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Corporate allies or adversaries: An exploration of the relationship between public relations and marketing among Ghanaian practitioners

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the perspectives of Ghanaian public relations and marketing professionals on the relationship between respective professions. Several academic studies were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s to address the apparent friction or turf war between public relations and marketing. The discussion centered on whether public relations should be treated as a separate function or if it should serve as a supplement to marketing. Data was collected from 171 marketing and public relations professionals using the quantitative method. Overall, the findings suggest that despite their cooperation, there is still tension or disagreement between the two professions. The result means that the two functions are likely to have challenges cooperating with each other to achieve organisational objectives, especially, in situations where one is given a higher status than the other in the organisation. Theoretically, more studies need to be conducted from an African viewpoint, including how content marketing is shaping the relationship between the two. The study suggests that more research be done on the subject, particularly from a management standpoint. We believe that the level of cooperation and attitude toward the two professions will be shaped by management's comprehension of them.

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Public relations; marketing; integrated (marketing) communication; Turf-War; relationship

Introduction

The discussion on the relationship between public relations and marketing has been a major conundrum among scholars from both fields for decades. Discussions have mainly revolved around the respective roles of the two disciplines, but more specifically whether the purpose of public relations is to support marketing or whether it serves a wider social function (Grunig and Grunig 2013). Public relations and marketing have thus found themselves locked in conflict situations due to the similarities in their work domain and the belief that communication roles within organisations can easily be interchanged (Lauzen 1991). Although literature acknowledges the similarities between the two disciplines, discussions regarding the two have tended to focus on the conflict between the

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two, especially the perceived encroachment of public relations by marketing. Scholars (e.g., Ströh 2007; Kitchen and Moss 1995) have pointed to the many points of intersections between public relations and marketing theoretically and at the practical level despite their differences. However, responsibilities assigned to the two fields tend to be 'murky, often overlapping and frequently conflicting', (Ehling, White, and Grunig 1992, 358). The murky nature of their roles has resulted in several debates regarding the true nature of the relationship between the two disciplines. Since the 1970s, scholars (e.g., Kotler and Mindak 1978; Lauzen 1992; Moriarty 1994) Grunig and Grunig (2013) have discussed the variations between public relations and marketing. Whereas one school of thought, mostly marketing, believes that public relations should be viewed as a promotional tool that is used to increase sales, others, mostly public relations, regard public relations as a different discipline whose purpose is to develop a positive reputation through strategic means and not subjected to marketing. Essentially, *beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder*. The debate has not dissipated even in the 21st century (Hallahan 2007; Hutton 2010; Place et al. 2016; Duhring 2017), as scholars and practitioners from both sides continue to discuss the relationship of public relations to what is now referred to as integrated marketing communication (IMC), and integrated communication (IC), (Grunig and Grunig 2013). The emergence of social media in recent times has seen attempts to revisit the relationship debates (Gesualdi 2019). The current study aims to contribute to the debate from the perspective of a developing country. The paper starts with a review of relevant literature that examined the organisational relationship between the two functions. This will be followed by a discussion of the controversies regarding the two roles and the issue of encroachment. The paper then discusses the methodological approach as well as a discussion of key results, the implications and suggestions based on the results.

Problem statement

The debate on the purpose of public relations and its value within the organisational set-up has been discussed for decades among scholars. An essential aspect of this debate is the relationship it has with marketing, particularly regarding their respective roles. The crux of the debate relates to whether public relations should play a supporting role to marketing or be seen as a discipline with a much wider social and political role. Public relations scholars and professionals (Grunig and Grunig 2013; Ehling, White, Jon, and Grunig 1992; Lauzen 1991; Hutton 2010) have generally argued against an arrangement whereby public relations is subsumed under marketing or the two fields combined into one unit; something that Lauzen (1992, 245) described as 'marketing imperialism' and 'encroachment' on public relations territory while others (Hutton 2010; McKie and Willis 2012; Gesualdi 2019), described it as the attempt of marketing to colonise the core functions of public relations. McKie and Willis (2012), for instance, cite several examples including Kotler and Lee's *Social marketing: Influencing Behaviors for Good* and the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and Jeremy Kourdi's publication of a book titled *The marketing Century: How marketing drives business and shapes society*, as attempts by marketers to demonstrate 'a clear imperial drive to having marketing acknowledged as the dominant organisational and social force', (p. 847). Ha and Ferguson (2015) also highlighted how the discussion on the relationship between the two fields has usually resulted in public relations being considered a subset of marketing. One cannot deny that

the debate has been made more complex with the convergence of marketing and public relations into one department, integrating all marketing communication functions, using the name (Integrated) Marketing Communication, especially in the last three decades. Unfortunately, discussions on (I)MC have generally categorised public relations as a promotional tool or playing the role of technical support, leading to a surge of criticisms from public relations scholars (Place et al. 2016).

