

**ANALYTIC STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC
RELATIONS IN GHANA**

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**THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
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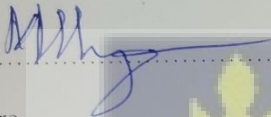
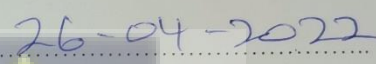


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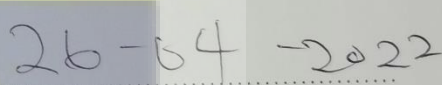
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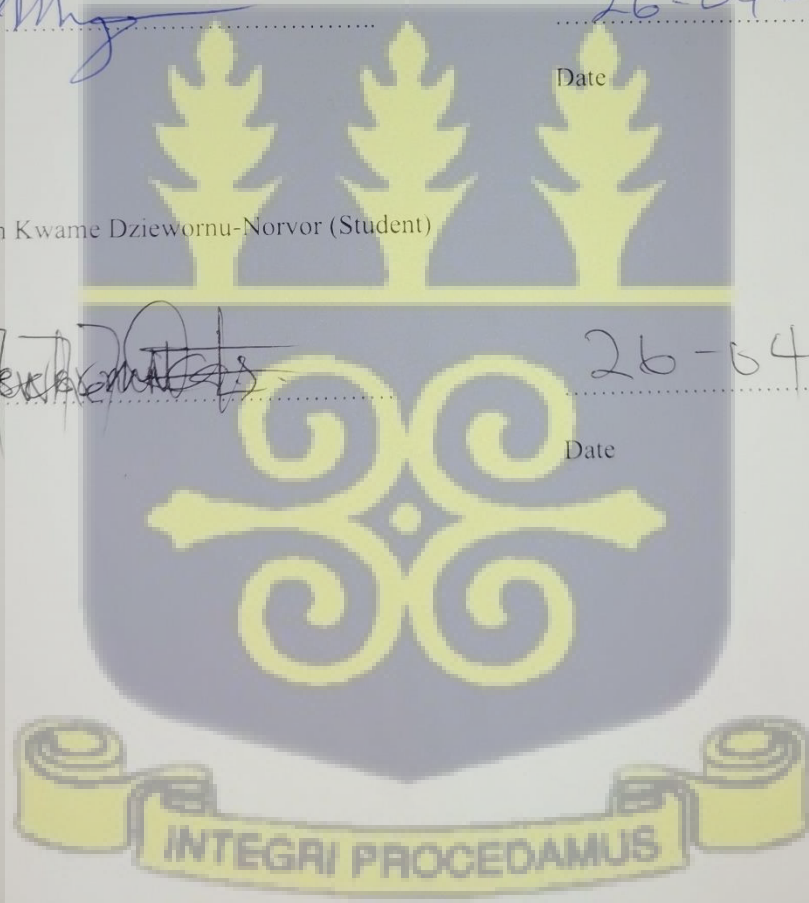
I declare that this work is the result of an independent enquiry, carried out by the researcher under supervision and has not been presented anywhere by another researcher. All works mentioned to enable the discussion within the study have been recognized appropriately.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to analyze Ghanaian public relations practitioners' use of social media and influence on public relations practice. Using the uses and gratification theory and dialogic theory of public relations as a lens, the study sought the views of 20 public relations practitioners. Essentially, the interviews sought information on how public relations deploy social media in their work, how their work is influenced, the challenges associated, and the competencies required to navigate the evolving world of social media and public relations. The study found that public relations practitioners in Ghana were well informed of social media platforms and employed them in their duties and are unanimous in agreement that social media have reshaped mainly the mechanism by which they interact with their publics by bringing them closer to their target audience. It was also revealed that work output and efficiency was positive because practitioners could get to their publics in real-time and interact seamlessly. Finally, the study revealed that practitioners may be under-utilizing social media and may not be reaping the benefits that abound primarily because training in the proper usage and deployment of social media platforms is not abreast with the evolving technology of social media. Despite these significant findings, there were other issues that the study could not address, including the views of organizational publics and the use of the quantitative approach, which would have made it possible to obtain a significant enough sample and thereby make it possible to generalize the findings of the study. Accordingly, the present study recommends that researchers investigate the extent to which social media mediate the relationship between organizations and their publics and find out whether the relationship mediated by social media is stronger or otherwise than the one by traditional/legacy media.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It includes the background, problem statement, research questions and objectives, and significance of study.

1.1.1 Background of Study

Rapid technological innovations have occurred over the last couple of decades (Lingelbach, Patino, & Pitta, 2012; Moore, 2012). Before social media became a big deal, there were three primary ways to capture the public's attention: investing heavily in advertising, obtaining coverage in the mass media, or employing people to inform potential customers about products (Zarella, 2009). Due to the evolution of social media tools (Scott, 2009), public relations practitioners now have a more exciting option: sharing content on the web that the public wants to consume. Institutions and, more specifically, public relations practitioners have embraced this new digital era and concur that social media transforms public relations and plays a critical role in organizational processes (Lee & McGovern, 2013).

According to Baran (2002), technological evolution, coupled with organizational expansion and improved research tools, is a significant factor shaping public relations over time. According to the author, technological advancements have boosted the efficiency of reaching a more targeted audience. Despite the vast potential of digitally mediated public relations, the ever-changing world of technology provides even more expansive growth options. Digital technology also assists public relations practitioners in being more efficient by eliminating needless tasks (Hallahan, 2001). Previously, news releases, for example, were created and disseminated individually. They are now sent via services such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Businesses also use these platforms to answer customer questions on their social media

platforms. With these tools, among others, public relations practitioners may be confident that they will be able to devote their time to improving their company's reputation or addressing a crisis communication issue rather than wasting time on duplicate activities.

The term "media" refers to a vehicle for communication or expression. "Social media" refers to how individuals interact in virtual communities by sharing and creating information (Apenteng & Doe, 2014). Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn are popular online platforms. Social media platforms connect people, aid in selling products and services, educate people, consume music, watch videos, and conduct research. Individuals make inquiries, share information, and have grown accustomed to receiving immediate responses via social media (Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström, & Freundt, 2014).

Social media exploded in popularity in 2000, with the advent of various social media sites. This proliferation increased and transformed the interaction of individuals and organizations with shared interests in art, education, and friendship, all of which are possible by social networking (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). The advantages of social media are evolving, as are the advantages for practitioners and organizations. Practitioners must stay current on social media trends to be relevant in today's technical and digital environment (Luttrell, 2018).

Hienert, Keinz, & Lettl (2011) presents some innovative ways of using social media. These innovative ways are:

- a. Business to Consumer (B2C): Businesses rely on social media to communicate with their customers in this model. When properly implemented, this increases the company's Return on Investment (ROI).

- b. Business to Business (B2B): This is a novel method for utilizing internal resources for external marketing or research and development.
- c. Government to Citizens (G2C): Governments can adopt social media usage to solicit feedback from public members on various government policies, among others. By doing so, social networks will mobilize like-minded individuals to act and collectively share their views, hence aiding in shaping a nation's development agenda.
- d. Peer to Peer (P2P): Numerous social networks and communities thrive on a peer-to-peer basis as well. Social gaming is a type of peer-to-peer (P2P) activity that is quickly developing. Social games are a colloquial term for games played between people on various social networking platforms.

Brown, Sikes, and Willmott (2013) detail the advantages of incorporating social media into business planning processes. According to them, digital engagement remains a top priority for at least the world's top ten institutions. The reliance on social media implies that marketing executives and public relations practitioners constantly seek new ways to connect with their customers or target audiences. Therefore, the use of social media to accomplish this goal is highly beneficial. Additionally, from the perspective of public relations practitioners, the prudent deployment of social media in public relations can spark interaction, accelerate brand growth, and ensure sustainability (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media are an assemblage of online platforms built on the technological and digital structures of Web 2.0 and enables the creation and sharing of data. According to Fuchs (2017), social media is a collection of internet platforms for interaction, content creation, and sharing.

Numerous individuals and public relations firms leverage the massive audience on social media to promote and spotlight their services and products (Garifova, 2016) to persuade them via

engagement (Laryea, 2017). Public relations professionals increasingly gravitate toward social media as the border between real-time and offline interaction is blurred. Social media enables public relations practitioners to engage with their audiences through discourse (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011).

Public relations departments are constantly on the lookout for new ways to engage with the individuals who make up their publics to address concerns about their product and service delivery and, consequently, their image (Johnson, 1997). Because of this push, organizations utilize various communication channels to accomplish this common goal. Public relations firms engage their audiences through various mediums, ranging from television advertisements to bumper stickers. Due to the unique possibility that social media allows public relations practitioners to engage with their target audience through discourse, it continues to bring significant changes to the public relations business (Valentini, 2015).

Dialogue is critical in public relations because it complies with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model, which results in effective public relations practice. Public relations have metamorphosed from a uni-directional strategy to continuous interaction between an organization and its publics. As a result, the role of dialogic social media in public relations should be examined (Ofori Kwafo, 2015).

1.1.2 Internet, New Media, and Web 2.0

The term "new media" has a long history in social research, dating back to the 1960s and 1970s of use by researchers looking into the various types, uses, and ramifications of digital communication (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). Not only has the internet ushered in and

revolutionized the dimensions of communication by enhancing access to information, but it has also ushered in a new era of communication (Balaban & Racz, 2020).

If the first generation of the World Wide Web (Web 1.0) facilitated internet-based communication chiefly via email and online sites, the second generation (Web 2.0) ushers in a new era of engagement, data creation, and sharing (Balaban & Racz, 2020). The adjustment of users' roles in content creation, consumption and behaviour are one of the most significant changes brought about by the advent and dissemination of Web 2.0 (Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

The critical phrase governing web users' new status, including information consumption and feedback creation, is "participation" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). Thanks to new media technologies, people can now create and publish online content with a minimum of technical, financial, or communication resources. As a result, anyone can create text, audio, or video content for free using weblogs or social networking (Katz & Rice, 2002).

Consequently, the role of the communicator evolves as media usage becomes complex. In the communication grid, the functions of content receivers and generators are interoperable (Minazzi, 2015). Web 2.0 enables active participation in both public and private communication. The media transcends one-way communication and opts for two-way discourse, allowing unfettered access to information. To respond to and connect with emerging societal requirements, public administration, often viewed as rigid and conservative, must now match technological innovation.

In terms of active participation via social media platforms, the primary advantages of web 2.0 are cost savings and increased reach. Other forms of marketing, such as salespersons conducting sales, are more expensive than using a social media platform. Furthermore, due to the geographic

constraints of conventional channels, social media allows businesses to reach customers who would otherwise be inaccessible. Social media platforms expand reach and lower costs for businesses (Watson, Pitt, Berthon, & Zinkhan, 2002; Sheth & Sharma, 2005). Weinberg (2009) claims that social media have a low-cost advantage. You can create a profile and post content for free on most social media sites. Unlike traditional marketing campaigns, many social media tools are free for businesses. Because social media is viral, any reader can share the news with his or her network, allowing information to reach a vast number of individuals quickly.

Current media have impacted significantly on the growth and development of new methods of interaction. New media have changed how often people interact online and with whom they communicate, providing new opportunities for behaviour change (Burmester, 2009). According to consumer research, people are more receptive to online services, spending more time on websites that provide third-party evaluations (Huang, Lurie, & Mitra, 2009). Even when obtained solely online, such information can directly influence purchasing decisions (Weiss, Lurie, & MacInnis, 2008). Environmentally friendly, new media has a lot to offer regarding social interaction (Kollock & Smith, 1999).

1.1.3 Social Media Use in Ghana

Ghana started enjoying full internet connectivity in 1995 and adopted an Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy in 2005 (Quarshie & Ami-Narh, 2012). The adoption of this policy, coupled with the rise of mobile broadband in Ghana, appears to have given Ghanaians the needed impetus to embrace internet usage for their personal and business use.

Social media in Ghana is at its peak. Social media are potent means of connecting with people worldwide (Abdulhamid, Ayoung, Kashefi, Sigweni, 2020). Social media have become a

lifestyle for some Ghanaians, especially musicians, entertainers, and politicians who use its applications to promote fashion, entertainment, and political activism.

In Ghana, social media have exposed most Ghanaians to various interactive platforms, which have had a considerable impact on purchasing and political behaviour, decision-making, and judgement (Boateng & Okoe, 2015). Today, social media have become a battleground for Ghana's most contested political debates and elections, musician feuds, and product placements as the use of social media technologies in social engagements become unparalleled. Individuals, politicians, and civil society organizations now have a new opportunity to engage in open, transparent, and dialogical discussions on promoting democratic values and goals, courtesy of social media.

Some individuals in Ghana who call themselves Instagram vixens or socialites rely on the internet to initiate conversation and amass followership. Their main activities on social media are posting pictures, creating trends, and connecting with people, and in some cases, they can generate income by discussing brands and services. Politicians and media houses have also joined in using social media to communicate with their constituents. Presently in Ghana, the former President, John Mahama, runs a very active Twitter and Facebook platform to canvas for support by creating trends such as #JohnMahamaLive. He answers questions and campaigns to users of these chosen platforms. Social media have become a vital part of public conversation and communication in today's society. Relying on social media have become a low-cost method for Ghanaians to reach out to their people. Even though television, radio phone-ins, stickers, and fliers are used in targeting their publics, social media provides a low-cost alternative for communicating brand messages to constituents, making it an essential marketing campaign technique.

1.1.4 Social Media and Public Relations

Social media have become prevalent and ubiquitous in today's environment. Recently, social media platforms have garnered a great deal of interest due to the exponential growth of users quickly. Additionally, social media platforms that were formerly utilized only for communication inside one's personal network of contacts are now employed for professional interactions.

