

**AN ASSESSMENT INTO THE RELEVANCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN
TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN WEST AFRICA: THE CASE OF GHANAIAN
AND NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES**

BY

MILLICENT AFRIYIE KYEI

10422777

**THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,
LEGON, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
AWARD OF MA COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEGREE**



DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is the result of my own research conducted at the Department of Communication Studies (University of Ghana), under the supervision of Professor Margaret Ivy Amoakohene. All references made to the works of other people have been duly acknowledged.



Prof. Margaret Ivy Amoakohene

(Supervisor)

Date 12-07-2022



Millicent Afriyie Kyei

(Student)

Date 12/07/2022



DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty for His direction and help throughout my stay in school. I also dedicate it to my husband, Mr. Frank Adjei, who supported and inspired my academic take-off.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to God for the life, strength, and ability to successfully carry out this study. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Margaret Amoakohene, for her insightful critique and continual academic guidance throughout this exercise, I pray for God's blessing for her and the entire family.

I am also thankful to the heads of the various public relations departments in the six universities, who gracefully made themselves available to be interviewed for this research. I pray for God's blessing for each of them.



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BUK	Bayero University, Kano
CIPPR	Centre for Information, Press, and Public Relations
DICROP	Directorate of Community Relations and Outreach Programmes
FM	Frequency Moderation
IPPR	Information, Publications & Public Relations Unit
LASU	Lagos State University
PR	Public Relations
PROs	Public Relations Officers
TV	Television
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCC	University of Cape Coast
UDS	University of Development Studies
UENR	University of Energy and Natural Resources
UPH	University of Port Harcourt
VC	Vice Chancellor

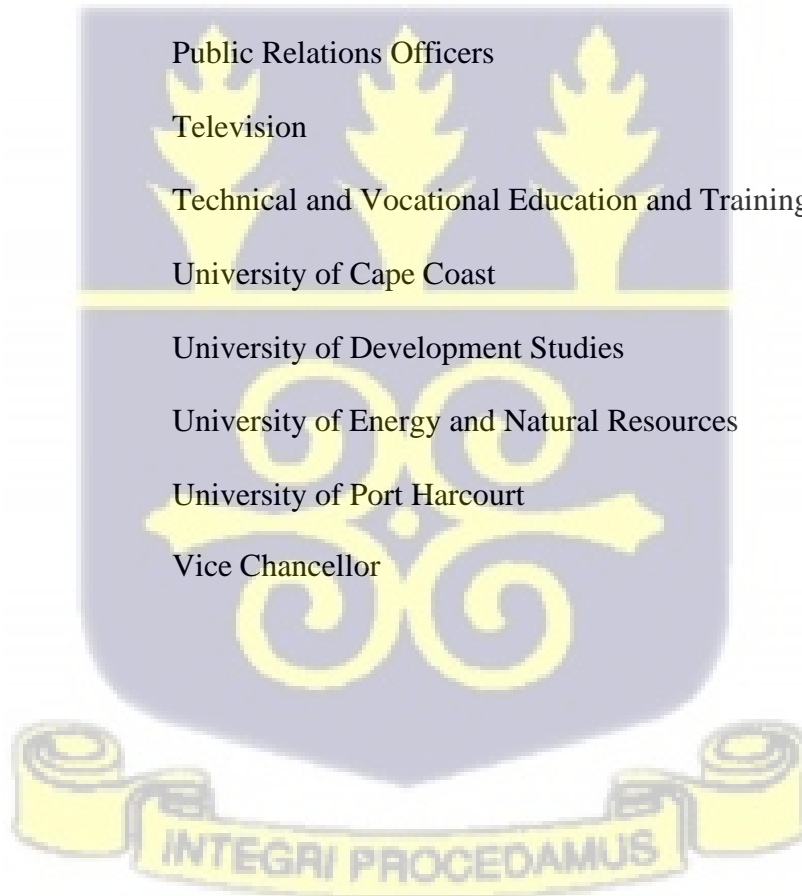


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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relevance of public relations in tertiary institutions in two West African countries— Ghana and Nigeria. The study was undertaken within the framework of the excellence theory. A qualitative in-depth interview was employed for data collection. Six institutions were purposively sampled — three in Ghana and three in Nigeria. The study noted that functions performed by the public relations units in the selected institutions are media and community relations, internal communication and content management. Tenets of the excellence theory were used as parameters to establish the relevance of public relations in tertiary institutions. The findings revealed that in some institutions, the senior public relations executive is a member of the dominant coalition. Again, it was revealed that the public relations units also perform other functions outside the core PR duties. Some challenges faced by the public relations units are inadequate funds and lack of qualified personnel and equipment. The fundamental parameters of the excellence theory were met hence the excellent practice of public relations in the selected institutions provide the benchmark for institutional relevance. The study recommends that for effective implementation of public relations functions, the senior public relations executive should be a member of the dominant coalition. Again, the senior public relations executive should play the manager role and not the technician role or both. Also, it is important to separate the core public relations functions from other duties. In addressing the challenges identified, the public relations units should be well- resourced with adequate budget and equipment as well as qualified personnel.