Even though research on the two disciplines has been studied for decades, literature on the issue seems to have taken a backseat since the late 70s, and early 90s. The most recent literature is a book on *'reassessing the relationship between marketing and public relations'* by Duhring (2017, based on her doctoral dissertation) and an article by Gesualdi (2019), who attempted to revisit the topic in light of the emergence of social media. Gesualdi (2019) argues that a drop in literature on the subject does not mean the 'turf war' has subsided hence the need to revive it. Also significant is the fact that the focus of research in this area has mostly been concentrated in the western environment, especially the USA. From an African perspective, this important topic is either gravely underrepresented or none existence. The few articles found (Scriven 2000; Thomas and Moti 2006; Van der Merwe and Venter 2008) are, unsurprisingly, from South Africa, which has a relatively mature industry with regard to public relations practice and scholarship. Even then, one can note how dated these articles are. Research (Anani-Bossman and Mudzanani 2020) shows that public relations in Ghana is mostly headed by professionals with varied, especially marketing, backgrounds due to the misconception of management about the purpose of public relations. This means that the public relations department is likely to suffer even in this era of globalisation where knowledge of public relations has expanded exponentially. The dearth of research in this area in Africa makes this research worth investigating. The study, therefore, explores the gap in current information in Ghana by addressing the following problem: *To investigate the relationship between public relations and marketing and how this relationship influences organisational outcomes*. This is done by executing a cross-sectional quantitative survey among public relations and marketing professionals in Ghana.

Literature review

In reviewing the debate between public relations and marketing, it is important to look at an area where both claim authority namely, their relationship-building goals. Public relations and marketing both seek to create and maintain relationships with key stakeholders. Drawing a link between the effort of the two to develop relationships show how the functional borders are most of the time infringed on. From a public relations perspective, theorising on relationship development started with Ferguson's (1984, as cited in Gesualdi 2019) call to shift the focus of public relations theory and practice away from processes and direct impacts and towards creating and maintaining relevant relationships with stakeholders. (p. 375). Since then a relational theory of public relations has evolved as the field's dominant theory (Ki and Hon 2007). The relational theory is concerned with the development and maintenance of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. The relationship-building approach has been conceptualised through organisational-public relationship (OPR) (Ki and Hon 2007; Ledingham and Bruning 1998). OPR depicts how public relations establishes a relationship with its publics rather than simply disseminating information them. It is

measured on five dimensions: openness, trust, investment, involvement, and commitment (Ki and Hon 2007). These dimensions can be viewed from the perspectives of both the organisation and the publics. In line with relationship management, Kent and Taylor (1998) developed the concept of dialogic relationships whereby organisations ethically communicate with their publics. Instead of relying on persuasion, they saw active interaction as a way to better understand each other's perspectives and develop mutually beneficial viewpoints.

Concerning marketing theory, the 90s witnessed a shift towards the building of relationship marketing based on, 'establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges'. (Morgan and Hunt 1994, 20). Webster (1992), for instance, called for a move to relationship building through the formation of strategic alliances instead of the traditional top-down management of marketing. Webster argued that such a partnership will lead to consumer relationships becoming the 'key strategic resources of the business' (p. 1). The relational marketing theory emphasises how people connect with brands and products over time. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust and commitment are the essential factors that mediate relationships, with shared values, communication, opportunistic behaviour, relationship benefits, power, and relationship termination cost being the antecedents to trust and commitment. As the relationship of marketing developed, researchers explored ways to classify and measure these relationships in order to make the marketing function more efficient thereby reinforcing the idea of marketing as a relationship-building function (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004)

The organisational relationship between public relations and marketing

Traditionally, public relations and marketing have been perceived as being similar. Both functions are focused on internal and external stakeholders and deal with communications, and relationships. They also work with the media and develop messages and both tend to focus on digital communication as well as deal with persuasion and public opinion, and audience segmentation (Duhring 2017; Kitchen and Moss 1995). At the strategic level, both are considered management functions (Hutton 2010; Falkheimer and Heide 2014). Broom and Sha (2013) for instance, defined public relations as a management function responsible for developing and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and its publics while marketing was defined as a management function focusing on the identification of human needs and developing a transaction that benefits the organisation. The concept of marketing as being premised on the transaction only has changed over the years into one based on communicating, developing and creating a relationship with customers (Kotler and Armstrong 2016; Belch and Belch 2018). Kotler and Armstrong (2016, 29), for example, defined marketing as 'the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return'. Arens and Weigold (2017) attributed this move from transactional marketing to relationship marketing to the shift from advertising to IMC. In this vein, the purpose of marketing now is to build, maintain, and strengthen the long-term relationship with customers and other stakeholders which will lead to information exchange and other things of mutual benefit (p. 9). Another area of similarity is the use of content marketing by both disciplines. Gesualdi (2019) notes how both PR and marketing are claiming *content marketing* as their responsibility. Since the stakeholders consist of both potential and existing ones, managing relationships with such stakeholders mostly occurs concurrently