In the 1980s, information channels were perceived in two ways: mass communication and micro communication. Mass communication was primarily concerned with disseminating information to a large population in an asymmetrical manner via newspapers, radio, and magazines. Micro-communication is concerned with exchanging information between individuals, and it takes a more balanced approach (Phillips & Young, 2009).

Social media platforms have altered how we live, from receiving and interpreting news to relating with loved ones. They are inescapable, overwhelming, and a fundamental part of public relations practice these days (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Social media are exceptional in offering public relations practitioners interactivity with their publics. They do not only provide channels for users to interact outside of their local and community-based boundaries, but they also provide a plethora of options for sharing user-generated content. Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, Shapiro (2012) and Bruhn (2012) argue that social media platforms allow consumers to contribute their inputs about brand messages, making social media a more reliable source of information. Today, social media have made public relations more democratic because information sharing and exchange are conducted in the open (the internet where everyone can see and react). Breakenridge (2012) contends that communication and technology merge when social media and public relations collide.

Again, public relations practitioners must disrupt established organizational ecosystems, necessitating the use of social media to reinvent public relations by emphasizing the importance of relationships (Davis, 2013). According to the author, sharing experiences is the future of public relations. According to Nicoli and Komodromos (2013), the challenge for public relations practitioners is determining the most effective strategy for using social media strategically and determining the most effective means of monitoring and evaluating it.

One of the primary goals of public relations is to facilitate efficient two-way communication and mutual understanding between an organization and its intended recipients (CIPR, 2013); organizations must focus not only on the networks but also on the people who inhabit them, their ways of life, and behaviour (Hutchinson, 2017). The majority of authors agree that when most people think of social media, they think of Facebook and Twitter. There are, however, a plethora of other platforms.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is “an umbrella term” that includes collaborative projects like Wikipedia, blogs, media-sharing communities, social media applications, and virtual communities. Furthermore, social media is a living, powerful force that keeps changing as new channels emerge (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009). According to Edwards, Tench, and Yeomans (2009), organizations must leverage the new possibilities offered by social media for targeting specific publics, particularly vibrant markets, in addition to the opportunities provided by direct contact with stakeholders (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Nicoli and Komodromos, 2013).

Solomon & Tuten (2012), who added a fifth ‘P’ (participation) to the traditional four ‘Ps’ of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion), argue that active digital engagement is

becoming a more vital part of an organizations' communication strategy, as Nicoli and Komodromos (2013) point out. The novel hybrid element in the mix of advertisements, according to Mangold and Faulds (2009), is social media. Today, public relations are about people and relationships, and public relations professionals must prioritize dialogic communication and mutual understanding, as monologue has given way to dialogue. Content creators are garnering the same regard and market penetration as traditional media. The industry will continue to seek a better understanding of online environments and the most effective ways to deploy online tools into traditional public relations.

According to Kwansah-Aidoo (2005), research in developing countries reveals that Ghanaian public relations practitioners are enthusiastic about the influence social media will have on the practice of public relations. They, however, have a long way to go before they are at the same level as their counterparts in industrialized countries. Furthermore, according to Dornyo (2014), public relations practitioners in Ghana are now more efficient in targeting their publics because of social media reorienting how public relations practitioners engage and interact with their target audiences.

According to Theaker (2004), public relations is evolving and difficult to define because it draws on ideas and praxis from various fields such as management, broadcasting, and psychology.

According to Sriramesh and Veri (2019), public relations align with current public dynamics and more responsive trends and opinions. They also emphasize the importance of an organizations' leadership prioritizing the public interest and being ethical when conducting research.

Public relations can be defined as the "management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on

whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985, p. 4). The term relationship in public relations scholarship is defined as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and cultural well-being of the other entity.” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62) There are five major public relations disciplines: financial PR, consumer PR, crisis communication, government PR, and internal PR (IPR, 2012). Freitag and Stokes (2009) offer an intriguing perspective on public relations. They address three points in order to substantiate their statement. The first component is management and leadership: practitioners receive the highest managerial assistance. The second section entails practitioners ensuring that their work complies with company requirements. The final component assesses practical abilities in research, strategy development, and design. These points emphasize the importance of public relations in organizations’ efforts to establish and strengthen relationships with key constituents. Nonetheless, as communication methods, tactics, and strategies evolve, particularly concerning the internet these days, public relations are poised to undergo significant change. Indeed, as new and evolved networking and social media platforms are designed to help businesses improve their communication and output, public relations practitioners are constantly looking for ways to listen to, interact with, and share information with their publics. Practitioners have access to a wealth of data about individuals through social media platforms (Nicoli & Komodromos, 2013). Numerous academics (Key, 2005; Waddel, 2010) agree that public relations’ role in this era of digital growth requires understanding how to think and develop a strategy. For example, Saxton and Waters (2014) discovered that stakeholders prefer dialogic interactions regarding charitable organizations’ Facebook posts.

Schultz, Utz, and Göritz (2011) examined the effect of social media techniques on recipients' crisis communications and reactions, concluding that the medium is more important than the message. Due to the widespread adoption of social media tools by practitioners for building relationships with their public, each tweet, Facebook post, or Instagram post is a deliberate attempt to solidify their corporate reputation (Barger, Peltier, & Schultz, 2016).

The interactivity of social media enables users to make inquiries and receive responses regardless of the platform an organization uses. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how public relations practitioners use social media to reach their targets, how they interact, and the dynamics involved in deploying social media into public relations practice.

1.2 Problem Statement

Social media have evolved from purely social networking sites to a popular and ubiquitous method for many businesses to acquire and communicate with customers in recent years. Organizations utilize social media platforms for a variety of purposes. These activities include increasing brand awareness, promoting brand recognition, and doing market research (Chikandiwa et al., 2013). As Dwyer et al. (2007) observed, social networking sites are excellent for managing multiple relationships simultaneously and communicating with the publics. This view has been corroborated by Lamberton and Stephen (2016), who concluded in a study on the use of Twitter to reach customers that Twitter had evolved into a central location for clients to voice their concerns and make inquiries about goods and services.

There is a scarcity of empirical studies on how public relations practitioners use and are affected by online public relations (Abdul Rahman, 2019; Robson, 2013; Zerfass & Schramm, 2014).

Existing research on social media and digital technologies has been conducted primarily on industrialized countries and corporations (Coombs, Falkheimer, Heide, & Young, 2015; Kent, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Sakali, 2017). Other research have looked at how businesses use social media for marketing their products and services (Mangold & Faulds 2009), to tell stories (Lund et al. 2017, Tarczydo & Howaniec 2017), and to increase product sales (Andzulis et al. 2012, Marshall et al. 2012).

Despite the popularity of social media studies in public relations, Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) identified significant gaps in our understanding of how organizations use social media and how these valuable new communication channels can or should be used in conjunction with more traditional channels of communication.

Numerous case studies demonstrate real concerns about certain corporations' attempts to engage in public communication in the Web 2.0 environment via one-way information transmission and a communication control paradigm reminiscent of mass media and Web 1.0. (Downes & McMillan; 2010; Li, Ma, & Duan).

Additionally, case studies have revealed unethical or immoral behaviour via social media and social networks. Without careful monitoring of how public relations practitioners use online technologies and understand how to use them efficiently, this research claims that their indiscriminate and unconscious use of these tools will be difficult to continue and may negatively impact an organization (Brown, 2009; Henderson, Johnson, & Auld, 2013).

Issues of social media competence, the ethical considerations necessary for the deployment of online tools, how practitioners cope with ever-evolving tools, the problems they confront, and how they overcome them are absent from research undertaken in developed and even developing

nations (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, Carlson, Filieri, R., Jacobson, & Wang, 2021; Royle, & Laing, 2014). Ikpe and Olise (2010) suggest that some of the factors responsible for this unfortunate development range from cyber crisis, low penetration of New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) in developing countries like Nigeria and Ghana, poor funding of public relations departments, and poor power supply.

As a result, the purpose of this study is to discover whether Ghanaian public relations practitioners are leveraging the benefits of social media by using it as a communication channel for contact with their target audience and the influence on their work. Additionally, it seeks to ascertain the hurdles practitioners face, their strategies for overcoming them, and the skills and competencies necessary to address these obstacles.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study generally aimed to find out the use and influence of social media on public relations practice in Ghana. Specifically, it sought to:

1. explore the level of social media usage by public relations practitioners in Ghana;
2. examine the challenges associated with the use of social media from the perspective of public relations experts in Ghana;
3. examine the extent to which social media influences the performance of the public relations practitioner in Ghana;
4. determine how public relations practitioners measure and evaluate their social media activities.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to meet the research objectives, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How have Ghanaian public relations practitioners incorporated social media into their work?
2. What are the difficulties that public relations practitioners face when deploying social media?
3. How has social media influenced or enhanced public relations practices in the Ghanaian industry?
4. How do Ghanaian practitioners measure and evaluate the impact of social media on public relations practice?
5. How do public relations practitioners use social media to interact with their publics?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is important because it reveals realities concerning the use of social media in public relations in organizations in Ghana in the age of new and social media overflow.

According to Key (2005), public relations in the digital age demands understanding how your important constituents obtain and share information and then influence them at critical points. This necessitates tactics that embrace the digital age. Again, because of social media's profound influence on public relations practice (Valentini, Romenti, & Kruckeberg, 2016), one could argue that social media should be at the center of public relations activities because they have the potential to promote an organization's relationships through improved community relations. This means that the new era of communication brings new obstacles and opportunities. In other words, the immediacy, responsiveness, and dynamic presence of interaction in most modern media represent a tremendous opportunity for media relations practice.

For Scholarship, this study will provide tools to engage in academic discussions while contributing knowledge and teaching practice.

For public relations practitioners, this study is intended to keep them alert as to why and when challenges come up and therefore invites them to put in measures to counter future challenges.

This study will also serve as additional literature to future researchers and industry players who will study social media, especially issues regarding the measurement of social media activities by public relations experts and will aid the industry in measuring the impact of their social media campaign hence getting value for their money.

1.6 Scope of the Study

With the emergence of public relations groups within Ghanaian organizations, it is imperative to know whether practitioners have embraced and integrated social media into their practice or rely on traditional media. With the rapid growth of new technologies and the transformation of the world into a global village, it is vital to investigate how this convergence affects public relations.

This study will therefore focus on public relations practitioners in Ghana. Consequently, the study sampled twenty (20) public relations practitioners who are members of IPR Ghana (Institute of Public Relations). The IPR Ghana is Ghana's only governing body for public relations practitioners. The Institute began in 1972 as the Ghana Public Relations Association (PRAG). On December 6, 1991, PRAG was restructured and backed by a Code of Professional Standards and Byelaws, establishing the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), Ghana, registered as a professional body under the Professional Bodies Registration Decree of 1973.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five chapters:

Chapter 1 focused on the background of the study, the problem statement leading to the conduct of this study, the purpose, objectives, research questions, and significance of the study.

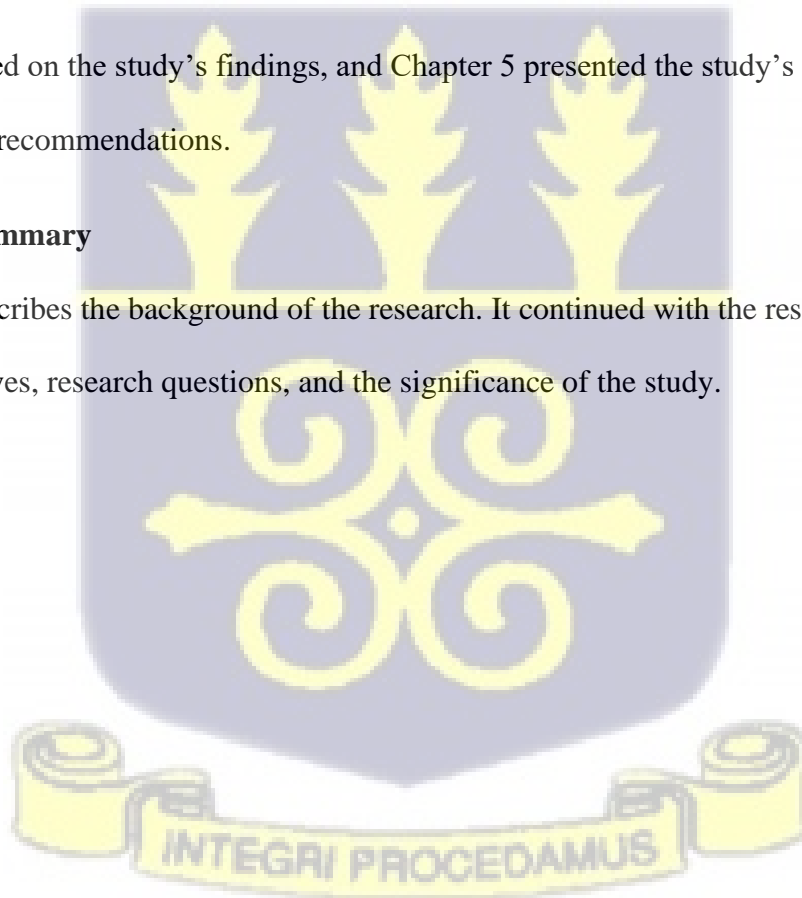
Chapter 2 dealt with reviewing the literature and theoretical framework underlying this study.