KEYWORDS: public relations, functions, relevance, challenges.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The growth of institutions largely depends on their relationship with stakeholders. Therefore, it is important for organizations to foster good relationships with their stakeholders (Gezihagne, 2018; Stanciu, Cristache, Tcaci, Tanasescu & Matis, 2017). Considering the usefulness of relationships to institutions, managers use communication tools such as public relations to build and maintain good rapport with their publics.

Public relations has been variously defined from different perspectives. According to Cutlip et al. (2012), “public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains the mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and the public on whom its success or failure depends.” Similarly, Odongo (2009) believes “public relations is both a management and structural function that can help institutions to establish and maintain effective communication among employees and its coherence within and outside these institutions.” Moreover, Onyienko (2014) views public relations as “a planned and sustained effort to maintain mutual understanding.” In essence, public relations can be understood as a function employed by an institution to build and maintain relationship with its publics.

According to Broom and Sha (2013), public relations used to be the preserve of the business environment. Today, the usefulness of public relations has influenced the expansion of the practice to other sectors including higher education. Currently, most tertiary institutions have dedicated offices to perform public relations functions (Gezihagne, 2018). According to Stanciu et al. (2017),

public relations functions are geared towards promoting the image capital of institutions.

Public relations practice has gained prominence and recognition in different sectors. Broom and Sha (2013) believe that public relations functions are acknowledged and considered relevant in various organizations. However, Narteh et al. (2013) posit that “universities have not accorded the PR units the recognition they deserve.” Okafor and Nwatu (2018), also agree that public relations practice is not considered relevant in educational institutions. Therefore, it is against this background that this study seeks to highlight the relevance of public relations to educational institutions specifically, tertiary schools.

1.2 Problem Statement

The efficacy of public relations as a tool for enhancing the image and reputation of institutions has been established in some studies outside the continent. For instance, Campbell (2018) examined ways public relations practitioners in higher education developed and executed internal communication responsibilities to employees of selected universities in Michigan. After interviewing the practitioners in the universities, the study found that the operations of practitioners were direct reporting to the presidents of their respective universities. Practitioners worked in a strategic capacity but did not follow a documented communication process, only a few had formal methods. Moreover, none had well formulated and strategic processes in place to check whether symmetrical communication was used to maintain relationships.

In studies conducted by Pirozek and Heskova (2003), and Kaverina (2003) respectively on public relations in higher education institutions in Czech Republic and on public relations strategy in

Russia, it was revealed that when practiced effectively, public relations in higher education institutions enhances corporate image and stakeholder trust like all customer-oriented organizations. Kriyantono (2019), on the other hand, studied the kinds of public relations functions that are carried out by state universities in Indonesia. The study employed a survey to distribute questionnaires to public relations practitioners in state universities. After analyzing the data that were collected, the study revealed that many public relations practitioners have adopted the principles of excellence theory, and the two-way symmetrical communication strategy has been found to be the ideal model for the practice of public relations. Another finding was public relations activities were included as part of the management and dominant coalition in the universities.

From the studies cited above, it is therefore evident that studies conducted outside Africa have centered on diverse aspects of public relations practice in tertiary institutions. However, in Africa, Ukwueze and Obi (2015) focused on examining the prospects and challenges posed by new media to execute public relations activities of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. After a careful observation and collection of data from the websites of new media that are used by these tertiary institutions, the study revealed that the arrival of new media has caused a paradigm shift in public relations management from the use of old media (radio, television, newspapers, etc.) to the gradual adoption of new media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). The use of new media in public relations management provided a higher speed of communication dissemination and interactive qualities between the tertiary institutions and their publics. The study again revealed that the challenges of using new media range from lack of gatekeeping and liberalization to the anonymity of the audience among others.

In another research work, Oluwagbemisola et al. (2018) utilized both primary and secondary data to

study public relations strategies and the effect of public relations on the management of conflict at the University of Lagos. After the analysis of data, it was revealed that dialogue or compromise, effective communication, collective bargaining, and confrontation were the public relations strategies employed by the University of Lagos management in conflict management. Again, public relations experts were given the chance to take part in the decision-making process with management being faithful to the bargain of public relations.

In Ghana, Boakye et al. (2012) examined public relations practice and identified specific public relations functions employed to achieve organizational goals in selected private universities which were Christian Service University College, Garden City University College, Ghana Baptist University College, and University College of Management Studies. After an in-depth interview with practitioners in their respective universities, the study revealed that three private universities did not have public relations department. All practitioners in the universities agreed on the fact that public relations is very critical when dealing with both internal and external publics, which in turn leads to achieving the organizational goals of these universities.