through public relations and marketing. Content marketing is about creating lead-generating content across several channels, such as blogs, infographics, social media posts, resource pages, and industry reports, to boost brand recognition and product benefits (Kelley and Sheehan 2022). It is also referred to as sponsored marketing and is regarded as one of the fastest-growing areas of proactive marketing public relations (Andrews and Shimp 2018). The basic premise of content marketing is to provide useful information, increase brand awareness and increase social engagement (Clow and Baack 2022). Tools used include testimonials, user-generated content, influencers, case studies, and white papers. Both public relations and marketing practitioners share an end goal of creating awareness and establishing a brand as authentic based on the provision of truthful information. Essentially, content marketing blends the tactics of public relations and marketing using social media and other online channels (Gesualdi 2019). It is therefore not surprising that both functions claim it as their responsibility. Despite these similarities, the two disciplines differ in several ways. Whereas marketing deals with the identification of needs and development of a product to fulfil those needs in exchange for something of equal value public relations focuses on media relations, regulatory agencies, community relations, internal communication, and investor relations. Marketing is also concerned with breaking even, analysing the competition, and package design while public relations deal with managing the reputation of the organisation, knowing the ins and outs of journalism, managing the organisation's social engagement, developing corporate social responsibility activities, developing communication materials for the organisation including speech writing, and optimising internal communication processes (Duhring 2017, 36). These differences mostly outweigh the similarities.

Wilcox et al. (2014) sum up the differences in the following statement:

The goal of public relations is to attain and maintain accord and positive behaviors among social groups on which an organization depends to achieve its mission. The fundamental responsibility of public relations as a management process is to build and maintain a hospitable environment for an organization.

The goal of marketing is to attract and satisfy customers (or clients) on a long-term basis to achieve an organization's economic objectives. The fundamental responsibility of marketing as a management process is to build and maintain markets for an organization's products or services (p. 15).

Essentially, the two disciplines complement each other despite their differences.

The controversies between public relations and marketing roles

Despite their complementary nature, the relationship between public relations and marketing has always been somewhat controversial and ambiguous. The controversy surrounds the roles of both functions (Grunig and Grunig 2013). The controversy regarding which is superior has resulted in several publications by scholars from both fields. Duhring (2017, 9) sums up these publications as consisting of:

Trench wars and encroachment; failed attempts of collaboration; negative attitudes, disregard, and disrespect. It is a rather simple, often superficial, and uninformed story, as well, characterized and influenced by the disciplinary and/or professional background of the respective authors. Oftentimes a stereotypical, old-fashioned image is painted resulting from the lack of knowledge about the respective other fields.

Kotler and Mindak (1978) were the first to attempt to discuss the issue of the relationship between the two functions when they outlined five alternatives to the public relations-marketing conundrum: Separate but equal functions; Equal but overlapping functions; Marketing as the dominant function; public relations as the dominant function; Marketing and PR as same functions.

The authors, after observing the similarities between the two, argued for a new point of view on the relationship between the two depending on external variables such as the size of the organisation and the sector in which the business operates. Kotler (1989) therefore, argued that the two functions be viewed as allies and not adversaries. Other scholars (Hutton 2010; Van Hallahan 1993; Van Leuven 1991a) have sought to enhance the work of Kotler and Mindak. Hutton (2010) for instance, provided criteria for selecting from among the relationships. The criteria were based on two questions, 'what proportion of the marketing tasks confronting the organization are communication related?' and, 'what proportion of the organization's communication tasks are marketing related?' (p. 206). Historically, both marketing academics and practitioners have tended to view public relations as a subset of marketing, a view that positions public relations as simply a publicity tool for supporting marketing activities (Kitchen and Moss 1995). Unfortunately, this view largely ignores the bigger strategic role of public relations as promulgated by public relations scholars (e.g., Grunig and Hunt 1984; Cutlip, Allen, and Broom 2000) whereby public relations is viewed as playing a mediating role between the organisation and key publics within its environment. Even though marketing scholars, including Kotler, have acknowledged the distinct nature of the two disciplines, they continue to subsume public relations under marketing throughout their writings (Kitchen and Moss 1995).

The 1990s witnessed an intensification of the debate with several articles discussing the blurring of the distinction between the two professions, leading to many writers postulating the view that public relations and marketing communications practices are increasingly *integrated and converging concepts* (Kitchen and Moss 1995, 100). While the articles focused mainly on public relations role within the marketing mix, they nevertheless, reflected a growing propensity for convergence in both the professional and academic fields. The most visible evidence of the blurring distinction between the two functions was the emergence of a new concept called *marketing public relations* (MPR) (Harris 1991). Harris (1991), in his attempt to popularise this concept, argued that the emergence of MPR as a distinguishing new function, which saw public relations techniques being utilised to support marketing, was already in existence in the 1980s. Harris (1991) argued that MPR is a separate function from corporate public relations. Related to MPR is the concept of *integrated marketing communication* (IMC) or *integrated communications* (IC), proposed by marketing academics. IMC was perceived by public relations academics as an attempt to colonise public relations (Hutton 2010; Place, Smith, and Lee 2016). Whereas marketing academics have favoured the convergence of the two functions, with public relations being incorporated into the marketing function, public