Chapter 3 looked at methodology. It included the research design, research approach, sampling technique and sample size, data collection approach instruments, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 focused on the study's findings, and Chapter 5 presented the study's summary, conclusion, and recommendations.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the background of the research. It continued with the research problem, research objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical foundations of the study and the related literature. It begins by defining and presenting Kent and Taylor's (1998; 2002) dialogic communication theory and the Uses and Gratification theory. After discussing the study's theoretical underpinnings, pertinent literature is reviewed. The chapter engages significant literature and discusses them in a straightforward narrative.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the underlying theories that underpin this investigation. Scholars have devised ideas to explain why certain events occur at specific periods. Venable (2006) defines theory as the embodiment of human knowledge statements in a form that applies to both the physical world, in which humans act on their knowledge, and the theoretical world, in which researchers concur on or reject existing knowledge and construct new knowledge in the form of theories.

2.2.1 Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

According to UGT, individuals seek out media that provide them with the satisfaction they require (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985). The media consumption habits of an audience are determined by the demands they aim to satisfy (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). UGT is a theory that researchers use to better understand how consumers consume information (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007).

While UGT has been applied to traditional media channels such as newspapers, radio broadcasts, and television (Luo, Chea, & Chen, 2011), rising research applies UGT to the demands and satisfaction associated with social media or social media platforms (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Ku, Chu, & Tseng, 2013).

According to the notion, media consumption satisfies five major sorts of needs. These include self-discovery, meaning, amusement, social development, and interpersonal connectivity. To begin, the phrase “purpose value” refers to the values that individuals gain from their life achievements (Cheung et al., 2011; Leung & Wei, 2000). Self-discovery refers to the sense of fulfilment associated with membership in an online community (Cheung et al., 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Additionally, preserving interpersonal ties refers to the advantages gained by an individual through building and keeping collaborative relationships with other members of an online community (Cheung et al., 2011). The phrase “social enhancement” refers to the values acquired by an individual due to a positive self-image and acceptance by an online community (Cheung et al., 2011). Additionally, the entertainment value of an online community takes into account the exhilaration associated with membership (Chen et al., 2013; Pai & Arnott, 2013). According to Severin and Tankard (2001), UGT helps inform users about the media’s uses and functions. Three objectives guide the development of uses and gratification theory:

1. To describe how people use media to meet their needs.
2. To ascertain the rationale for a person’s media use.
3. To identify the effects of an individual’s media use.

Furthermore, the theory explains that people do not become vulnerable to social media but rather use it to obtain some form of satisfaction. Numerous studies have examined the UGT of specific Facebook activities (Krause, North, & Heritage, 2014; Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017).

Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) also used UGT in their study to investigate networking among college students who use social media to make new friends and re-connect with old ones.

The UGT explains why people use social media tools and claims to fill an unmet need (Hicks, Comp, Horovitz, Hovarter, Miki, & Bevan 2012).

2.2.2 Assumptions and Tenets of Uses and Gratification Theory

The first assumption is that people are self-aware of the communication channels that meet their needs. This assumption implies that audiences make deliberate choices about communication channels based on their motivations. According to studies, individuals use a particular social media platform because it was recommended to them or want to stay connected with friends (Karimi, Khodabandelou, Ehsani & Ahmad 2014). The second premise is that people determine and use media to meet their needs and may choose which media to use based on those needs. Thirdly, media users are influenced by a variety of factors, such as their environment or state of mind, and are likely to choose a particular communication channel due to these factors. The fourth premise is that the media must compete for attention, selection, and use with other modes of communication. The fifth premise is that individuals can articulate their motivations for utilizing the media. This means that media users can justify their use of the media to fulfil a particular desire.

2.2.3 Criticisms Against the Uses and Gratifications Theory

A major criticism of UGT is that concepts such as “needs” are not adequately explained. It has also been criticized as a tool for gathering data (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Lometti, Reeves, & Bybee (1977) also criticize this theory, saying there is an active audience assumption. Media consumers are no longer viewed as passive consumers but as active participants who select and make sense of media information and make informed decisions about which media to consume.

The media is used for various purposes, including entertainment, relaxation, education, and social contact. This active nature of audiences makes public relations practitioners use social media to test that dialogue.

2.2.4 Importance of Theory to Study

Whiting and Williams (2013) assert a lack of understanding regarding why people use social media and what they use them for. Scholars believe that the evolution of the internet will result in new roles. The Uses and Gratification Theory is predicated on this diversification of media consumption. According to Ruggiero (2000), the UGT allows researchers to discover and understand mediated communication's significance. These new media, especially social media, come with new options, making the theory ideal for explaining users' needs and gratifications.

2.3 Kent and Taylor's Dialogic Theory of Public Relations

Kent and Taylor's Dialogic theory of public relations is the second theory underpinning this research as propounded by Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework to better understand the relationship between the internet and public relations. They investigated a two-way connection between organizations and their publics via the internet. The dialogic communication theory evolved out of an examination of interpersonal theory and relational communication variables such as trust, empathy, and sympathy, as well as other variables studied by scholars (Stewart, 1978), ethicists (Burbules, 1993), and educators (Phillips & Napan, 2016). The relational approach places a premium on relationship building in public relations (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Applying dialogic theory to public relations requires organizations to develop open relationships with their constituents rather than remain closed.

Numerous authors have studied the impact of the internet and social media on public relations since its inception. The conversation has become an increasingly important aspect of public relations due to social media's two-way communication capabilities, with much research on digital communication focusing on this subject in recent years. Kent and Taylor's (1998) theoretical framework is seminal in this regard, as it has remained at the heart of the majority of subsequent studies on websites and social media from a public relations perspective. However, it is not the only one to examine the internet's level of dialogue and interaction.

Kent and Taylor (1998) set up a framework of principles to research the use of dialogue on websites. With the evolution of the internet into social media, interest in applying these principles to public relations practice has grown. While not all dialogue features are necessary for dialogic interaction, the more dialogue features are present, the stronger the dialogic bond (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002) identified five (5) principles of dialogic communication:

a. Easy to Use

This refers to the flexibility of social media applications that makes it possible for the public to navigate social media sites. When the public visits an organization's website, it seeks information to satisfy a specific need. Kent and Taylor (1998) argue that a website that is navigable by the public when seeking information is ideal for building relationships via the internet. He further argues that websites should be dynamic and interactive to make inquiries and pursue dialogic conversations.

b. Return Visits Generation

This principle highlights the importance of repeat visitations and recommends that users be encouraged to return to a website if they find it interesting. The frequency with which users

return to a website reveals how useful the information was or whether it provided a forum for users to ask questions and receive more precise responses.

c. Conservation of visitors.

The third principle, visitor conservation, is predicated on the notion that users should be encouraged to remain on the site. According to Kent and Taylor (1998), organizations should avoid using third-party links (e.g., pop-ups) that redirect visitors away from the organization's website. Visitors to a website should be valued; they come to the site to take advantage of what the site has to offer, not to “search for other sites.” If a visitor leaves the site via another link, he or she may never return. The objective is to keep visitors on the organization's website; hence, the website should be interesting, instructive, and valuable to the organization's constituents (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

d. Dialogic Loop

The frequency with which users return to a website reveals how useful the information was or whether it provided a forum for users to ask questions and receive more precise responses.

e. Usefulness of information.

Organizational websites should strive to be the primary source of information for their audiences. According to the concept of utility of information, organizations' websites should give valuable information relevant to their audiences and information consistent with their audiences' interests, values, and concerns (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Additionally, the material should be relevant to their intended audiences.

Kent and Taylor (2002) further identified some principles that overlap due to their communicative orientation; they are:

1. Mutuality is concerned with accepting equality-based organization-public relations, in contrast to bargaining, where there is a winner and a loser, parties involved in dialogue must have equal opportunities.
2. Propinquity involves spontaneous interactions with the public so that discussions are deliberate and the public feels part of the building process.
3. Empathy refers to the support given and confirmation of the interests of an organization's public hence seeking the ultimate good of the organization's public by sharing their feelings and experiences.
4. Risk entails willingly engaging in one-on-one interactions with individuals and the general public on their terms. While Leich and Neilson (1997) recognize the genuine risk that dialogue entails, participants also accept the risk of "vulnerability" and "unanticipated emergent consequences."
5. Commitment has to do with an organization's commitment and eagerness to engage in dialogue with its constituents, i.e., its genuineness and commitment to the public interest.

Finally, Kent and Taylor (1998) addressed the potential and limits of technology's role in building and managing relationships, stating that technology "can neither create nor destroy relationships; rather it is how the technology is used that influences organization-public relationships" (p.324). In comparison, while websites were well-positioned to promote dialogic communication and serve as a vehicle for relationship building, neither was guaranteed; so, Kent and Taylor outlined principles of dialogic communication that companies might employ to help achieve both.

2.3.1 Criticisms Against the Kent and Taylor's Dialogic Theory of Public Relations

The first criticism is directed mostly at the ideas of dialogic communication research, which were introduced in Kent and Taylor's (1998) work. As previously noted, the authors distinguished between two-way symmetrical communication, which places a premium on processes and procedures, and dialogic communication, which they defined as a distinct type of relational contact based on dialogue's description as "product rather than process" (p. 323).

Taylor and Kent (2014; see also Kent, 2013; Kent & Lane, 2017; Kent & Theunissen, 2016) chastised researchers for failing to distinguish between two-way symmetrical communication, dialogic communication, and dialogue, and for concluding that describing specific characteristics and functions of websites, blogs, and social media constitutes evidence of dialogue. Taylor and Kent (2014), for example, stated that "the most significant fault in how conversation has been investigated in web-based public relations has been the treatment of dialogue features as a sequence of categories that had to be present in order for dialogue to occur" (p. 388).

2.3.2 Importance of Theory to Study

Recent research has shown that applying Kent and Taylor's Dialogic Theory of Communication to organizational internet sites is an efficient way to determine how these sites make connections with their audiences (Esrock & Leichty, 1998, 2000; Kent & Taylor, 2003; Kent, Park & Reber, 2008; Taylor, Kent & White, 2001; Taylor & White, 2003 Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009). Because organizational social media applications and websites are similar in that they are both online and marketed as relationship-building tools, several researchers have investigated how social media tools facilitate online relationship building. As far as this study is concerned, this theory also tests the assumptions for using UGT and helps us understand whether dialogue and interactivity have been achieved through media for satisfying a specific want. Ultimately, researchers can use

this theory to investigate social media platforms' two-way interaction and relationship-building capabilities.

3.1 Related Studies

This section reviews pertinent literature and discusses key concepts from previous research on the Uses and Gratification Theory of Communication and Dialogic Communication Theory. It examines works that analyze public relations practitioners' use of social media and other web-based platforms for communication and relationship building with their public.

Organizations and their constituents can now engage in rapid and sophisticated interactions through the internet. As a result of technological advancements, the internet's reach continues to expand, and it has evolved into a viable tool for public relations professionals. Because it facilitates mass audiences to be reached regardless of the physical location, the internet is an ideal medium for public relations (Abbate, 2000; Hill & White, 2000; Wright, 2001; Gnanasambandam, Madgavkar, Kaka, Manyika, Chui, Bughin, & Gomes, 2012). The internet has several advantages over traditional news sources such as radio, broadcast TV, and papers as a new communication medium. The internet has one advantage over these more traditional forms of media because it is difficult to regulate through a gatekeeper, allowing for a nearly limitless range of usage (Kaye & Johnson, 2003). Because of the internet's unique nature, any form of communication interception is impossible. Without using a third party, the two parties can connect directly through their websites, Facebook pages, or Twitter accounts.

Furthermore, the internet is the most cost-effective communication medium between organizations and their constituents. The internet, in particular, has reduced the cost of marketing and advertising by allowing businesses to cut costs while simultaneously reaching a large number of people across multiple platforms. Furthermore, the internet has consistently increased

the opportunities for public relations practitioners to attract, persuade, and motivate their target audience (Heath, 1998; Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016). Additionally, as a medium of communication for issue-oriented individuals, the internet has developed into a powerful platform for new topics (Quelch & Klein, 1996; Heath, 1998).

3.1.1 Incorporation and Use of social media in Public Relations

Olinski and Szamrowski (2021) studied Polish public benefit organizations' (PBO) use of Facebook in managing stakeholder engagement. The study included 876 entities, grouped into four groups based on their size. The impact of Facebook posts was then examined. Various statistical procedures, such as descriptive statistics, and multiple regression analysis, were applied for this goal. Despite social media's undeniable benefits, the findings revealed that public benefit groups only exploit a small percentage of its potential. The role of Facebook, the most popular service, in increasing organizational revenue from 1% PIT deductions appears to be secondary.

Andoh-Quainoo and Annor-Antwi (2015) studied organizations' use of Facebook. Purposive sampling was employed to choose four Ghana Club 100 financial services industry companies. Data collection was accomplished by content analysis, while data analysis was accomplished through both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The findings revealed that, while all of the selected companies frequently use Facebook as a public relations tool, there is a greater reliance on one-way communication, resulting in very little interaction to build relationships and create a stronger bond between the organization and the public. With few customer reactions, the engagement is primarily between the company, its consumers, and the general public. The researchers advocated for more two-way communication between organizations and their stakeholders.

Wigley and Zhang (2011) conducted a study on social media by public relations practitioners for crisis preparation in their personal lives in 2011. The researchers polled members of the Public Relations Society of America's public relations practitioners (PRSA). According to survey respondents, 71% of the people they connect with the most on social media are potential customers, with the news media coming in second (61%). According to the study, fewer than a quarter of respondents worked in companies where one or more people were exclusively responsible for handling the organization's social media.

Eyrich, Padman, and Sweetser (2008) surveyed practicing public relations professionals on their use of 18 social media tools and their thoughts about the rise of social media trends in public relations. An online survey was used to determine the use of social media tools and communication technologies by public relations practitioners. Practitioners were asked about their use of social media and its perceived prevalence within the industry. The researchers focused on a central metropolitan area with a considerable population of public relations practitioners, ranging from worldwide public relations firms and multinational organizations with extensive public relations departments to non-profits and boutique public relations firms. Nine hundred twenty-four email invites were issued to the active email accounts of these respondents. Despite this, only 283 practitioners responded to the survey.