Moreover, Dornyo and Adiku (2015) examined the practice of public relations at Valley View University and Islamic University College in Ghana. Their study employed the qualitative in-depth interview to investigate how these two universities managed communication, the types of communicator roles performed, and the public relations models that were applied by practitioners in the universities. The study revealed that public relations practitioners failed in the strategic management of communications in both institutions. The over-emphasis on media relations compelled public relations managers to adopt a one-way public information model in the process of communication. The adoption of the one-way model caused a hindrance to accepting the two-way

symmetrical model which is the ideal model for any communication process.

Most studies on public relations in institutions of higher learning have all focused on the practice rather than the relevance. Again, these studies are country-based and do not cover a sub-region of the continent. That is, studies assessing the importance of public relations in tertiary institutions across two or more countries of the same continent are rare. In light of the identified gap, this current study sought to explore the relevance of public relations in tertiary institutions within the West African sub-region. The interest of the researcher was to identify the functions of public relations, its practice, relevance and challenges for higher education institutions. Moreover, the study focused on using tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria since English is the official language of both countries.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the relevance of public relations in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria.

Specifically, however, the study seeks:

1. To assess the functions of public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria.
2. To find out the relevance of public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria.
3. To identify the challenges facing public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to achieve its objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the functions of the public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria?
2. What are the relevance of public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges facing public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria?

1.5 Significance of the Study

As indicated in the problem statement, studies on the relevance of public relations in tertiary institutions are rare in the sub-region. Therefore, this study adds to scholarly work on the relevance of public relations in tertiary institutions in West Africa. Again, the study will enhance the understanding of the benefits tertiary institutions derive from public relations through its functions. Also, understanding the challenges faced by public relations units would provide empirical data to illuminate and inform university management in strengthening public relations functions.

1.6 Definition of Concepts

For the purposes of this study, the following concepts have been operationally defined:

Tertiary education: Education means both formal and informal acquisition of knowledge or skills, including skill training or apprenticeship. According to the World Bank (2021), tertiary education

refers to all types of formal education following and building upon upper secondary education including technical and vocational education and training (TVET). For the purpose of the study, therefore, tertiary education will be used about the level of education beyond the senior secondary school level. It includes pre-university education or university education, which awards undergraduates and graduate credentials.

Relevance: Relevance suggests benefits or usefulness. Hence, the relevance of public relations suggests the benefits or usefulness of public relations to stakeholders of the tertiary institutions.

Public relations: Public relations, though has been variously explained in the study by various scholars. The definition by Jethwaney & Sarkar (2000) suits the study's conception of public relations, and, hence, will be applied accordingly. According to Jethwaney & Sarkar-- (2000, p. 11), public relations is a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. In simple terms, public relations is understood as a function for maintaining mutual understanding and communicating between the institution and its public.

1.7 Organisation of Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one focuses on the introduction, which entails the background of the study, public relations in West Africa, the problem statement, research questions, objectives, significance of the study, and organisation of the study. Chapter two touches on the literature review, highlighting the conceptual definitions of PR, models used, and the impact PR has had on institutions in society as well as the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter three covers the study methodology, which entails the research design and strategy, sampling procedures, data collection methods and instruments, and data analysis. Chapter four presents the

study findings and discussions whilst Chapter five covers the summary, conclusions and limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future studies.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter set the foundation by introducing the study, discussing the background with emphasis on public relations, and the practice of public relations in West Africa. The problem statement was elaborated. The objectives were outlined based on the research questions that were raised. Included in this chapter were the significance, definition of concepts and organization of this current study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides both the theoretical framework and empirical analysis of related works from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy documents. While the study is underpinned by the excellence theory, related works have been discussed in line with the thematic areas - functions of public relations units, benefits of PR to institutions, challenges faced by PR units in the execution of their mandate, and nature of PR in educational institutions in both Ghana and Nigeria. The identified gap in literature is also elaborated in this chapter.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory was propounded by J. E. Grunig in 1992 (Grunig et al., 1992). The theory has its grounds in the review and evaluation of extensive literature that examines the theoretical positions which exist in different academic fields including communication, psychology, feminist studies and marketing (Tyma, 2008).

The excellence theory is a general theory in public relations that explains how public relations in organizations must be organized and managed to make the organizations more effective (Dornyo & Adiku, 2015). The theory denotes that public relations practitioners can contribute to the effectiveness of an organization when the organization practices excellent public relations (Grunig et al., 2002). Moreover, it explains the different programmes that public relations practitioners employ to be

excellent and communicate effectively to their publics. The programmes are looked at all levels of the organization that is departmental, organizational and societal levels along with the expected effects of excellent public relations practice. As a result, the theory is classified as a theory of excellence and effectiveness in public relations and communication management (Grunig & Grunig, 2011).

