to gain employment as well as explore other functions of the profession which were not available in the government sectors.

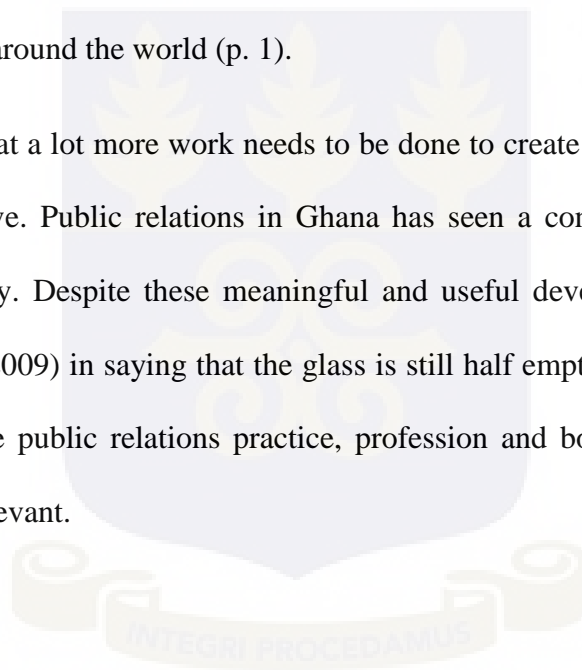
Public relations lecturers are excited about the interest many schools in Ghana have shown in teaching public relations but the main concern is the calibre of lecturers teaching the course.

The lecturers also stated that formal education was very important because it helped the future practitioners understand the basic theories and principles of the profession which they can subsequently link to practice when they get onto the field. This study complements other studies to show that the field of public relations is evolving and transforming globally.

As Thompson (2008) rightly put it,

Public relations has come of age around the world. The number of public relations agencies and organisations that have sprung up around the world in the past is proof that public relations is recognized and formalized around the world (p. 1).

This assertion means that a lot more work needs to be done to create a good environment for public relations to thrive. Public relations in Ghana has seen a consistent growth from its inception in the country. Despite these meaningful and useful developments, it is wise to agree with Sriramesh (2009) in saying that the glass is still half empty and much work needs to be done to make the public relations practice, profession and body of knowledge more holistic and globally relevant.



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**APPENDIX A**

**QUESTION GUIDE FOR PR PRACTITIONERS**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Eunice Asantewaa Asante, an M.A. Communication Studies student at the University of Ghana, Legon. The goal of the study is to learn about the transformation of public relations in Ghana. Please help me to achieve this goal by answering the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Your thoughts and experiences are important to me. This interview is confidential therefore your name and the name of your organization will not be identified in the final report.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE**

1. Has the practice of PR in Ghana changed over the years?
2. If yes, what changes have occurred?

**MEDIA LIBERALIZATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

1. Explain how the media options available due to media liberalization have transformed PR practice.
2. Do you consider the liberalization of the media landscape a threat or an opportunity to PR in Ghana? Please explain.
3. How has social media influenced the relationship between PR practitioners and both their internal and external publics?

4. How is your organization, especially the PR department, using social media in the delivery of their mandate?
5. In your opinion, what challenges has media liberation created for PR in Ghana?

#### PUBLIC RELATIONS DURING ECONOMIC LIBERALISATION

1. PR in Ghana started in public institutions. In your opinion, how have private organisations fared in establishing PR departments?
2. What opportunities does the expansion of the private sector present to PR practitioners?
3. What do you think the long term benefits for PR are in Ghana's liberal economy?

#### PERSONAL DATA

1. How long have you practiced public relations?
2. Which organisations have you practiced PR in?
3. How long have you been a member of the Institute of Public Relations?
4. What level of membership do you have?

**APPENDIX B**

**QUESTION GUIDE FOR PR LECTURERS**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Eunice Asantewaa Asante, an M.A. Communication Studies student at the University of Ghana, Legon. The goal of the study is to learn about the transformation of public relations in Ghana. Please help me to achieve this goal by answering the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Your thoughts and experiences are important to me. This interview is confidential therefore your name and the name of your organization will not be identified in the final report.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION**

1. A lot of institutions have sprung up which teach public relations. What will you say has been the impact of this phenomenon on the practice of PR in Ghana?
2. In your opinion what role does formal education in public relations play in the development of PR practice?
3. What do you think can be done to improve PR education in Ghana?

PERSONAL DATA

1. How long have you practiced public relations?
2. How long have you taught public relations?
3. How long have you been a member of the Institute of Public Relations?
4. What level of membership do you have?