Findings showed that practitioners have utilized nearly six different social media technologies professionally on average: email, intranet, blogs, video conferencing, podcasts, and video sharing (PDAs).

Djabanor (2019) explored how Ghanaian telecom network operators connect with the public via social media. By conducting a content analysis of selected tweets from MTN Ghana and

Vodafone Ghana's Twitter profiles, the study sought to assess the degree of engagement between the firms and their respective clients on Twitter.

Additionally, it sought to discover how the two telecom companies communicate with their customers and whether they use the platform to suit the public's informational needs.

The study found that telecom companies and their customers kept in touch via questions, inquiries, and complaints. Customers were also given information before they asked for it, demonstrating a proactive approach to meeting their information needs. MTN Ghana had more interaction on their page than Vodafone Ghana, indicating more responsive to their customers. However, the study did conclude that both companies used Twitter to build long-term customer relationships.

Lee, Dozier, and Sargent (2015) investigated the role of public relations practitioners as social media experts and discovered that some participants disseminated their messages via social media. Furthermore, some people admitted spending an inordinate time on social media and less on other activities. This result was obtained through face-to-face interviews with twenty (20) practitioners.

The study concluded that social media is a dominant part of public relations practice and relies heavily on practitioners. Therefore, their roles as public relations practitioners and social media practitioners become challenging to differentiate.

Komodromos (2014) researched how social media tools and technology, such as blogs, social networking, and microblogging, are used. The study used a hybrid methodology, analyzing data both statistically and qualitatively. A selective sample of 25 senior public relations practitioners from various sectors in Cyprus was selected using a mixed methodological approach. The

findings revealed that understanding how public relations practitioners use social media tools in Cyprus organizations can improve branding, brand loyalty, and marketing, increase customer conversation, and the ability to mine and analyze customer data more effectively. Previous research has described social media implementation as a yes-or-no line of argument. On the other hand, this research is groundbreaking in that it investigates how public relations practitioners in Cyprus use social media (and to what extent) and how this may benefit their organization.

Dornyo (2014) found that PR practitioners in Ghana use Facebook profiles for their organizations because they consider it essential in communicating with the public. They concluded that the sampled organizations' Facebook profiles were very engaging and allowed the public to make inquiries. This interactivity increased the public's trust in them. Despite competition among organizations with Facebook pages posing problems for each other, such as spreading falsehoods, creating fake accounts, and its attendant consequences, Facebook pages are needed to quickly dispel such news and set the record straight before it becomes a full-blown crisis.

Achor, Nwachukwu, and Nkwocha (2015) assessed the impact of social media on information management in public relations. The study looked at 225 certified public relations professionals in Nigeria and discovered that almost everyone uses social media at work. Furthermore, the study discovered that social media had aided public relations practitioners in their gatekeeping feature. Furthermore, the study discovered that Facebook, Twitter, and blogs are Nigerian public relations professionals preferred social media channels. The study, however, did not reveal the extent or frequency with which Nigerian public relations practitioners use social media.

In a similar study of PR practitioners in Malaysia, Gabriel and Koh (2016) found that 84.6% of surveyed informants used social media to interact with the public. They also found out that the practitioners communicated with their public through value statements, mission and vision statements, and regular updates. Social media platforms were the most used, as 26 (100%) of informants used them.

Saxton and Waters (2014) discovered that consumers favored dialogic modes of communication in a study on why stakeholders choose Facebook as a medium for participation. This was accomplished by a content analysis of 1,000 updates from Nonprofit Times 100 organizations. These findings were analyzed in terms of their practical and theoretical consequences for public relations practice.

3.1.2 Social Media Influence on Public Relations

Gordon (2010) researched the use, value, and influence of social media on public relations practitioners in the Fox Cities of the United States of America. The study's goal was to determine how practitioners used social media and how it affected public relations practice. The study was quantitative, with data gathered through a survey.

Informants agreed that social media had changed how their organizations interacted with constituents, particularly external constituents. Gordon (2010) discovered that social media platforms are perceived as less factual, trustworthy, and true than traditional news organizations. Furthermore, the survey discovered that, despite public relations practitioners' belief that tracking and analyzing communication about their firms was critical, they were not doing so.

El-Kasim & Idid (2017) supported social media in public relations practice in both developed and developing countries. As a result, practitioners are urged to leverage online public relations

to establish and shape cordial relationships with their strategic constituents. Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton, and Sweetser (2010) found that online public relations were a critical public relations instrument and that an organization could more effectively monitor public opinion, action and criticism through its use.

Bortree and Seltzer (2009) studied environmental advocacy groups' Facebook pages to ascertain the dialogic strategies employed on the groups' accounts. The researchers discovered that advocacy groups used usefulness information, simplicity of use, and visit conservation as dialogic tactics in a purposive sample of 50 environmental advocacy Facebook pages.

Additionally, the researchers noticed that advocacy organizations were not generating return visits or employing dialogic loop methods. The researchers discovered that the groups could significantly enhance the dialogic strategies utilized by environmental advocacy organizations on Facebook to build ties with the public.

3.1.3 Social Media Competencies of The Public Relations Practitioner

Molleda, Moreno, and Navarro (2017) examined the skills that European practitioners must possess to perform their roles and the qualifications required to effectively manage social media in the PR sphere. Practitioners' ability to use social media effectively is lacking, leading to underutilization. These findings came from research conducted with researchers from six countries: Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. A mixed-methods approach was used to conduct the research.

First, there was a survey of 2,710 practitioners from 43 countries, followed by four focus group discussions and 53 interviews. The results indicated that communication professionals in Europe did not seem to have a high level of knowledge and skills regarding social media usage as public

relations professionals. All communication managers reported moderate knowledge and skills needed to use digital technologies for communication properly. Moreover, a significant number of interviewees agreed that they needed to improve their competence regarding the use of social media.

According to Neill and Lee (2016), practitioners can advance and influence an organization through seven distinct social media positions. Among the positions available are social media technician, social listening and analytics, online media relations, policymaker, employee recruiter, internal social media manager, and law enforcement (Neill & Lee, 2016).

Scholars have advocated secondary positions such as media relations professional, communication liaison, or agency profile to assist the public relations agency's job (Broom & Dozier, 1986). Other recent role classifications include key policy and strategic advisor, monitor and evaluator, issue management expert, troubleshooter problem solver, and communication technician (Beurer-Zullig, Fieseler, & Meckel, 2009; Vieira & Grantham, 2007; Moss, Newman, & DeSanto, 2005), all of which are intended to aid in the effective management of social media.

Numerous analysts believe that contemporary marketing methods, particularly those concentrated on social media, affect contemporary public relations. As a result of their interaction with social media, public relations professionals' responsibilities as social media administrators become evident. They are critical to the organization's social media presence and wield significant influence within their companies.

While numerous studies have been conducted in the field to determine the value of social media managers, most of them have focused on the relationship between social media performance and the social media managers themselves, as well as the skills that social media managers are

expected to have possessed. Anani-Bossman, & Bruce (2021), in their analyses of the perceived impact of globalization on public relations practice in Ghana, examined how Ghanaian PR practitioners are utilizing the opportunities that globalization offers while dealing with the challenges it brings. The qualitative interview technique was used to interview five (5) public relations practitioners from the non-banking financial services sector.

The findings indicated that public relations practitioners are well aware of the demands imposed by globalization. Communication infrastructure difficulties and a lack of technical skills pose a significant management challenge. The competition will be fierce as global corporations pour into the country. Practitioners' abilities, particularly in digital communication, and awareness of current norms of practice in an era of globalization must be upgraded.

The literature demonstrates the value of data analysis in eliciting audience insights and developing and evaluating communication tactics (DiStaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011; Grates, 2016; Jain, 2016). Kent, Carr, Husted, and Pop (2011) assert that technology advancements benefit pupils. With modern technologies such as analytics in the hands of communication experts, it becomes easier to comprehend stakeholders and the publics, and students develop into more assertive professionals.

3.1.4 Challenges Encountered in Social Media Deployment and Use

Some public relations firms are incorporating social media into their operations. This is considered a positive development because it provides an avenue for dialogue and participation due to the openness that characterizes social media usage. However, practitioners fail to consider the challenges and conflicts that may arise between the openness of social media and best practices regarding management.

Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) conducted two international surveys in Australia and Europe to determine how firms in different nations used social media. The study's conclusions came from in-depth interviews with a select group of social media experts. Organizations and practitioners, according to polls, predominantly use Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, and Instagram. While informants were aware of social media, they unanimously stated that practitioners lacked a social media policy. In Australia, 19% relied on unmanaged instructions and emails to govern their social media use. Additionally, most businesses did not take the monitoring and assessment of social media inputs and outcomes seriously.

Einwiller and Steilen (2015) discovered that the companies sampled in their study of large US companies' Facebook and Twitter pages were not fully embracing social media opportunities to demonstrate their willingness to interact with and assist their stakeholders in analyzing complaints and complaint responses on their Facebook and Twitter pages. The reactivity of organizations is limited, and corporations frequently attempt to divert complainants away from social networking sites. The most frequently used strategy is to request additional information from complainants if the information provided is insufficient. Less frequently, complaint-satisfaction-promoting response strategies are used. They fix the situation, connect the complainant with someone who can assist in resolving the issue, and offer appreciation to the complainant.

According to studies, practitioners are disappointed with social media's alternatives and frightened of embracing technology (Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006). Rook (2010) exemplifies practitioners abusing or misusing social media.

He discusses Toyota's role in a safety catastrophe that culminated in the recall of over eight million vehicles. Toyota's public relations nightmare began in December 2009 with the announcement of a Facebook video contest to promote the Yaris small vehicle brand. The competition's winner attracted public outrage over perceived misogyny in certain sections of the video. Such events reveal communicators' inefficient use of social media.

3.1.5 Risks associated with Social Media Incorporation in Public Relations

According to Aggarwal (2011), social media use can deliver huge benefits. This same social networking platforms may expose its users to hazards such as lack of trust, privacy, and security (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012). Using social media to promote a product or service raises new questions about confidentiality and data protection. Businesses must be aware of risks and take the necessary steps to limit their liability related to collecting, using, and maintaining personal data. Furthermore, privacy concerns have caused havoc on several of the biggest social media marketing firms' public relations efforts, resulting in substantial corporate image degradation (Advertising Age, 2000).

Social media effectively converts consumers into marketers and advertisers. Customers can exert either good or negative pressure on a business, its products, and services, depending on how the firm is presented online and the quality of the items and services offered to the client (Roberts & Kraynak 2008). Since the advent of Web 2.0 technology, user product reviews have grown in popularity on the internet, having a significant impact on e-commerce (Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld 2008). They are invaluable for clients making online transactions (Ghose, Ipeirotis, & Li, 2009). Adverse post replies are one feature of social media that is particularly detrimental to businesses. Customers or rivals dissatisfied with their service or product can share exceedingly insulting posts or videos. There is little a business can do to avoid this (Cheung, Lee, & Thadani

2009). On the other hand, negative or other negative input cannot be disregarded. Social media channels must be carefully handled to respond to and neutralize unfavourable posts in real-time.

According to a recent study, negative online comments from stakeholders can negatively affect a company's brand (Ji, Li, North & Liu, 2017). Unfavourable social media comments can go viral, negatively impacting organizations. Social media monitoring should be required at this point, as businesses must respond quickly to unsolicited comments. A company's reputation would be safeguarded if the appropriate response was given at the right time.

3.1.6 Ethics and social media

Einwiller and Steilen (2015) discovered that the companies sampled in their study of large US companies' Facebook and Twitter pages were not fully embracing social media opportunities to demonstrate their willingness to interact with and assist their stakeholders in analyzing complaints and complaint responses on their Facebook and Twitter pages. The reactivity of organizations is limited, and corporations frequently attempt to divert complainants away from social networking sites. The most frequently used strategy is to request additional information from complainants if the information provided is insufficient. Less frequently, complaint-satisfaction-promoting response strategies are used. They fix the situation, connect the complainant with someone who can assist in resolving the issue, and offer appreciation to the complainant.

Several instances of unethical social media users have made headlines. For instance, Justine Sacco, InterActive Corp's (IAC) Public Relations Director, tweeted before flying to South Africa in 2013. He wrote, "Going to Africa. I hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding! I'm white!" (Ronson, 2015, p. 68). The tweet went viral in less than an hour. IAC issued a statement

attempting to contain the damage, stating: “The offensive comment does not reflect the views or values of IAC, we take this issue very seriously, and we have parted ways with the employee in question” (Biddle, 2013, p. 1).

Toledano and Wolland (2011) studied the ethical issues surrounding professional communicators’ use of social media.

They uncovered significant ethical issues for the profession due to their investigation into the experiences of New Zealand practitioners. Additionally, the data demonstrated how social media exacerbates ethical difficulties that public relations professionals have traditionally encountered in an offline environment. Simultaneously, it demonstrates how social media enables practitioners to impact corporate ethics in ways that conventional practitioners have wished for an extended period.

They discovered that, even though social media allows a lack of transparency and makes deceit more accessible, public relations might be able to foster ethical contact with stakeholders and earn a more prominent place as an ethical leader.