The excellence theory further explains the value of public relations to an organization. The value of public relations to the organization is based on the quality of the relationship that exists between the organization and its publics (Grunig, 2002). The theory states that for public relations to make an immense contribution to a particular organization, public relations must be part of strategic management (Ni, 2006). Again, the theory posits that an organization can be effective if it can solve its problems and satisfies the goals of the manager, stakeholders and publics. By this, the organization must be able to identify its publics affected by various organizational decisions or those who need the organization to provide solutions to their problems. For the identification of these publics, there must be scanning of the environment, and such a process of public relations contributes to the strategic management of the organization (Grunig & Grunig, 2011). The theory contributes to the management function and effectiveness of an organization thereby building relationships and resolving organizational conflicts (Bowen et al., 2010).

According to Kriyantono (2019), the excellence theory is one of the influential theories in public relations research all over the world. Since the theory was developed, it has been tested continuously by scholars of public relations to demonstrate the specific role of public relations that are considered efficient and ethical for both an organization and its publics (Grunig & Grunig, 2011).

2.1.2 Principles of Excellence Theory

According to the excellence theory, the practice of public relations in institutions whether private or public needs to meet good standards. The standards are met based on the ten (10) principles of the excellence theory (Grunig et al., 2002). The principles of the excellence theory are employed to evaluate the effectiveness of public relations activities or programmes in any institution that practices public relations. These principles are:

2.1.2.1 Involvement

This principle explains the involvement of public relations in the strategic management function of an institution. The principle posits that public relations is needed to be part of the management process which eventually works together to contribute to the overall goal of an organization. Firstly, public relations must be part of the overall strategic management, and secondly, contribute to the entire strategic management (Grunig et al., 2002). The involvement of public relations must cater for the design and management of programmes. The public relations' involvement in the strategic management function ensures that there is objective decision making (Kriyantono, 2019).

2.1.2.2 Empowerment

The principle of empowerment explains the capacity of public relations to form part of the dominant coalition and directly communicate with the top management. This principle suggests that the public relations head must have direct and full access to communication with the dominant group. By this, the public relations practitioner must be empowered to directly report to the leadership (Kriyantono, 2019). Reporting directly to leadership must involve things that centre on the publics, ethical decision-making and the values of the organization. To have access to or be involved in the dominant

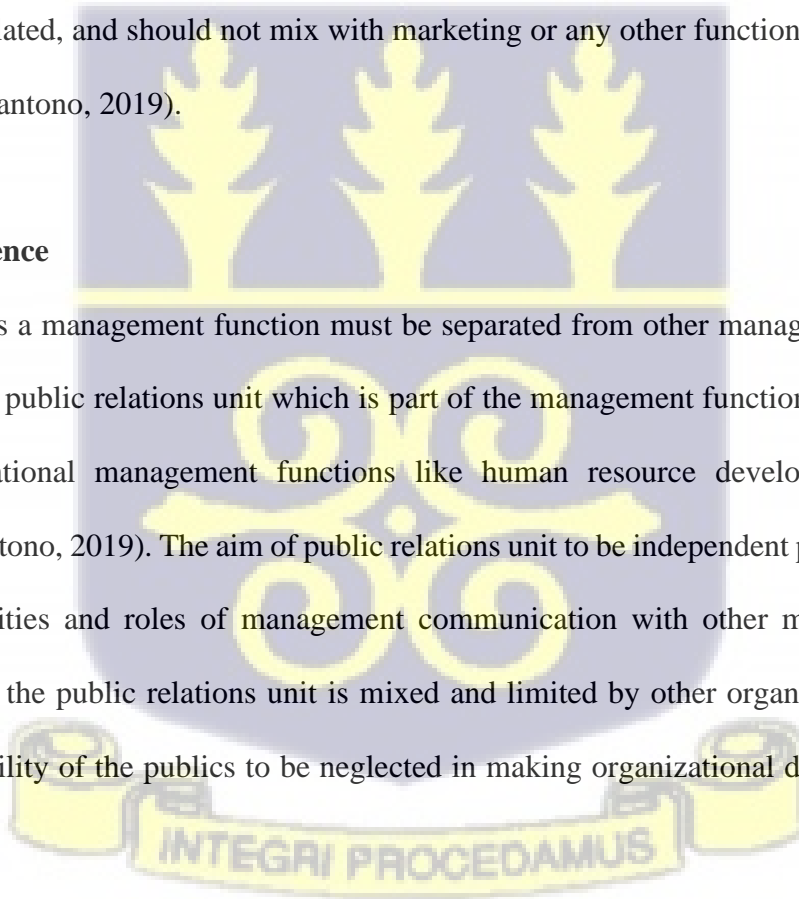
coalition, public relations practitioners need to improve their abilities and skills through education, professionalism and experience (Grunig et al., 2002).

2.1.2.3 Integration

Integration deals with the merging of all public relations functions into one department. This principle suggests that the practice of public relations function in any organization must be integrated into one department (Grunig et al., 2002). The organization must not allow each department to have its own public relations division. The integrated public relations function should have access and authority at every level and function of the organization. The principle of integration posits that public relations function is not isolated, and should not mix with marketing or any other functions, rather, it must be autonomous (Kriyantono, 2019).