relations academics have always been keen in their quest for 'a clear justification for the establishment and departmentalization of the public relations function and for separating public relations management from marketing management' (Ehling White and Grunig 1992, 366). Even though IMC has largely been accepted as being important by scholars of public relations, they, nevertheless, strongly believe that public relations and marketing have different philosophies, missions, boundaries, and theories. Therefore, any attempt, particularly by marketing, to integrate public relations within a total communication function was perceived as constituting hostile takeovers, a phenomenon termed as imperialism and encroachment – discussed briefly below (Lauzen 1991; Gesualdi 2019). McKie and Willis (2012), after examining the intersection between marketing and public relations, advocated what they called a 'paradoxical strategy' which called for amplification of Hutton's (2010) appeal for vigilance in the face of marketing imperialism, on the one hand, and to argue for increased collaboration in response to current conditions on the other. They concluded by proposing a complexity-influenced framework – grounded in classic public relations principles – that will enable mutually beneficial cross-fertilisation between the two. (p. 851). Estanyol (2012), analysed how Web 2.0 is changing the relationship between marketing and public relations in Spain. The result showed that when developing a Web 2.0 consumer communication campaign, having a relationship with the marketing department is not only required but also beneficial and complementary. Nevertheless, practitioners noted that the attempts by marketers to see a too-commercial campaign that overlooked the need for relationship building often resulted in conflicts.

Encroachment in public relations

The encroachment concept is premised largely on the early work of Broom and Smith (1979) regarding role enactment by public relations practitioners. Broom and Smith identified four different roles that practitioners enacted within organisations. *Expert prescribers* demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding of issues and decide on issues dealing with various publics. The *Communication Technician* is responsible for tasks related to work such as writing and editing. The *communication facilitator* act as a link between the organisation and its publics. The *problem-solving facilitator* collaborates with other members of the organisation to identify and solve problems. Subsequent research led to the roles being captured under two main roles: manager and technician. Expert prescriber, communication facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator were considered managerial.

The theoretical discussions on encroachment were largely influenced by issues regarding the managerial role of public relations, most especially the perceived attempt by marketing to reinvent itself as public relations (Hutton 2010). The latter part of the 20th century saw public relations roles being performed by individuals, particularly marketers, without any public relations education or experience in the field. This was premised on the belief that anyone can perform public relations functions and that one did not need a formal education to perform the function (Gesualdi 2019; Lauzen 1991), a perception that persists as illustrated by discussions on trade publications (Havartin 2013). The result of this phenomenon was the theorising of the concept of encroachment within public relations scholarship. Dozier (1988, 9) defined encroachment as the 'practice of assigning

the top management role in public relations to someone from outside public relations'. Lauzen (1991) advanced this concept by including what she called imperialism. According to Lauzen (1991, 245), 'when the interaction between departments with domain similarities occurs as a result of perceived power differences, turf wars often develop with one department intruding on the activities traditionally in the domain of the other'. Hutton (2010, 205) also described it as an attempt 'to include or subsume much or all of public relations'. Lauzen (1991) notes that the managerial role in an organisation is linked to power, whereas the technician role lacks power. In essence, when a practitioner possesses the requisite education and knowledge of PR to perform the managerial role in an organisation, encroachment is not likely to occur. Lauzen (1991) concludes that the inability of the public relations practitioner to enact the manager role in any organisation creates a *power vacuum*. This creates a situation where other departments with similar roles which are more powerful (e.g., marketing), then take over functions commonly undertaken by the less powerful (e.g., public relations) department. In other words, when two functions are viewed by the organisation as having similar skills, goals, and tasks one function is usually regarded as interchangeable with the other.

Ehling, White, and Grunig (1992), aver that because of the widely held notion that the primary mission of a business is to make a profit, organisations are willing to invest heavily in solving marketing problems to enhance sales. Organisations are therefore ready to promote marketing activities to a dominant level at the expense of other functions. Public relations, therefore, suffers within the organisational framework as it performs a low technical function. Public relations is therefore reduced to a product publicity role. Ehling, White, and Grunig (1992, 358) argue that 'the public relations and marketing function as structured within an organization have different missions to fulfil and, therefore, appeal to different paradigms or models of the organization's social environment and of the complex communications systems that are constructed and utilized in that environment'. Therefore, when an organisation reduces public relations into a technician role, 'the organisation loses a valuable mechanism for managing its interdependence with its strategic publics', (p. 357).