3.1.7 Social Media Monitoring

At times, the growth of social media and associated user-generated material poses a considerable challenge to public relations practitioners. Organizations lose control over their information due to the ability of other media users to respond online. According to the literature, one of the critical issues for public relations practitioners is a lack of complete control over the content posted on social media (Wright & Hinson, 2008; Macnamara, 2010; McLennan & Howell, 2010; DiStaso, McCorkindale & Wright 2011). In other words, stakeholders can speak actively about organizations via personal social media accounts or by submitting comments on the

organizations' official social media pages. Simultaneously, stakeholders can aid in the growth of businesses by exchanging or transmitting the information. Other stakeholders, including employees, bloggers, consumers, and the community, have been allowed to create material for public consumption that may contain adverse information or news about a particular organization. Stakeholder participation online, particularly on social media, exposes firms to internal and external crises (DiStaso, McCorkindale & Wright, 2011). According to a recent study, negative online comments from stakeholders can negatively affect a business's brand (Ji, Li, North & Liu, 2017). Unfavourable comments can quickly spread on social media, casting a negative light on businesses. Social media monitoring should become necessary at this stage, as businesses must rapidly respond to undesired statements, complaints, or accusations. Responding responsibly and promptly would protect a business's reputation.

3.1.8 Measuring and Evaluating the Impact of social media On Public Relations Practice

Nicoli and Komodromos (2013) argue that public relations practitioners are faced with the challenge of incorporating social media into public relations and are also tasked with finding acceptable ways of measuring and evaluating the impact of social media on their activities as practitioners and organization as a whole. As social media usage grows, the relevance of creating standards and recognizing the importance of measurement increases proportionately.

Finally, research highlights the need of looking beyond simple counts like likes, follows, and comments to more comprehensive outcome indicators like audience engagement, voice share, and mood.

Yang and Kung (2009) developed a four-component blog engagement assessment scale that allows organizations to assess the level of interaction of their stakeholders on their organizational

blogs. In addition to measuring, other studies have focused on benchmarking to help document and guide social media use and planning.

Macnamara (2010) conducted a two-year research project into the influence of digital media in the practice of public relations that also has implications for the practice of its evaluation. He found that contemporary audiences desire increased involvement in conversations and value transparency in business practices. Therefore, the social and ethical evaluation elements are more valued in the online environment. Macnamara's (2010) research also showed that new forms of media and monitoring analysis beyond numbers are needed to incorporate social media posts. The online environment has created new challenges for practitioners, who must be even more aware of increased online scrutiny when an organization's reputation is more vulnerable.

In recent years, social media in public relations has skyrocketed. According to Wright and Hinson's (2017) 12-year longitudinal study on social and emerging media usage, 99% of practitioners employed some form of digital media in their public relations and communications work. Most of that time was spent on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Additionally, while 63% of practitioners agreed that public relations should be responsible for monitoring and managing social and emerging media and an even higher majority (75%) felt that this should be the job of the public relations department, not marketing (4%), or digital media (15%).

Over the course of the study, practitioners acknowledged that social and digital media have influenced their everyday operations, particularly engagement with external audiences. The authors concluded that the sector as a whole was slipping behind in terms of measurement (Wright and Hinson, 2017).

4.0 Gaps in Literature

Scholars have long extolled the virtues of social media in public relations, claiming that it enhances practitioners' prestige power (Diga & Kelleher, 2009), connects people, promotes public relations campaigns and interventions (Morley, 2002), and has a significant impact on the formation of relationships between organizations and their publics (Diga & Kelleher, 2009). (Pavlik, 2000).

According to James (2007), it is vital to assess how new technology facilitates or impedes traditional public relations activities and responsibilities, such as media relations, reputation management, problem and crisis management, and social media management, to name a few.

This study stated that public relations' social media usage had unintended repercussions. Among other things, this research asserts that social media may appear to hinder public relations objectives. Most importantly, the study adds a contextual/geographic dimension to the existing literature, which is especially crucial since social media is still a relatively new phenomenon in this world.

Additionally, the study sheds light on public relations practitioners' difficulties when interacting with social media. The current study is an important step in comprehending the ramifications of social media use on public relations roles and practices.

While many public relations practitioners admit that new media technology has revolutionized the business, the changes have been so rapid that practitioners are scrambling to adapt.

According to Broom (2009), one of the challenges facing public relations practitioners today is effectively representing organizations in the new media ecosystem.

4.1 Summary

The chapter's literature review provided information on the concepts of social media use in public relations and the various attempts by researchers to apply social media and its interactive elements to practice. The literature review reveals that public relations practitioners use social media platforms to communicate with their audiences to meet their dialogic needs.

Other research should examine the competencies and skills necessary to navigate the constantly evolving field of social media in order to avoid obstacles and crises.

The theoretical framework for this study is the Uses and Gratifications theory and Kent and Taylor's Dialogic theory of public relations. These frameworks were used to determine how social media can be used to improve and achieve desired communication between an organization and its constituents.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology employed in the study. Kothari (2004) describes research methodology as studying how research is done scientifically. The methodology describes the steps necessary for addressing a research problem. These steps include the research strategy, the population and sample, the data collection instrument, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

This study was conducted qualitatively to do an in-depth analysis of the information sought and allow the researcher to probe and quiz informants or follow up with questions when there was a need for clarity in the responses given. According to Creswell (1994) and Kothari (2004), qualitative research addresses problems that have a lot to do with quality; it is done to assess the perceptions and opinions of human behaviour.

Qualitative research can assist in answering “how” and “why” questions by examining environmental events, reviewing everyday routines, and monitoring interactions that allow for the investigation of social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena in their natural habitats (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). Additionally, the qualitative technique enables a more in-depth understanding of the diverse perspectives of the individuals being researched. Qualitative research enables researchers to pick up on intricacies in human experience. Qualitative research enabled the researcher to learn about public relations practitioners’ perspectives and experiences to better understand engagement and dialogue via social media in their own words by identifying their procedures, processes, and how these professionals think about various terms in the context of this dissertation.

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a qualitative approach and an in-depth interview to elicit information about the use of social media in public relations practice and the dynamics involved. It examined their use of social media for public relations, the difficulties inherent in social media for public relations practice in Ghana, and the impact social media use had on their performance.

A qualitative approach was chosen because the subject matter concerned how practitioners use social media and how they use it for public relations, necessitating a thorough investigation. It also has to do with the practitioners' experiences and perceptions, which can be gleaned more fully through in-depth interviews.

The provision of thorough accounts of what occurs in the informants' life is a principle of qualitative research. While qualitative researchers seek to ascertain the views and interpretations held by study participants in order to know the world through their eyes, the study's sample size will be significantly less than that of a quantitative technique such as a survey. As a result, developing a comprehensive, holistic understanding typically requires a smaller number of community members (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Of course, qualitative findings do not represent the entire community; therefore, the researcher must avoid providing conclusions that can be generalized.

The words collected and analyzed cannot be considered objective because they are based on observations and interviews. Instead, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaa (2014) interpret findings based on their own experiences, personal values, beliefs, and attitudes. According to Davies and Dodd (2002), qualitative research rigor is not limited to structured, or uniform methods.

Qualitative research methods, which encourage flexibility, and incompleteness, do not lack credibility. However, qualitative researchers must outline the procedures they use to select participants and collect and analyze data to maintain rigor, credibility, and validity (Davies & Dodd, 2002).

3.2 Sources of Data

According to Kothari (2004), primary data are those that are collected for the first time and are thus unique. As a result, the researcher needed to identify specific individuals with specialized knowledge of the phenomenon being studied, as the research objectives stated unequivocally that public relations experts would be the subject of the study. The researcher gathered data through semi-structured interviews using interview guides he created and led. During the data collection process, interview sessions were conducted at the researcher's office, and other locations agreed upon by the researcher and the informants. The interviews lasted between ten and twenty-five minutes per respondent and took place at mutually agreed-upon locations and times.

Population and Sampling Technique

The term 'population' refers to the total number of things (or instances) of a particular type that are the subject of a study (Walliman, 2017). A study population is defined as all variables taken into account in any field of inquiry (Kothari, 2004). Following Walliman's (2017) definition, the population target for this study is all PR practitioners in Ghana who are members of (IPR) Ghana.

The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana is the country's only professional association for public relations practitioners, which is why informants must be members to be sampled.

Purposive sampling is the process of selecting a sample based on the researcher's understanding of the population, its components, and the nature of the study objectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Furthermore, Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) describe the “purposive sampling technique” as “the deliberate selection of a participant based on the subject's characteristics.” As a result, the researcher employed purposive sampling to locate and select participants with specialized knowledge of social media platforms and tactics for performing public relations tasks. To ensure a representative sample, the researcher randomly selected informants from the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana's list of public relations practitioners. Snowball sampling, or a referral system for finding professionals with similar backgrounds, was then used (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Using this method, the chances of finding practitioners across industries increased. Before being contacted for the interview, the sampled public relations practitioner was cross-checked from the list to see if they were registered members.

The study did not specify the sort of organization, size, or geographic location of informants. This was done to acquire a better knowledge of how practitioners from various sectors explain similar phenomena in order to bolster the findings.

3.4 Sample size

According to Kothari (2004), the sample size chosen by a researcher is determined by the researcher's objectives or purpose, the necessary data and their reliability, as well as the time and resources available for the research. Additionally, Borrego, Douglas, and Amelink (2009) argue that qualitative research requires a smaller sample size of the entire population in order to investigate a specific situation thoroughly.

Twenty (20) public relations practitioners who are members of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana were selected for this study. Membership in IPR is critical because it serves as the umbrella organization for all public relations practitioners and informants in Ghana. This sample size is justified by Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora's (2016) information power concept for qualitative studies. This concept argues for using a small number of participants who have sufficient information about the study (Malterud et al., 2016). The sample size was determined using the 2019 list of IPR Ghana members in good standing.

3.5 Research Instruments

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with public relations practitioners to extract information about their use of social media, its impact on their practice, the problems they encountered, and the skills necessary to use social media.

According to Mason (2002), a characteristic of semi-structured interviews that distinguishes them from structured interviews is their flexibility and fluid structure, as opposed to structured interviews, which follow a predetermined list of questions.

Additionally, Mason (2002) suggested that this was commonly done in order to ensure that questions were posed in a variety of ways and sequences. Scholars such as Nayak and Singh (2015) and Biggam (2015) have recognized structured (in which the researcher asks a predetermined set of questions to ensure sufficient concentration) semi-structured (in which the researcher asks questions based on pertinent points listed on the interview guide) and unstructured interviews (where participants express their own opinions based on the subject on board).

However, the study used semi-structured interviews to elicit primary data from twenty (20) public relations professionals, as they have sufficient expertise about social media and how to incorporate it into their business. They provided information that enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification. In general, semi-structured interviews are guided by pre-written interview guides and may include a high number of open-ended questions that allow for follow-up questions (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). The guide's questions were not strictly followed, as the informants' responses mostly dictated the direction of the conversation.

All informants were interviewed using the same interview guide. The interview began with an overview and rapport-building questions, followed by inquiries regarding personal definitions of social media and public relations, how they relate to interaction and relationships, how they connect with their publics, and the channels and strategies they use to engage them.

Individual and in-person interviews were conducted at the informants' offices and other mutually agreed-upon locations.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data was audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to generate themes that reflected the study's findings. Thematic analysis is a technique for detecting, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) contained within data. It organizes and describes the data set in detail in the simplest way possible. Additionally, it frequently goes beyond that and interprets various facets of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify significant or interesting themes based on the patterns found in the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Themes capture significant ideas that emerge from the data in relation to the research questions and

indicate a degree of patterning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were analyzed inductively in this study.

The responses of the informants were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Grbich (2007) defined thematic analysis as the pre-interpretation process of segmenting, categorizing, and relinking aspects of data. The study took an inductive approach to data analysis, deriving themes from the data's content. Braun and Clarke's (2012) approach to thematic analysis was used in this study. The process began with familiarization with the data gleaned from all of the public relations practitioners' interviews. This entailed taking notes on notable quotes or points pertinent to the study's research questions. The data set's recurring patterns were then used to generate codes, and these codes aided in interpreting the data and were subsequently synthesized into themes and further analyzed through explanation building.

Explanation building is a type of pattern matching that aims to analyze case study data by constructing a case study explanation (Yin, 2009). Explaining, in this context, refers to the process of constructing a set of causal links to explain how or why something happened (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The goal is to analyze the data and develop a theory to explain the phenomenon. To 'explain' a phenomenon, one must first establish a set of causal relationships. Coding, an important part of the qualitative analysis process, started as soon as the data was collected and continued throughout the collection and analysis process.

The information was divided into categories: social media use and deployment, challenges and risks associated with social media use, influences, and critical competencies required by social media users. Following that, the findings were discussed in relation to the research questions, the underlying theories, and other related studies.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations play a vital role in research methodology. Participants' consent, confidentiality, and the risks involved in participation must be explained to them (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

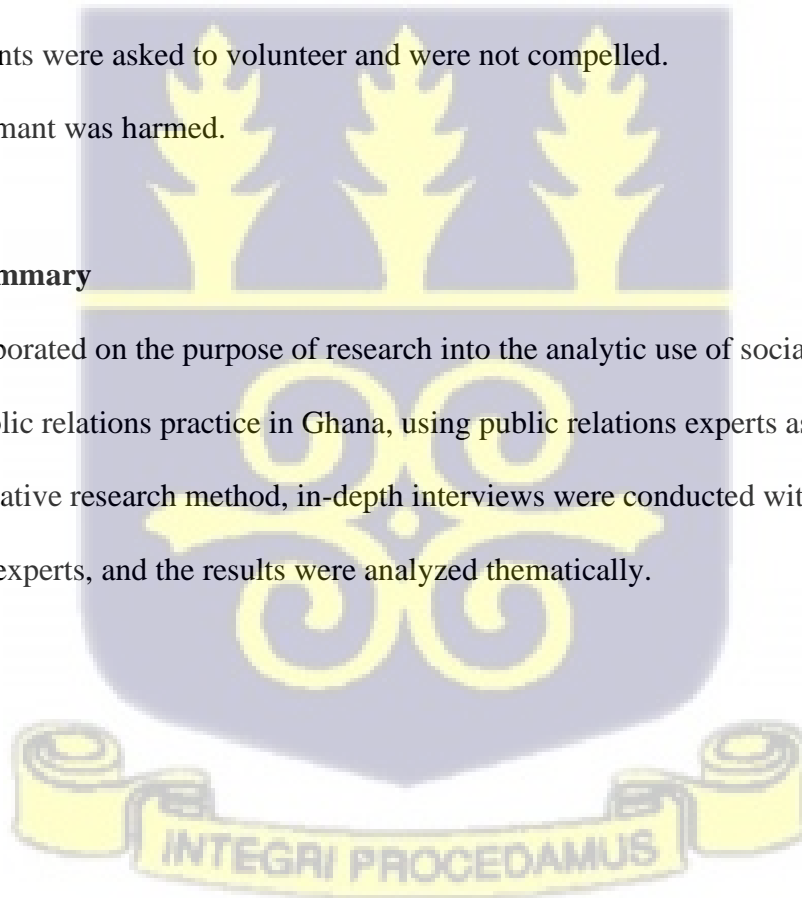
The purpose of the study was explained to all participants, and their agreement to participate voluntarily was obtained.