2.1.2.4 Independence

Public relations as a management function must be separated from other management functions. It is essential for the public relations unit which is part of the management function to be independent of other organizational management functions like human resource development, finance or marketing (Kriyantono, 2019). The aim of public relations unit to be independent prevents the mixing of the responsibilities and roles of management communication with other management. As an implication, when the public relations unit is mixed and limited by other organizational functions, there is the possibility of the publics to be neglected in making organizational decisions (Grunig et al., 2002).



2.1.2.5 Managerial Role

The principle of managerial role in public relations function suggests that public relations units or departments must be led by a manager, not a technician (Grunig et al., 2002). The manager must execute the functions of the communication manager, not just the communication technician. The public relations unit needs to be headed by a professional public relations manager but not someone who is technically proficient in writing skills. The manager must have in-depth knowledge of research and must be able to gather information, resolve conflicts, control management issues, manage department staff and draw a budget. The public relations function becomes isolated when no manager exists to carry out public relations functions. Isolation of the public relations functions breaks the extent of media relations. The managerial principle puts forth that the public relations professional must have expertise in carrying out three managerial roles which are Communication Facilitator, Expert Prescriber, and Problem Solving Facilitator (Kriyantono, 2019).

2.1.2.6 Two-way Symmetrical Model

Institutions which have public relations functions as part of their work need to establish a two-way symmetrical model of communication between the institutions and their publics. The employment of the two-way symmetrical model in any organization is critical for a good public relations department. According to Grunig et al. (2002), the adoption of the two-way symmetrical model has proven to be the best for the public relations practices in terms of communication between an organization and its publics when compared to the other three models which are the public information, press agency and the two-way asymmetric model. The application of the two-way symmetrical model ensures that a balanced communication process is achieved, and better relationships between the organization and its publics are forged through compromise and negotiations (Grunig et al., 2002).

2.1.2.7 Knowledgeable

The public relations functions are carried out based on the knowledge of practitioners in the public relations field. The principle of knowledge requires that a good public relations department must have staff who have in-depth knowledge about the practice of public relations. Having knowledge is mandatory to manage the relationships with the publics, carry out analysis, and engage in negotiations and problem solving (Grunig et al., 2002).

2.1.2.8 Symmetrical Internal Communication System

According to Kriyantono (2019, p. 160), “one of the characteristics of an effective organization is implementing an internal communication system in two directions”. When a two-way or internal communication system is implemented, employees’ satisfaction is always achieved. The practice of the internal communication system builds good employees relationships, builds trust and fosters a culture of participation among the employees (Kriyantono, 2019). The adherence to the principle of a symmetrical internal communication system ensures that there is an exchange of information between employees which in turn allows the opinions of employees to be accommodated in any organizational decision-making (Grunig et al., 2002).

2.1.2.9 Role Diversity

There must be diversity in all roles of public relations. The practice of excellent public relations must include both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds (Tyma, 2008). Both men and women in the public relations department must be given equal opportunity to occupy a managerial role. Women must be valued and given the benefit of doubt to serve in the strategic role. Such an opportunity according to Grunig and Grunig (2011, p. 22), “prevents filling in that position with a male head from another department who does not have

the requisite knowledge in public relations”.