There have been some empirical studies to gauge the perceived relationship between public relations and marketing. For example, Zerfass and Duhring (2012) analysed the relationship between the two functions in relation to corporate branding. The study found that although there was a strong convergence of stakeholder priorities, goals, and instruments of branding as well as a high level of collaboration, there were also issues of conflicts, discrepancies, and contradictory perceptions. In other words, practitioners from both fields did not share the same mindset. Kitchen and Moss (1995) conducted an exploratory study between the two and found that despite both functions accessing similar communication tools, the focus of their communication activities differed. Whilst marketing focused on creating exchanges with consumers, for which it borrows or uses public relations tools, public relations had a wider focus aimed at creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relations with publics. Van der Merwe and Venter (2008) found a lack of clarity among public relations practitioners regarding the relationship between the two functions. A global communication survey report (2017) found that almost half of public relations professionals and more than half (60%) of marketing professionals believed that the two functions would become closely aligned in the future. While some believed public relations will dominate, others felt the opposite will happen.

The study further found that 18% of public relations departments reported to marketing. Pullen (2009) analysed the relationship between the two from the perspective of the nonprofit sector. The author found that despite continuous disagreement and tension over roles, both groups admitted that cooperation and compromise were necessary for organisational success. Ha and Ferguson (2015) investigated the variations in perceptions of public relations functions between public relations and marketing departments, as well as how such disparities lead to conflicts between the two departments. The result showed image function to be a statistically significant perception variation in the public relations functions. Within the social media domain, recent studies have examined the varied effect of social media on the relationship between public relations and marketing. Results of these research suggest that knowledge of social media may give public relations an advantage over marketing professionals who lack the same abilities (Smith and Place 2013). Furthermore, the use of social media can improve public relations perception as a strategic communication function (Estanyol 2012). These studies demonstrate that examining the distinctions between the two fields is still important and useful in understanding public relations practice.

Research on the relationship between public relations and marketing, despite taking a bit of a backseat, is still relevant. The day-to-day enactment of roles of public relations professionals is evolving thanks to globalisation. In Africa, and Ghana in particular, literature shows a lack of understanding regarding the role of public relations and this influences the placement of public relations (Anani-Bossman 2021). What is interesting is that the relationship between the two has not been really interrogated in this part of the world. With the constant influx of multinational organisations onto the continent and its subsequent impact on public relations practice. It will be significant to review this issue from the perspectives of both public relations and marketing practitioners in Ghana.

The research is based on the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between public relations and marketing as perceived by public relations and marketing professionals in Ghana?

RQ2: How do the two professions perceive the role of public relations in relation to marketing in the future?

Methodology

The survey method was employed to gather data from public relations and marketing practitioners. For public relations practitioners, an online survey was used. Since we had a database of practitioners, which we had gathered over the years, it made it easy to reach out to them. However, we did not have any database of marketing practitioners hence we had to use the personal/face-to-face approach. Respondents were sampled purposively due to their level of experience and knowledge in their respective fields. A total of 200 questionnaires were sent out (100 via email to public relations practitioners, and 100 via personal administration to marketing practitioners). A total of 171 responses were received (see demographics for distribution). A questionnaire made up of 23 itemised questions was distributed to respondents. The questions consisted of Likert scales and

demographic questions. Questions/statements related to RQ1 were developed based on findings from literature while questions/statements relating to RQ2 were adopted from the global communication study (2017). The responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The findings were analysed in relation to the research questions. In ensuring that ethical issues were not violated, the respondents' names and institutions were not included in the research. Also, any information that could link them to the research was removed to ensure complete anonymity and confidentiality. Again, the purpose of the research was explained in a letter attached to the questionnaires. This was to ensure transparency and honesty.

Campbell and Fiske (1959) argued that researchers have to ensure that items correlate higher to the construct they intend to measure than to other constructs to show how valid the study variables are. The present study evaluated the discriminant validity of the constructs used in examining research questions 1 and 2 by examining items to construct relationships in line with Campbell and Fiske's (1959) recommended approach. The validity test showed that Perceived Public Relations and Marketing Relationship construct is more highly and significantly correlated with the underlying twelve (12) items ($.39 < r < .79, p < .001$) than with the other six (6) items. The future role of public relations in marketing construct is more highly and significantly correlated with the six (6) items ($.57 < r < .79, p < .001$) employed to examine it than with the other twelve (12) items. The reliability test of research question 1 construct employing Cronbach's Alpha showed $\alpha = 0.82$. Similarly, the reliability of the research question 2 construct showed $\alpha = 0.80$. Based on the above results the Perceived public relations and marketing relationship construct was examined using twelve (12) items to answer RQ1: What is the relationship between public relations and marketing as perceived by public relations and marketing professionals in Ghana? The other six (6) items underlie the future role of public relations in the marketing construct used in finding the answer to RQ2: How do the two professions perceive the role of public relations in relation to marketing in the future?

Demographics

The respondents for the quantitative study spanned a variety of organizations. Service firms had the highest representation (45.6%), those in public administration had 19.9% representation, manufacturing firms had 9.4 percent representation, and practitioners in the IT sector had the least representation (7.6%). Public relations practitioners formed 50% of the sample, marketers made up 45%, and a few respondents were specialized in both fields (5%). Most of the respondents (58%) have been practising for more than five years with nearly half (47%) being in managerial positions.