The researcher, therefore, ensured the following:

1. Informed consent was sought from participants.
2. Informants' confidentiality and identities were respected.
3. Participants were asked to volunteer and were not compelled.
4. No informant was harmed.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter elaborated on the purpose of research into the analytic use of social media and its influence on public relations practice in Ghana, using public relations experts as a case study. Through a qualitative research method, in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty (20) public relations experts, and the results were analyzed thematically.



CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings collected through interviewing a sample of public relations practitioners in Ghana. In all, twenty (20) interviews were conducted. All informants used social media as public relations professionals and are abreast with social media tools and trends.

The presentation and discussions that ensue in this chapter have been structured or done according to the specific objectives of this study.

4.1.1 Level of Social Media Usage and Influence

This research objective sought to find out how prevalent the use of social media was among public relations professionals and what tasks they performed with the tools available to them.

Data gathered indicated that all the informants knew about social media and were active users.

Eighteen of the informants mentioned some of the social media platforms they were active on.

Some of which were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Tumblr, and LinkedIn.

Also, they all explained that social media was critical when they were executing public relations roles. Informant 3 said:

I am on almost all the social media platforms, but I am very active on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Communication has evolved, so we must catch up and find sharper or efficient ways of catching attention. Everyone is going digital. People are selling and buying online, solving problems online, people are even reading newspapers online so social media presents an endless list of possibilities.

This assertion by informant 3 demonstrates that public relations practitioners have become acquainted with social media and even agree that it is a more efficient means of capturing their publics' attention.

As practitioners began to use social media regularly, they began to determine which platform to use based on their own needs and preferences while also taking into account their publics' social media consumption habits. Four informants agreed that as they began to incorporate social media tools into their practices, they noticed that some of their services performed poorly on specific platforms, primarily because their intended audiences were more active on other platforms.

Public relations practitioners have also become researchers because they can now tell which social media platform to deploy for a particular campaign or activity. Some organizations use a particular platform because it makes their publics on those platforms and makes targeting easier.

Informant 3 highlights this by saying:

I have done PR for more than a decade, and I think Facebook and Twitter are really efficient and fast ways of getting to your targets. Instagram too is good, but I don't see the fun in posting pictures and videos when people easily scroll and don't remember what they saw. You know, some platforms are for fashion, fitness and lifestyle kind of posts. My boss decided we move to Pinterest and for like a whole two months of posting and engaging users, telling our clients to hop on and enjoy the picture kind of thing our followership was less than hundred. But the Instagram platform kept swelling with followers, and so we had to adapt fast.

Findings also revealed that the type of social media platform used was dependent on the kind of media or information they wanted out there. For instance, Informant 19 is of the view that:

When it comes to Instagram, we like to post a lot of pictures because people would not be motivated to read long texts, especially because the outlook of Instagram does not make reading attractive. For a page like Twitter, we do not allow long texts. So, we use that when we want to engage our publics on interesting

topics and because more interaction means the likelihood that our discussion or brand will trend.

To shed more light on the above statement, Informant 19 describes the rationale for posting certain content on a social media platform. He said:

For example, if you are communicating a sports event like we do, we push a lot of content on Twitter and Facebook because a lot of trends tend to pop up there so it will not be prudent.... I mean it is not cool to do long write-ups. Pictures with short captions resonate a lot with sportspeople.

The ability of public relations practitioners to use social media to satisfy the needs and tastes of their publics gives a clear picture of how intensive social media use is within the practice of public relations.

Informants described their daily routines as platform administrators for their organizations. These tasks included posting hourly or daily updates, scanning for potential brand threats, researching and designing posters for their platforms, and responding to publics' questions. It is now simple to identify dissatisfied publics who use social media to air their grievances and quickly resolve them because social media makes everything public. A quick resolution reassures the publics that they matter. A few informants revealed that they have developed into social media experts as a result of the amount of time they spend managing the company brand in a digital space where their work is visible and scrutinized by all. Informant 16 narrates his daily routine as a social media expert for his organization:

When I get to work, I log into Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. I then go to google and type my organization's name to see who has mentioned us, why we have been mentioned. If all is good, then we are okay. However, if there is a negative comment, I trace to find the source and we deal with it immediately. There have been instances where I have had my team call an angry client to apologize because we can quickly get to them. Imagine social

media did not exist; a small problem can spread and do a lot of damage because response time may have passed.

Social media's ability to penetrate markets and give publics a chance to make inputs into brand strategy means that organizations are constantly on their toes, always looking out for online activities that can hurt their brand. According to informant 13, these are some of the functions he performs daily:

I create and maintain a database of clients I interact with, collect information on them and their needs so that we can meet such needs. I also monitor social media pages like Twitter and Facebook to find out whether externally created material by others speak well of the organization or otherwise. Then we can quickly do damage control if we are receiving negative feedback. I also respond to questions and comment on comments related to the brand. I also update blogs or websites, send emails, share promo videos on Facebook and conduct polls on Twitter and Facebook.

According to the informants' comments, they all use social media, which supports Eyrych, Padman, and Sweetser's (2008) assertion in their study on public relations practitioners' use of social media, which discovered that public relations practitioners use social media and integrate it into their public relations strategy.

Another interesting finding was that Facebook and Twitter were the most widely used social media platform by practitioners. Seventeen informants mentioned Facebook first, followed by Twitter and the other platforms. Informant 12 said, "Facebook is a lifesaver. It is the first platform I log on when I get to work. Then Twitter and the others. Facebook and Twitter are always adding new features to the outlook and design, and it is only right to hop on to what is in vogue."

This assertion by informant 12 is consistent with Wigley and Zhang's (2011) study of experts preferred social media platforms, which identified Twitter and Facebook as the most popular. It

is also consistent with Kharvi's (2017) findings that most experts prefer and are more familiar with Facebook and Twitter than other social media platforms.

Five of the informants explained that they were limited in tools for information dissemination, but social media now presents a rich supply of tools and tactics for managing information across platforms. Others added that now, information can be sent at the click of a button, and responses generated as quickly as possible. According to informant 15, "...that when radio and television were state-owned, there were not too many options to share information..."

Informant 3 added that "...social media have now provided a range of platforms through which professionals can get to their publics..."

PR professionals were asked to indicate how frequently they used social media in their practice and for what purposes. Seven informants stated that they engaged in online conversations via social media. Three informants agreed that live interaction enables refinement in order to strengthen relationships between organizations and their publics. Informant 20, in shedding more light on this, said:

We organize conversations by developing hashtags. People who want to take part in these conversations only need to mention the tag, and we see their contributions and questions. We give feedback immediately and provide guidelines to solving whatever problem is being discussed.

Public relations experts use social media for content creation and story-telling. Public relations practitioners can now tell their own stories instead of waiting for the media to run stories that may not be entirely true.

Organizations can now decide what to put out and when to do so. In so doing, they control the narrative (Sherwood, Nicholson, & Marjoribanks, 2017). Journalists rely heavily on social media influenced information when researching stories. They rely on information released by organizations via social media platforms instead of publishing information that may not be entirely accurate. According to informant 15:

My organization needed to break a story which had to do with one of our former managers. Apparently, he had conducted business after he left and denied it later. So, the people with whom he signed the agreement wanted to sue for breach of contract. They actually wanted to sue us the company. We quickly released an already published disclaimer that he was no longer a member of the company and that doing business with him would be at their own risk. The people seeing this quickly withdrew from suing and issued an apology through social media. Not long after, we saw publications concerning the matter exactly as it happened.

4.1.2 Social Media Influence on Performance of Public Relations Practitioners

Data gathered indicated that social media have impacted public relations practice significantly when it comes to performance. The majority of the informants explained that social media helps them create a better impression on their audience. Informant 17 said, “We are able to get the message to our target audience exactly the same way we want. We are able to tell our own stories without waiting on the media to do so for us.” Again, practitioners are excited about the prospects that social media provides as far as the presentation and refinement of their communication are concerned. Informant 8 puts it in a succinct way when he says, “When news stories break, social media offers a great way to offer expert commentary and leave an immediate impression on your targets.”

Social media is extremely popular with the general public because it enables rapid exchange of high-quality content in the form of posts, images, and videos (Kamel Boulos, & Wheeler, 2007).

Because Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, among others, provide a conversational platform, practitioners use them to disseminate information while also soliciting feedback.

Additionally, social media provides a sense of timeliness. As long as there is internet connectivity, users of social media platforms can broadcast news from anywhere in the world.

Informant 9 extols the virtues of timely social media posts, stating:

The major factor is reaching our audiences in a timely manner when we have to break news on something important instead of relying on traditional media, which takes 24 hours sometimes to break news. Facebook just makes things easier.

For the timely release of communication material, informant 2 stated, “We resorted to the extensive use of the Hootsuite App. This app enables one to post updates on a schedule. One can schedule a whole week’s social media update, and it posts them automatically on time.”

Social media have motivated many brands to focus more on their targets to build positive relationships. Customers publics can quickly go online and vent their displeasure at a service rendered to them, so organizations constantly scan social media for potential threats to their brands. Informant 1 gives a classic example:

Social media is a blessing in disguise. Sometimes a customer walks away angry, and you think you are safe only to find people discussing it on social media. You log on to the site only to realize that it has become a full-blown crisis. We have no option than to scan for anything that even relates to us in order to avert any unforeseen crisis.

Informants 3, 6, and 15 also shed light on the fact that social media have altered the media landscape and those public relations professionals now have the power to compete with traditional media as far as interaction with their publics is concerned. Informant 3 said, “Now

you can sit in traffic and send communicate or issue instructions without doing it in person and by the time you get to work results are pouring in,” Informant 6 also said, “Ghanaians love paperwork but now, everything can be done online. Paperless means less cost and less movement. All I need is a stable connection and I am good to go.” This has been achieved through direct interaction with the publics on social media platforms where it is easy to obtain information such as complaints and feedback. Informant 15 said:

Traditional media also is not flexible, and so feedback does not reach the organization directly, and even if it does, it will take some time. When it comes to social media, your customers can reply to you within a matter of seconds. That way, you know people are watching your brand.

Social media have created a prompt and direct relationship between organizations and their publics. Using social media means a quick and efficient way of solving problems.

Eight informants admitted responding to queries and questions from their clients for a relatively more extended period because social media platforms make it easy for publics to visit a site more than once until their queries are answered, depending on the peculiarities involved. Informants 9 and 20 agreed that social media’s ubiquitous nature and availability have made it possible for people to ask many questions or make inquiries.

Additionally, findings indicate that practitioners utilize social media tools extensively due to their interoperability with other platforms. For example, Instagram can be connected to Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, ensuring that it is automatically shared on the other connected platforms when a user posts communication material on Instagram. Informant 10 said discusses this interoperability by saying:

I really cannot handle posting communicate on platforms separately, so what I do is that I rely on the feature on Instagram that allows you to connect Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and some other platform. Or I just log on to the Hootsuite App that allows me to connect a lot of platforms and share information by posting on the App.

The ability of the practitioner to manage more than one social media platform by connecting them to one application makes work easier and faster than posting the same material on two or more platforms.

4.1.3 Challenges and risks associated with social media

Several practitioners stated that they did not pay enough attention to evaluating their work to determine whether the intended publics were reached. They used the growing number of pages likes to determine their reach, similar to what Facebook does. Informant 15 resorted, however, to analyzing Facebook page insights through Google analytics, and other page information systems to monitor levels of interaction and assess the impact of social media. While the success of social media tools and associated public relations strategies can be measured in terms of technologies, platforms, or engagements, proper analysis requires the use of data. graphs, metric reports, and tables to analyze social media platforms. These analytic tools necessitate familiarity with web 2.0 analytic tools. Informant 15 contended, “Sometimes because some of our updates are paid for, the team continually checks how the page is performing in terms of interactions, messages, queries, and responses but that alone is not enough because a rise in numbers may not necessarily result in positive growth. It could be users just scrolling.” For organizations that conduct business across multiple platforms, it is prudent to look at strategies across platforms, to determine the richness of feedback as they interact with their publics, how often they are

contacted by these publics via these platforms in order to make a definitive argument about the impact of social media. This is also supported by Informant 17, who says:

I really don't believe the numbers mean anything anymore because when people are online, they may just be surfing, and it will be counted as views and bloat the numbers, but interactions are low.