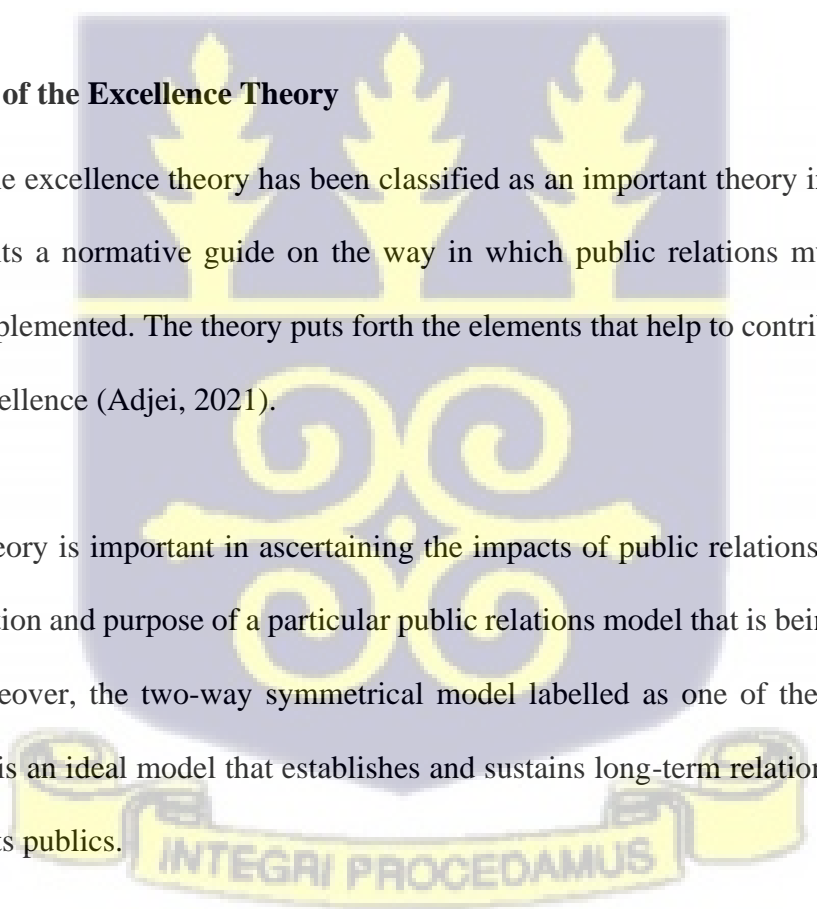
2.1.2.10 Ethical Public Relations

This principle emphasizes that in practicing public relations, practitioners must prioritize the ethical codes and professional integrity (Grunig, 2000). As stated by Gower (2006), public relations has gradually moved into the realm of management and decision-making positions, and therefore new direction of researches must be engaged. Ethical codes must be adhered to by practitioners in the practice of excellent public relations in their work.

2.1.3 Importance of the Excellence Theory

The adoption of the excellence theory has been classified as an important theory in public relations. The theory presents a normative guide on the way in which public relations must be conducted, structured, and implemented. The theory puts forth the elements that help to contribute to the overall organizational excellence (Adjei, 2021).

The excellence theory is important in ascertaining the impacts of public relations programmes that establish the direction and purpose of a particular public relations model that is being practiced by an organization. Moreover, the two-way symmetrical model labelled as one of the principles of the excellence theory is an ideal model that establishes and sustains long-term relationships between an organization and its publics.



2.1.4 Relevance of the Excellence Theory to this Study

Several studies have been underpinned by the excellence theory. To cite a few, Kriyantono (2019) adopted the theory to guide his study in describing the public relations activities of state universities in executing their functions in Indonesia. The study revealed that many public relations practitioners have adopted the principles of the excellence theory, and the two-way symmetrical communication strategy has been found to be the ideal model for the practice of public relations.

Van Heerden (2004) conducted a study to describe the practice of public relations in Africa. By employing the excellence theory as one of the theories that underpinned his study, it was revealed that the practice of public relations in Africa is strategic, and practitioners function at a very influential strategic level within the organizations.

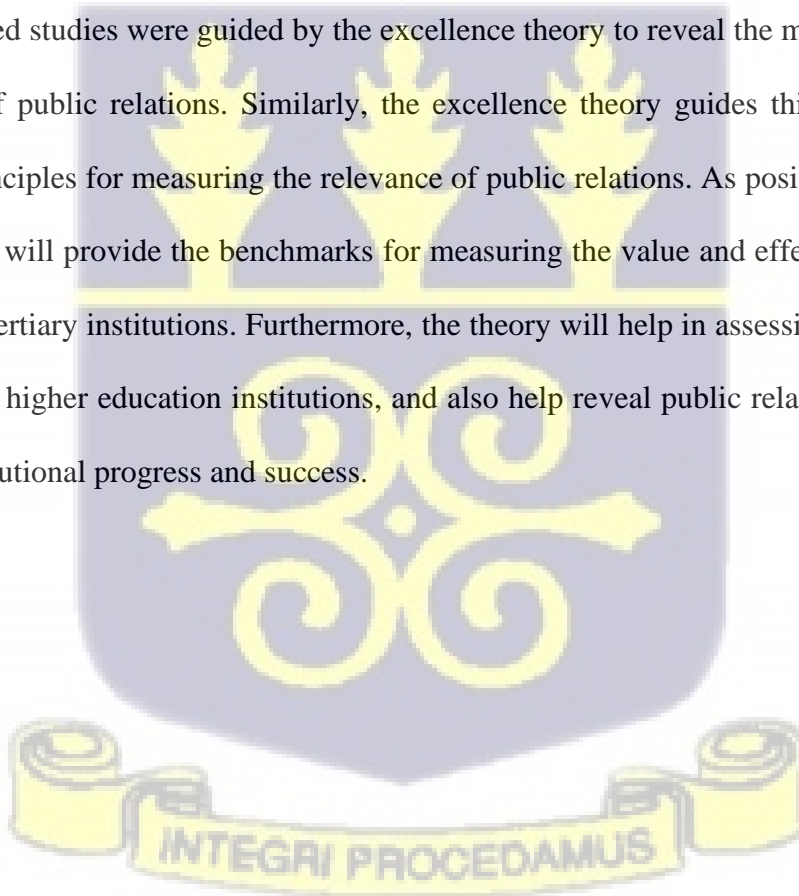
Moreover, Dornyo and Adiku (2015) employed the excellence theory as a reference point to assess the practice of public relations at Valley View University and Islamic University College in Ghana. The study revealed that public relations practitioners failed in the strategic management of communications in both institutions. The over-emphasis on media relations compelled public relations managers to adopt a one-way public information model in the process of communication. The adoption of the one-way model caused a hindrance to accept the two-way symmetrical model which is the ideal model for any communication process.