Findings

The first objective of the study was to determine how the relationship between public relations and marketing functions was perceived by practitioners in both fields. To do this, the study first examined respondents' general views on twelve statements (see Table 1) calibrated on a five-point Likert scale using descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation). Subsequently, the responses were compared between the two groups of practitioners (marketing and public relations) using independent sample *t*-tests. Given

Table 1. Descriptive analysis results.

Statements	Mean	Std. E.	Std. D
ST3 – The PR-marketing relationship is unclear and debated	3.15	0.10	1.30
ST4 – PR and Marketing are separate but overlapping functions	3.91	0.08	0.98
ST5 – PR and marketing practitioners understand their individual roles	3.73	0.08	0.99
ST6 – PR is simply an additional element of the marketing mix	3.10	0.12	1.61
ST7 – PR transcends selling of products and services	4.01	0.08	1.02
ST8 – PR plays a narrower role in achieving business goals	2.91	0.11	1.43
ST9 – MPR represents a new approach to PR practice	3.36	0.08	1.00
ST10 – MPR represents an attempt by marketers to assert control	3.35	0.07	0.90
ST11 – Combined communications and marketing structure makes sense	3.90	0.06	0.84
ST12 – PR is used as a strategic tool in maintaining key relationships	4.45	0.05	0.66
ST13 – PR should be treated as a separate function from marketing	3.54	0.10	1.26
ST14 – Corporate PR and marketing enjoy some interaction and Synergy	3.85	0.08	1.00

N = 171

the exploratory nature of the research, the focus of the analysis was to determine the similarities or variations in the perceptions of marketers and public relations practitioners about the connection between the two fields.

Results of the descriptive statistics captured represent how each of the 12 statements performed from the perspective of the respondents, with mean scores ranging from 2.91 to 4.45, and standard deviation scores ranging from 0.66 to 1.43. The mean values show respondents' overall (dis)agreement with the statements and the standard deviation values depict how spread-out responses are from the mean value. Given that these items were measured on a five-point scale with a midpoint of 3, all the mean values (except for ST8) are above the midpoint which indicates a good fit to the data set. To put this differently, respondents generally agreed with all statements but largely disagreed with the statement 'PR plays a narrower role than marketing in defining and achieving business goals' ($M = 2.91$).

The results also indicate that the predominant perception are the views that: organizations use public relations more strategically to help establish and maintain relationships with key stakeholder groups ($M = 4.45$); the public relations field sees the relationships with strategic stakeholders as going much further than ensuring the selling of products and services ($M = 4.01$); and public relations and marketing are separate but overlapping functions ($M = 3.91$).

Following the descriptive statistics, the study compares responses of public relations practitioners and marketers by providing a diagrammatic view of the similarities and differences in their opinions using a line graph (see [Figure 1](#)). The graph shows variations in their perceptions across all 12 statements. However, to determine which of these differences in perceptions are statistically significant, an independent sample *t*-test was conducted. Preliminary results from the *t*-test showed that assumptions of equal variance were met between the two groups as the Levene's test produced *p* values of .07 and above for all the measures.

To pursue the second objective, respondents were required to rate where they see, public relations in the next five years in relation to marketing. [Figure 2](#) provides a graphic view of the general responses and [Table 2](#) depicts the corresponding descriptive results signifying that respondents generally hold the belief that public relations will, in the next five years 'become more closely aligned with marketing' ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.01$), 'play an increasingly

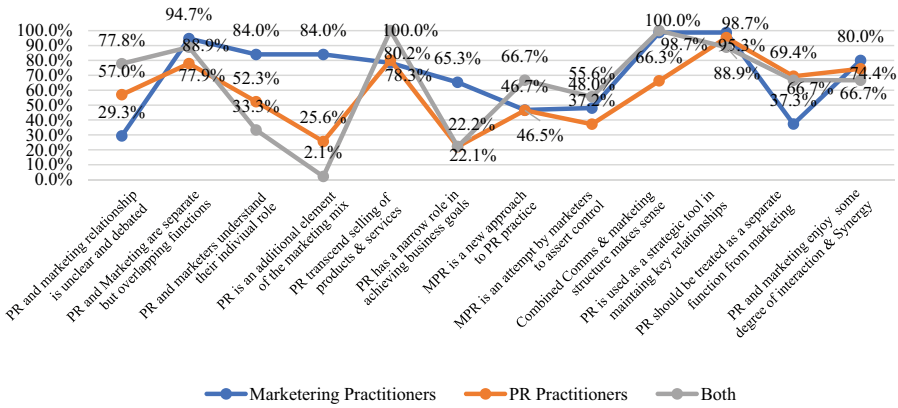


Figure 1. Perceptions regarding PR-marketing relationship.