According to the data gathered, most public relations professionals face difficulties when utilizing social media. Informants indicated that they are confronted with the difficulty of managing social media. Six informants believe that continuous training is necessary as long as technology evolves. Due to social media and consumer behaviour complexities, practitioners must stay current and knowledgeable about digital trends (Constantinides, & Fountain, 2008). Lack of training and refresher courses puts practitioners at a disadvantage. There are numerous social media platforms to choose from, and new ones are developed on a regular basis. Practitioners may not be able to run all of these platforms concurrently, and thus selecting the appropriate medium is critical for locating the appropriate targets. Regardless, each social media application targets a specific demographic, and public relations firms must demonstrate dominance and control wherever their publics or customers congregate. Informant 9 this to say:

We faced the challenge of time as the PR does many other things in addition to social media management. More so, we have a lot of data, and we have to find time to respond one by one. The PR department is overstretched, and sometimes we cannot fully deal with all cases. Every day, there is an update on these platforms, so we need to understand these upgrades in order to serve our publics better.

Because social media enables rapid dissemination of information, practitioners want to capitalize on the opportunity and share information without properly verifying or proofreading it.

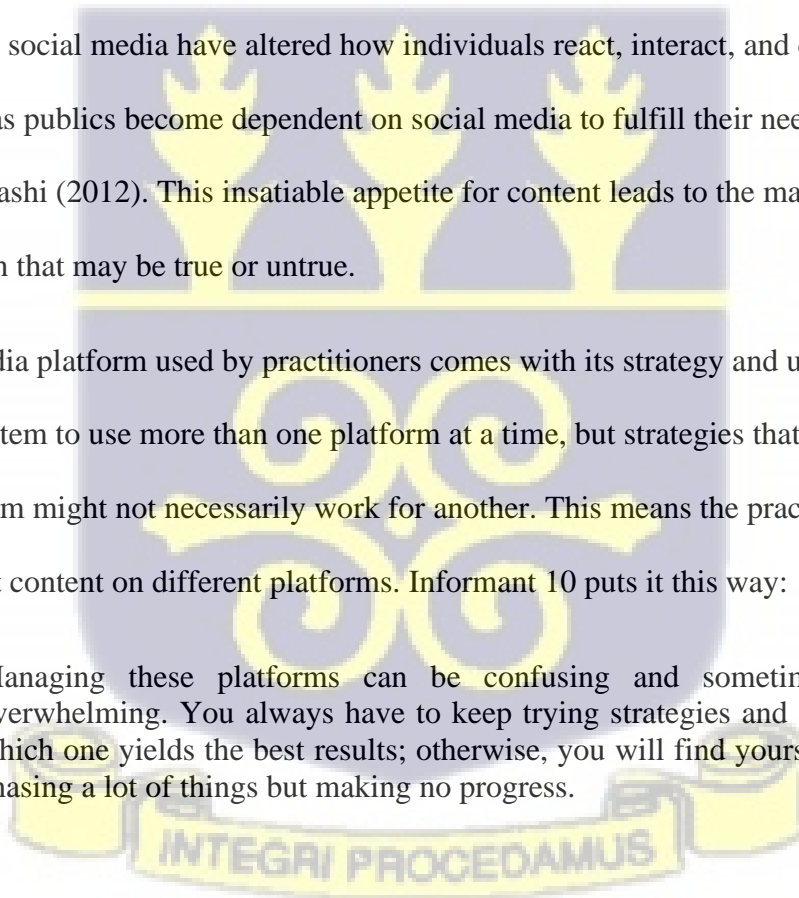
Many practitioners lack the necessary skills to deal with issues affecting their brands' online reputations, such as content management, community management, writing, and content optimization. If caution is not exercised, the things social media communicators say or write may harm the brand, resulting in lawsuits and legal battles. Informant 14 corroborates this by saying:

Sometimes we as practitioners forget that when you write under the brand name, you need to detach your person from it; otherwise, you may be speaking but definitely not for your organization. So training and periodic refresher courses will do a lot of good if taken seriously.

Without a doubt, social media have altered how individuals react, interact, and communicate with each other as publics become dependent on social media to fulfill their needs and satisfy their curiosity, Sashi (2012). This insatiable appetite for content leads to the mass production of news information that may be true or untrue.

Every social media platform used by practitioners comes with its strategy and use. A practitioner may devise a system to use more than one platform at a time, but strategies that work for a particular platform might not necessarily work for another. This means the practitioner must continuously test content on different platforms. Informant 10 puts it this way:

Managing these platforms can be confusing and sometimes overwhelming. You always have to keep trying strategies and see which one yields the best results; otherwise, you will find yourself chasing a lot of things but making no progress.



4.2 Discussion of Findings

This section discusses findings of this study in relation to the research questions. However, the scarcity of information regarding the influence of public relations in Ghana necessitates further discussion.

4.2.1 Incorporation of social media into public relations practice

The study questioned public relations practitioners on their use of social media in their daily work, its impact on their work, and their roles as a result. Almost all practitioners used social media to add value to the world through the content shared by their companies on social media. Additionally, they shared brand-related content and engaged in social media conversations linked to the brand to communicate with their publics. This means that whenever public relations practitioners are putting anything out there, they communicate to their publics. Therefore, they should think critically about what they are putting out there and what they hope to achieve.

Secondly, because they are using social media to communicate, they should remember that communication requires feedback from their publics. Therefore, they should pay attention to the comments emanating from their public and then respond accordingly. Some of these comments may be questions, criticisms and suggestions that can harm an organization and so must not be ignored to enhance the communicative partnership between themselves and their publics.

According to the public relations practitioners interviewed, posting a mix of informative and interactive posts is a daily activity. This style enables publics to learn about and become acquainted with their products and services, while also enabling the company to assist customers who have problems or require clarification.

Incorporating social media into public relations was viewed as a complementary and direct communication channel between organizations and their constituents, enabling organizations to engage with their constituents more effectively. Social media facilitates communication by ensuring that critical information reaches its intended recipients promptly while receiving timely feedback. This increases dialogue between an organization and its constituents, fostering trust and interdependence. When public relations practitioners incorporate social media into their activities, their work rate and speed change as their audiences' efficiency and ease of interaction improves.

An organization can also stay informed about the public's views and reactions via social media. This puts organizations in a better position to respond quickly to crises. This is consistent with Gabriel & Koh (2016), Cooley (1999), and Grunig (2009), all of whom agree on the numerous benefits that social media offers organizations, particularly in terms of increasing public interaction.

The findings also revealed a very high dependence on Facebook and Twitter as tools for executing public relations strategies. Many businesses rely on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as public relations tools. By keeping a Twitter or Facebook account, a business can reach new audiences, communicate with consumers, and demonstrate technical expertise. According to Evans, Twomey, and Talan (2011), Twitter enables practitioners to micro-target communications to specific communities and establishes a one-on-one dialogue with media members. Again, Facebook is rapidly becoming one of the most influential public relations platforms available. Gananian (2012) corroborates Facebook as an online public relations tool that enables businesses to exponentially expand their reach by delivering engaging material to interested people when and where they are receptive to the message.

4.2.2 Difficulties and risks in deploying social media

Additionally, the study discovered that most public relations practitioners believed social media might be detrimental to an organization's reputation. This could be linked to social media's user generated content, which enables the publics to comment and put out their complaints, some of which may be unfavourable and could ruin an organization's reputation. In this circumstance, organizations retain limited control over their data since publics will continue to respond to, interpret, convey, and share organizations' issues via social media. Detrimental statements made on social media are widely accessible to the public and may hurt a company's reputation.

Organizations must give regular updates, rapid responses to inquiries, and increased openness in this digital era. Failure to achieve these expectations causes frustration among publics, which results in a negative perception of the organization's image. Thus, managing social media and reacting to stakeholders' inquiries and complaints should be ingrained in an organization's everyday operations. Practitioners must therefore keep abreast with technological developments to quickly disseminate information and to be able to respond quickly, effectively and accurately. Thus, while public relations practitioners consider social media as a strategic tool for promoting an organization's virtue, they should also anticipate social media's unanticipated consequences and deal with them. The impact of social media can be both pleasant and troublesome.

An earlier study on social media in public relations has concentrated on more tactical problems, such as how practitioners use social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and blogs (Porter, Sweetser, & Chung, 2009; Wright & Hinson, 2012). Wright and Hinson (2012) discovered that 85% of respondents claimed that public relations practitioners were responsible for social media management within their companies or organizations, up from 64% in 2009. This corroborates the assertions of several informants that they spent a significant portion of their time monitoring

their businesses' social media accounts and agreed on the importance of regular refresher courses or training to stay up with the constantly expanding digital environment. Public relations professionals have a vested stake in the organization's overall success and must remain vigilant about what they post and how it is received by their publics.

4.2.3 Social media influence and Impact

The study discovered that social media had altered public relations in Ghana. Notice boards, a classic technique of interacting with an internal audience, have been phased out by most corporations in favour of social media platforms. Public relations specialists no longer rely on traditional news organizations to distribute their press releases; instead, they use blogs, Facebook, and Twitter to keep their audiences informed about their activities. Public relations professionals can now operate successfully and efficiently remotely, as they are no longer required to be physically present to do business on behalf of their organization.

Brands may now reach consumers via various channels thanks to social media; whether through an interesting Facebook post or a tweet, each channel provides a unique platform for firms to connect with consumers. These channels assist shape a brand's overall personality and fostering a more intimate connection between consumers and brands. While it enables marketers to communicate with consumers across several platforms, it is not one-way. Additionally, social media enables consumers to interact with brands via various platforms. Consumers can "like," "comment," and "share" brand content, which helps promote brand awareness and messages. However, it provides consumers with an excellent platform for criticizing and sharing unfavourable experiences. Due to the public nature of the site, these complaints are visible to the media and other consumers. Brands must act swiftly and effectively to avert the escalation of these concerns.

Social media have provided brands and customers with new and exciting communication and information sharing channels. These channels are continually evolving, focusing on organizations' ability to adapt rapidly and create appealing content to reach target customers across many platforms. Brands who grasp the importance of these platforms and put time and attention into staying on top of social media trends and advancements have established themselves as industry leaders, adding value to their overall brand and developing devoted customers.

Respondents also mentioned transparency as an important function of social media when crisis develops. Transparency is required to establish confidence, and trust. Effective crisis communicators are honest, transparent, and open in their public communication. Such candor builds credibility with the publics. According to best practices in communication, organizational statements comprising openness, candor, integrity, and honesty are more effective. Respondents indicated that their online communication activities increased transparency during times of crisis.

4.2.4 Measurement and Evaluation social media on public relations practice

Practitioners were questioned about how they monitored the impact of social media initiatives and what criteria determined whether an action was successful or unsuccessful. Informants lauded social media's advantages but noted that they did not take measuring seriously. Some thought the number of likes or interactions to be sufficient. From the findings, it is critical to exercise caution while utilizing social media in public relations techniques for various reasons. It is vital to understand that having a lot of fans, followers, and likes do not automatically equate to success.

Numerous organizations track both social media followers and participants to determine their performance. However, judging effective methods based on just one of these data is superficial. Another significant difficulty is that it is difficult to quantify the impact of social media efforts,

and public practitioners sometimes overlook the importance of correctly analyzing the results of social media initiatives. Practitioners are incapable of decoding social media analytics appropriately (SMA). Organizations must therefore employ SMA to better understand their constituents' communication and behaviour, thoughts and feelings, and relationships (Moss, Kennedy, Moshonas, & Birchall, 2015).

Organizations must watch social media to listen to and communicate with the public, protect their brands from the competition by monitoring competitors' actions, build brand values through influencer identification, and monitor and track emerging issues. SMA solutions adoption will enable organizations to generate and analyze massive amounts of real-time data from different social networks. Practitioners can identify and segment publics using analytics such as keyword searches, thematic and sentiment analysis, and analysis of spread patterns. They can do so by developing a grasp of their situation, involvement, and recognition of constraints resulting from their posts about the problems organizations create.

Due to the complexities inherent in analyzing social media data, determining whether a public relations effort was effective or not is difficult. Public relations experts can enrich their data and analysis by looking at how public relations strategies are faring across multiple platforms to decipher which platform resonates with their publics and intensify their interaction through those platforms while identifying the problems with unpopular platforms.

4.2.5 Social media competences

The study's findings revealed a dearth of skills and competencies required to deploy online platforms properly. Respondents are under increased pressure to create instant material. This means they must prepare materials faster than ever before, nearly instantly and with the needed

level of accuracy. Furthermore, they must have the necessary equipment to immediately transmit or upload resources on the information being disseminated. These elements frequently put them under pressure to meet the ever-increasing demands of the public. As a result, they are under pressure and forced to improve their skills in modern public relations.

Continuous training is necessary to ensure that public relations practitioners remain current with technological and digital advancements. This assertion is consistent with Aronson, Spetner, and Ames (2010). They argue that applied creativity and skill development can enable new ways of communicating a company's image, the benefits of a product, or the organization's objectives.

Thus, a public relations practitioner who cannot communicate effectively with online publics will be unable to create or maintain the desired public image effectively.

These may occur due to the practitioner's fear of accepting responsibility for errors or the technology itself.

4.2.6 Crisis Communication

According to the respondents, utilizing traditional media for crisis communication is very expensive. Organizations must pay large sums of money to have their eyes and ears on the ground during a crisis or even during normalcy to avert a disaster. The new technology allows them to provide important information about the emergency to their function as crisis communicators and their stakeholders at a low cost. Social media's opportunity for social connection and interactivity promotes fast feedback and updates during crisis communication.