The theory guided Adjei (2021) to assess the role of public relations as a strategic management function that contributes to the growth and success of RLG, a telecommunication organization. The study revealed that RLG Public Relations Department plays predominantly a strategic managerial role which impacts the overall strategy of the organization. The department, therefore, contributed to

organizational excellence and effectiveness.

Lastly, Anani-Bossman and Mudzanani (2020) studied how public relations was conceptualized and practiced in relation to the purpose and roles of the financial services sector in Ghana. Guided by the excellence theory, the study found that public relations practitioners of communication departments of most financial institutions have no public relations background, which affected their conceptualization of public relations. Also, the practice of public relations in most financial institutions was not fully strategic.

The aforementioned studies were guided by the excellence theory to reveal the models that are ideal for the practice of public relations. Similarly, the excellence theory guides this current study by presenting the principles for measuring the relevance of public relations. As posited by Grunig et al. (2002), the theory will provide the benchmarks for measuring the value and effectiveness of public relations units in tertiary institutions. Furthermore, the theory will help in assessing the relevance of public relations in higher education institutions, and also help reveal public relations functions that contribute to institutional progress and success.



2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Functions of Public Relations

Public relations units are established to execute functions relevant to an institution's goals and objectives (Boakye, Nsor and Tabi, 2012). In line with this, studies have been conducted to explore functions performed by public relations units in institutions.

In Indonesia, Anggreni (2018) evaluated the functions and position of public relations in educational institutions. Using a qualitative descriptive research method, in-depth interviews were conducted with public relations officers of the Mahendradatta University. The study found that the functions of the public relations office include giving expert advice to management and solving critical problems. This is achieved through the communication manager who is part of the university's management. The study also established that the public relations unit facilitate communication between the institution and its publics, both academic and non-academic. The findings further revealed that, public relations practitioners develop communication strategies aimed at promoting the institution. Again, the public relations office develops communication materials such as press releases and also facilitates internal communication.

Odongo (2009) also conducted a study to assess the trends of public relations practice in tertiary institutions in Kenya. A quantitative study was adopted for the study. 60 respondents (public relations practitioners, administrators and students) were sampled from the Orthodox College of Africa to complete a structured questionnaire. The findings of the study identified inter-college relations, media relations, internal communication, "college-general public relations" and provision of expert advice to management to inform decision making and policy implementation as functions of public relations in the institution.

Okafor and Nwatu (2018) also established that reputation management, customer relations also known as student relationship management, media relations, social media and corporate social responsibility are some major functions performed by the public relations units. The findings were established in a study conducted to examine public relations as a tool for attaining the objectives of educational institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria. A quantitative research method was adopted to randomly select the unit of analysis through stratification of the population. A structured questionnaire was disseminated to 77 administrative and public relations staff of eight tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria. The questionnaire sought to test the hypotheses that reputation management, customer relations, media relations, social media and corporate social responsibility are key functions of public relations in educational institutions. It also sought to test that reputation management, customer relations, media relations, social media and corporate social responsibility influence the attainment of the institutional objectives.

Also elaborating the functions performed by public relations offices, Dornyo and Adiku (2015) examined the practices of public relations in tertiary institutions in Ghana. Using a qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted. Convenience sampling was employed to select six participants from the Islamic University College and the Valley View University. The study further revealed that the functions performed by public relations units are writing press releases, editing news articles, organizing press conferences, and managing correspondences between the institutions and the media as well as the alumni.

Functions of public relations in tertiary institutions vary depending on the institutional goals. However, the underlining function of public relations practice remains managing relationships

between the institution and its publics. The publics are the media, employees, other institutions and alumni. Other functions noted include developing communication materials such as press releases, reputation management and providing expert advice to management based on feedback and interaction with the institution's publics.

2.2.2 Benefits of Public Relations (PR)

Public relations is integral to the development of higher education institutions, and when managed properly, can yield diverse benefits (Stanciu, et al, 2017). In relation to the benefits of public relations, Stanciu et al, (2017) examined the importance of public relations in Romania universities. The study employed a quantitative study using a structured questionnaire to test two hypotheses. Firstly, "public relations enhances the universities' image through its campaigns." Secondly, "there is sustainable differentiation of universities through public relations activities." Using a sample size of 350 respondents, the study revealed that "elements such as the learning environment, reputation, the career prospects of graduates, the image of the area in which the university is situated and their integration as dimensions within public relations campaigns are the effect of a standardized strategy beneficial to the Romanian educational market" (Stanciu, et al, 2017). Again, the study established that public relations campaigns enhances the image capital of universities in Romania.