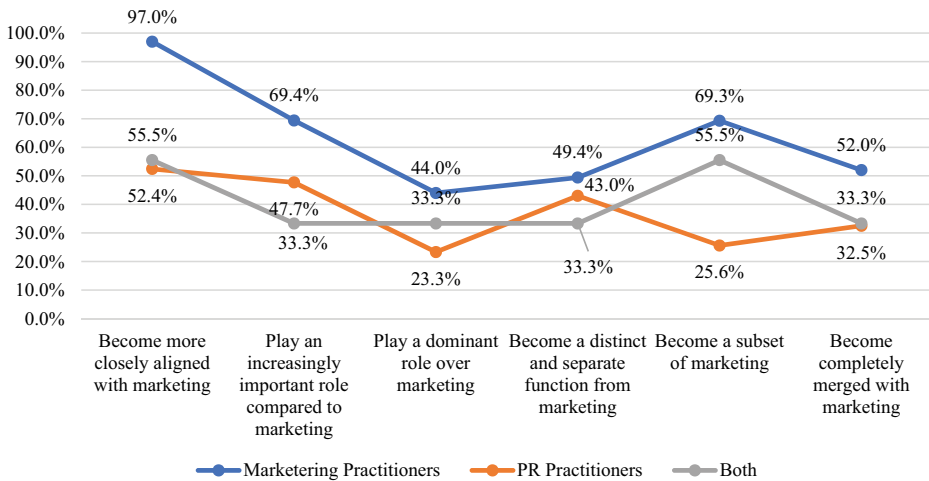


Figure 2. Perceptions of future link between PR and marketing.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis results.

Statements: <i>In the next five years I believe PR will ...</i>	Mean	Std. E.	Std. D
ST15a – become more closely aligned with marketing	3.81	0.08	1.01
ST15b – play an increasingly important role compared to marketing	3.50	0.09	1.19
ST15c – play a dominant role over marketing	2.84	0.10	1.26
ST15d – become a distinct and separate function from marketing	2.34	0.08	0.99
ST15e – become a subset of marketing	3.18	0.10	1.34
ST15f – become completely merged with marketing	2.98	0.11	1.39

N = 171

Table 3. *T*-test results.

Statements	Public Relations (<i>n</i> = 86)		Marketing (<i>n</i> = 76)		<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
	Mean	Std. D	Mean	Std. D		
ST15a	3.47	1.10	4.30	0.70	5.56	.000*
ST15b	3.20	1.37	3.83	1.00	3.64	.000*
ST15c	2.70	1.23	3.00	1.31	1.31	.190
ST15d	3.16	1.10	3.60	1.00	2.76	.006*
ST15e	2.52	1.32	3.87	1.00	7.54	.000*
ST15f	2.62	1.46	3.40	1.22	3.64	.000*

N = 162

*= Significant values (2-tailed).

important role compared to marketing' ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.19$), and 'become a subset of marketing' ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.34$). However, they are not of the view that public relations will 'play a dominant role over marketing' ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.26$), 'become a distinct and separate function from marketing: ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.99$), and 'become completely merged with marketing' ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.39$). The study results also indicate that there are significant differences (see Table 3) between the perceptions of public relations and marketing practitioners regarding the link between the two functions in the future (next five years) on all measures except for public relations playing a dominant role over marketing ($p = 0.19$).

To determine the perceived level of importance to either discipline, respondents were asked questions regarding the status of both disciplines as well as the allocation of budget. Although there was little difference between the status of each field, marketing had a slight advantage (37%) over public relations (34%) while others (29%) indicated that both disciplines occupy an important position in their respective organisations. Significantly, marketing (55%) tended to receive a higher portion of the budget allocation than public relations (25%) with less than one-fifth (19%) noting that both receive an equal amount of budget allocation.

Discussion

The study sought to analyse the perceived relationship between public relations and marketing from the perspectives of both marketing and public relations practitioners in Ghana. It sought to look at the similarities as well as the perceived discrepancies that affect the two fields in the performance of their work. In relation to the first objective, which sought to determine the relationship between the two functions, the result shows a general agreement with the key variables. Both fields, for example, acknowledged that public relations and marketing are separate but overlapping functions. This result is consistent with literature (Lauzen 1991; Kitchen and Moss 1995; Gesualdi 2019) regarding the overlapping roles, objectives and stakeholders of the two disciplines hence making it difficult to distinguish. Zerfass and Duhring (2012) therefore acknowledged the need for greater integration and cooperation, especially in areas where both sides have a high stake, such as corporate branding (p. 2). The authors note that the separation of marketing and public relations 'on behalf of their instruments, techniques, strategies or even their mission or assignments', cannot be upheld due to changes in the business environment. Nevertheless, literature also notes that the blurring roles are likely to create tension

between the two, especially where one (notably marketing) tends to supersede the other (public relations). Kotler and Mindak's (1978) question, 'should PR and marketing be partners or rivals? Where does marketing end and public relations begin?' (p. 13) becomes noteworthy.