4.3 Summary

Organizations are increasingly adopting new communication strategies that incorporate social media tools to plan and analyze online activity. According to most practitioners, the Internet use

and social media tools in Ghanaian organizations have undoubtedly increased. Additionally, public relations professionals stated that their communication campaigns should focus on specific stakeholders and organizations. Practitioners can organize and customize their data to respond quickly to new concerns and market shifts. Industry experts recognize the value of social media platforms in their work and use them to communicate with stakeholders and build relationships. Social media platforms enable public relations professionals to communicate directly with their audiences, deliver critical messages, and successfully promote their content in communities. Informants indicated that ongoing training is necessary to effectively use digital technologies while maintaining the anonymity of the public or stakeholders.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the study's major findings is made. Conclusions are drawn and presented based on the major findings. Suggestions as to how public relations practitioners can improve the use of social media in their activities have been made.

5.1 Summary of Major Findings

Findings of the study are summarized as follows;

The study discovered that the informants' adoption and use of social media had shifted from traditional information dissemination methods among organizations and their publics to new and innovative ways.

Social media have redefined how public relations practitioners go about the practice of public relations. Newspaper advertisements and radio announcements that provided traditional channels of reaching an organization's publics have been replaced by Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools. Practitioners no longer have to compete for space in newspapers or wait for a particular time to put out communication.

Most informants hinted that the use of social media would eventually become a big deal because publics are enlightened, and communication material must consider their inputs and suggestions. They also agreed that public relations practitioners' use of social media to identify and mute potential crises or establish a two-way relationship between their organizations and publics is a significant benefit to their work. Scholars (Coombs, 2007; Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007)

reiterate the value of reputation and relationships with publics in public relations planning. Social media provides the best way to achieve this.

As informants heap praise on social media, it is essential to note that practitioners also face problems that mitigate the smooth deployment of social media in public relations practice. Problems arise because there is always an updated form of one social media platform, and practitioners need to keep up or become obsolete. There is also the problem of an enlightened public who constantly needs assistance over an issue or the other. Other issues have to do with measuring social media impact on practice.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings showed that Ghanaian public relations professionals used a variety of social media platforms. Internal and external stakeholder communication via social media have exploded recently. In light of this, the study found that most companies have dedicated personnel to manage their social media accounts. In terms of public relations, social media should be used both strategically to promote an organization's image and relationally to build long-term relationships with online stakeholders. However, social media's ability to foster relationships and dialogue is often underutilized. Public relations professionals should promote two-way communication between organizations, thereby taking advantage of the 'two-wayness' of social media to foster relationships with their publics, thus responding quickly to complaints and inquiries and finding ways to constantly engage them. Practitioners should seize this opportunity to show their ability to optimize social media usage for their organizations and their audiences. A systematic approach to social media management is required to achieve this goal.

Public relations professionals also handled social media complaints in various ways. Not all public relations professionals follow this best practice of directly responding to online complaints. The involvement of other media users is minimized with such response strategies. Remaining silent in the face of grievances also shows a lack of accountability or concern (Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010). This can easily lead to distrust and erode an organization's credibility. With the help of social media, practitioners can respond to complaints in real-time.

According to the research, social media is also viewed as a possible significant threat to public relations practice. They recognized social media's power to build or destroy a brand.

Organizations have no control over what is shared on social media. Information spreads quickly and widely and individuals' imprudent behaviour, such as spreading false information or venting frustration on social media, can harm an organization's reputation. This requires proactive social media monitoring and rapid response to avoid negative consequences. This study shows that social media can help businesses improve their performance and image.

Communication technology will continue to change. The same goes for social media platforms. This innovation will continue to disrupt public relations by disrupting their routine. These changes must be accepted to remain competitive.

By leveraging cutting-edge communication technology, such as social media, public relations professionals can help organizations achieve their objectives. Ensuring mutually beneficial online communications requires understanding social media users' communication preferences and expectations.

5.3 Limitations

As is evidenced in all research, this study had some limitations. First of all, this study sampled 20 public relations practitioners from the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana out of a total membership number of over 600 practitioners from the sixteen regions in Ghana. So, a firm generalization cannot be made about all the practitioners in Ghana. Because the sample is only a meagre percentage of the population, findings could have been broader if a survey was employed. A survey would have allowed communication with a lot more people. Nevertheless, the information gathered serves as a foundational study upon which future studies can be conducted.

Another limitation is that this study only focused public relations practitioners and so did not investigate the problem from the point of view of the publics. It would be interesting to know if publics engage well communicatively with public relations practitioners on social media. Finally, there was some difficulty in getting informants on the agreed time for interviews during the outbreak of COVID-19. The researcher had to reschedule several times

5.4 Recommendations

The study found that even though public relations practitioners enjoy two-way communication, it could sometimes be detrimental to organizations due to scathing comments from their publics.

This study recommends that they tread cautiously by responding to clients' concerns quickly, politely, and doing follow-ups to inquire whether they are satisfied with the service rendered.

The study also recommends that public relations professionals receive regular training to manage social media effectively. These online platforms are available 24 hours a day, allowing stakeholders to ask questions or post comments. In this context, social media users expect fast

responses from businesses. Responding slowly or inappropriately can harm an organization's image.

The study found that only a few informants responded immediately to social media inquiries. While speed is essential in this case, appropriateness is more important. According to the study, responding to inquiries allows stakeholders to interact and better understand their needs.

Practitioners may not respond immediately due to personal or professional reasons. In order to meet the current expectations of online media users, they should consider ways to overcome these constraints.

Future studies can also investigate what dialogue and use mean to the publics. How they use social media to interact with each other and their organizations is worth investigating.

Additionally, future research should include a variety of strategies for effectively enhancing an organization's public relations efforts. Trends in social media usage should be investigated to understand better how social media is used within the organization.

Another significant implication is how to leverage social media to enhance various aspects of client engagement to satisfy the public while achieving the desired results. Public relations practitioners must challenge established corporate systems and reimagine organizational processes through social media.

Finally, to ensure effective communication with the public and to increase the effectiveness of collaboration, additional research on human behavior on the internet and social media is required, with a particular emphasis on areas critical to organizations.

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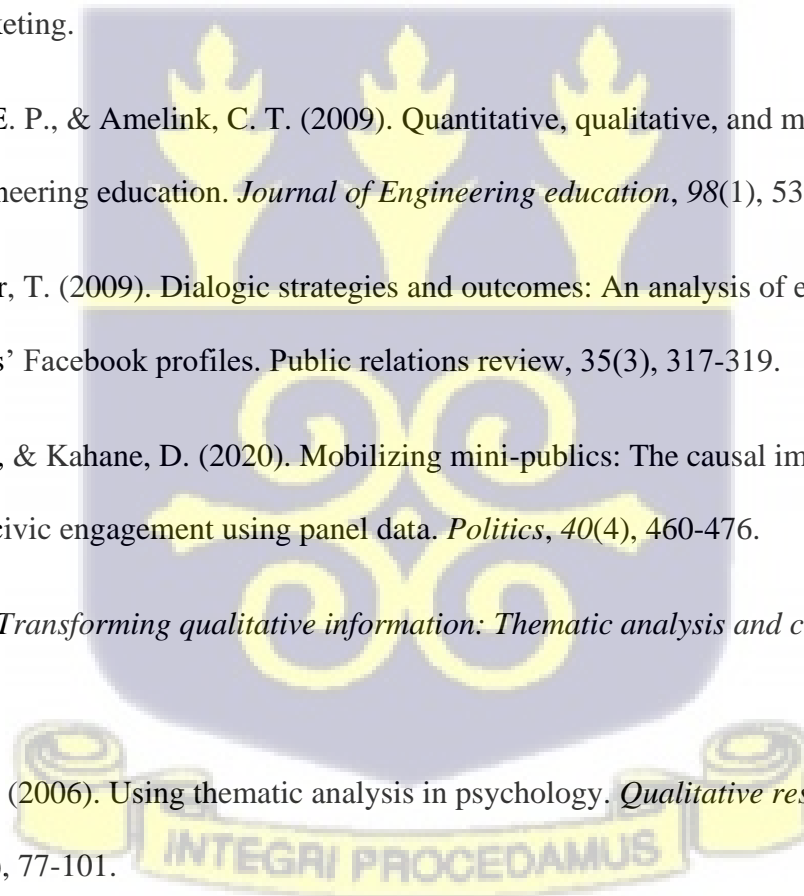
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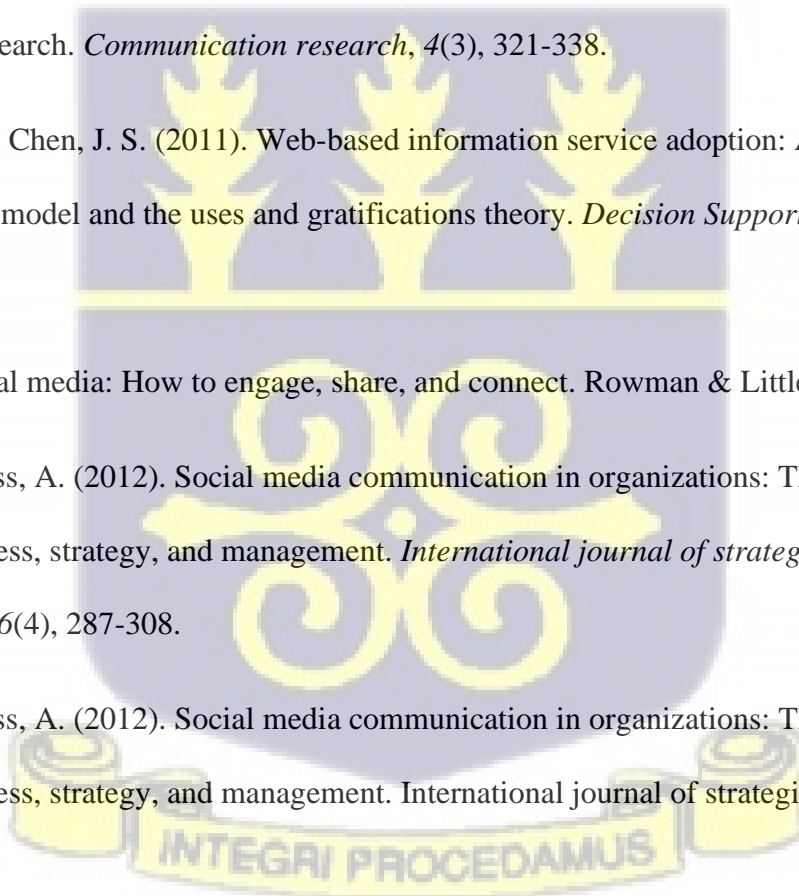
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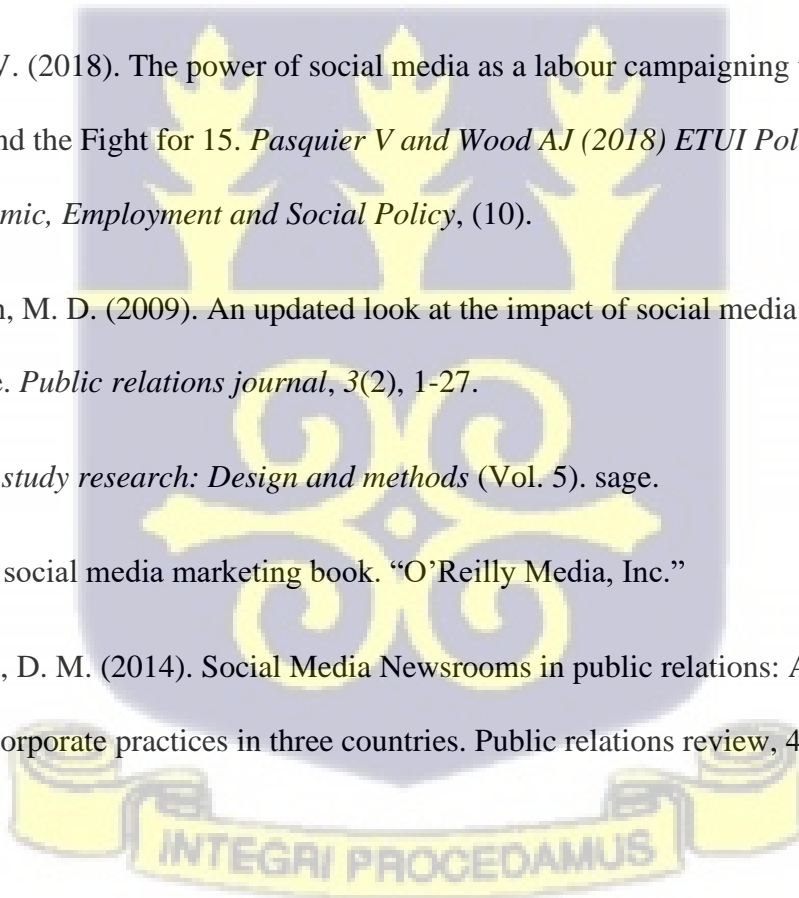
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Are you familiar with the various social media platforms?

Name some of them?

2. Has your organization integrated the use of social media in its operations?

a. If yes, walk me through the process of integration?

b. How often do you use social media as a public relations professional?

i. As a PR professional?

ii. By your organization?

c. What factors influence the adoption of social media by your organization as PR?

3. What types of social media tasks do you perform? –

4. Outline challenges encountered during the integration process of social media into business operations of your organization?

a. What measures have or were put in place to curb these challenges?

5. What challenges do you encounter while using social media in your business operations?

a. What measures have or were put in place to curb these challenges?

6. Do you perceive a positive change in public relations practices since the adoption and usage of social media? Yes

a. If yes, outline some of these positive changes? Will you conclude that, the adoption and usage of social media in your organization has influenced significantly performance of the organization with regards to public relations roles?

i. If yes, how?