The significant differences in responses to some variables illustrate the fact that regardless of the perceived overlap in their duties, there is still a degree of disagreement over their respective roles within the organisational setup. For instance, whereas public relations practitioners moderately agreed ($M = 3.72$) that merging communication and marketing structures makes sense, marketing practitioners strongly agreed ($M = 4.09$). Again, practitioners differed regarding the role of public relations in the organisational setup. Whereas marketing practitioners generally agreed ($M = 3.67$) that public relations played a far narrower role than marketing in defining and achieving business goals, public relations practitioners disagreed ($M = 2.33$). The differences were further highlighted when practitioners were asked their views on the link between their professions in the future (i.e., five years), with regards to objective two, which asked both practitioners where they saw public relations in the next five years in relation to marketing. The result is similar to the 2017 *Global communication report* where practitioners from both fields differed in relation to their views on public relations and marketing within five years.

These differences highlight the perceived tensions that permeate between the two, which can stall organisational progress. Literature abounds regarding the tension between marketing and public relations, especially in situations where public relations is sublimated to marketing despite the different but complementary roles they play (Broom and Sha 2013). Hutton (2010) also alluded to the tension between the two disciplines due to perceived encroachment. Gesualdi (2019) further points to the intensification of the tension with the addition of social media into communication activities. The result demonstrates that these differences can lead to the two disciplines becoming corporate adversaries rather than allies. Although attempts have been made to find a solution through the integration of marketing and public relations along with other functions to form the IMC, such tensions will continue to exist so long as one feels the other attempting to usurp its powers.

Implications for theory and practice

The study sought to investigate the perceived relationship between public relations and marketing among Ghanaian practitioners from both fields. At the theoretical level, the findings show that despite a drop in research regarding the subject, it does not mean a drop in perceived encroachment in practice as Gesualdi (2019) rightly acknowledged. The result provides an opportunity for scholars to revive the issue in light of current development within the field. Literature on this issue is primarily American hence there is the need to focus on emerging countries to further enhance the body of knowledge. Frameworks developed may not work effectively in different cultural settings as public relations literature has extensively discussed. The need for further discussion on the subject from the perspective of other cultures such as Africa is therefore necessary. With the increasing emphasis on the move towards convergence, it will be essential for scholars to examine how the two, especially

public relations, are influencing the integration process, that is, whether their roles have been strengthened or diminished and what it means for organisational success. The continuous evolution of the current (digital) media landscape also has implications for the future direction of the two functions. It is therefore important that research in the two areas emphasise other areas of conflict, especially within the digital/social media domain. The blurring of the boundaries between public relations and marketing and its effect on public relations in Africa needs to be further explored.

At the practical level, marketing and public relations practitioners must begin to understand each other's profession if they are to collaborate effectively to achieve organisational goals. Public relations and marketing are both undergoing significant changes and practitioners will need to understand these changes from the other's perspectives if they are to be able to work together effectively. The blurring of the various roles, structures and tools now makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. Many, as demonstrated in the literature, have called for convergence and indeed this has been happening for several years. This call is reflected in the words of Leslie Gaines-Ross, a reputation expert, that 'a singular focus on building 21st-century reputation requires communications, marketing and digital all working in lockstep to break through and be heard', (Weber Shandwick 2014). The engagement of both professions in content marketing to create awareness for brands is evidence of the direction that the two functions are taking. Through content marketing, both functions can work together to enhance organisational and brand reputation. The interdependent nature of the two makes integration an obvious choice with well-defined roles. We conclude this session with the comment from McKie and Willis (2012, 851) that 'if theory and practice are to reconcile, then we see the responsibility on public relations educators and their marketing counterparts to do the same'.

Conclusions, limitations, and future studies

The current study confirmed insight gained from literature. It is obvious that both professions form various avenues for communication and are therefore allies rather than adversaries. Their roles are not seen as competitive but complementary. Although public relations play a significant role within the marketing domain, its role goes beyond that. Conversely, marketing's role has moved beyond transactional purposes and adds value to communication activities. Despite the convergence of the two, public relations and marketing will continuously remain separate and distinct with varied overlapping roles. The management of organisations needs to understand these differences and similarities in order to ensure both contribute effectively to organisational objectives.

Regardless of the finding, no study is without its limitations. Due to the limited number of respondents, the study cannot be generalised. The study also did not place much emphasis on other areas such as convergence and its influence on public relations activities as well as how social media has changed the role of the two. Given this, it is recommended that future research examines this issue from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives to gain further insight. Other research areas that can be examined include how the convergence into integrated communication and the evolution of social media is influencing the power of public relations. Of particular importance is the need to

analyse the perspectives of management regarding their understanding of the respective roles of each profession within the organisational setup. Future research in Africa should also look at how social media is influencing the practice of both functions. It will also be interesting to examine the perspectives of those who work closely with both practitioners in organisations.

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