Okafor and Nwatu (2018) also agree that public relations is a relevant tool in maintaining the image of educational institutions. In a study conducted to assess public relations as a tool for attaining the objectives of educational institutions, Okafor and Nwatu, (2018) noted that the public relations functions- reputation management, customer relations, media relations, social media and corporate social responsibility are significant to the attainment of institutional objectives.

Boakye et al. (2012) also posit that public relations contributes to achieving organizational goals in tertiary institutions in Ghana. The researcher interviewed four public relations practitioners from four universities in the Ashanti region. The study revealed that functions performed by the public relations units are instrumental to the institutions' successes. The functions were noted to include dissemination of information to the various publics, media and alumni relations as well as content generation and management for the universities' online platforms. Other functions performed by the public relations practitioners include partnership development, fund raising and protocol services.

Also, Aikins and Adu-Oppong (2015) examined public relations practice as a tool to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of tertiary institutions. The study employed a quantitative method of inquiry where 150 senior members, senior staff, and junior staff including public relations practitioners were sampled at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), Ghana. The study found that the public relations unit of the UEW projected the image of the university. In addition, the study revealed that public relations also facilitates reputation management of the university.

2.2.3 Challenges faced by Public Relations Units

The practice of public relations is confronted by various challenges and lapses. Scholars have noted 'insufficient funds' as a pertinent challenge faced by tertiary institutions.

Nurhanifah (2018) agrees that effective public relations practice in universities is hindered by various challenges. The challenges were established in a study conducted in Indonesia. The study examined public relations strategies in improving institutional image, using the State Islamic

University of North Sumatera as a case study. The researcher interviewed public relations practitioners and administrators in the university. The study revealed that lack of funds, qualified personnel and inadequate facilities are key challenges faced by the public relations department.

Also, Odongo (2009) in a study which sought to investigate the trends of public relations practice in Kenya identified insufficient financial allocations to public relations departments, lack of management goodwill towards public relations departments, poor planning and coordination of public relations functions and the integration of PR roles with other roles as major challenges faced. To arrive at the findings, a quantitative study was adopted for the study. 60 respondents (public relations practitioners, administrators and students) were sampled from the Orthodox College of Africa to complete a structured questionnaire.

In addition, Gezihagne (2018) conducted a study aimed at evaluating the practice and challenges of public relations in public universities in Ethiopia. The study revealed that financial constraints, lack of public relations professionals, lack of appreciation and recognition for public relations functions by management, absence of logistics and weak governing structure of the public relations units were the key challenges faced by the universities. The researcher employed a mixed method approach in conducting the study. 13 public universities were purposively sampled while three public relations practitioners were randomly sampled from each university.

In a study conducted to investigate public relations practices in private universities in Ghana and identify its challenges, Agyapong (2011) noted that inadequate budget was the major challenge highlighted among other challenges such as lack of qualified personnel, absence of recognition and appreciation for public relations practice, lack of logistics as well as resources. The findings were

revealed through a qualitative research method. In-depth interviews were conducted with three public relations practitioners from three universities in Ghana.

Also, Narteh et al. (2013) conducted a study to assess public relations practices in selected universities in Ghana. The study purposively sampled four universities in Ghana. In-depth interviews were conducted for four public relations practitioners. The study revealed that public relations practitioners do not perform their roles effectively in the private universities due to the lack of qualified staff and logistics. Again, the public relations units were not represented at the universities' highest decision-making body to enable them disseminate timely management decisions to the universities' publics which also impedes their effectiveness.

The challenges identified tend to hinder the effective implementation of public relations functions. As a result, the studies reviewed recommended that managements of the various institutions must initiate measures to address these challenges.

2.2.4 Nature of Public Relations in Educational Institutions in both Ghana and Nigeria

Most public and private tertiary institutions have integrated public relations as a management function into their management councils. Godwin and Josephine (2010) assert that public relations practitioners in tertiary schools provide different patterns of growth and opportunities for these schools because the practitioners give priority to public opinion, create awareness and boost institutional images.

Public relations that is practiced in educational institutions can be termed educational public

relations (National School Public Relations Association, 2012). According to the National School Public Relations Association (2012, p. 14), “educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programmes and services of an educational organization”. This further indicates that the activities of educational public relations are a two-way affair which involves communication between the institution and its audiences. As the core function of public relations is to establish and maintain relationships between an organization and its publics, so is educational public relations.

Public relations plays a key role in many educational institutions. Educational public relations practitioners have the mandate to provide assistance to students and also work with parents, and other various departments within the institutions (Agyapong et al., 2013). Moreover, public relations units within the educational institutions circulate newsletters that contain information about events on campus, build and maintain relationships with students, lecturers, staff and alumni.

The growth of public relations in educational institutions has gained grounds. According to Tianping (2003), the existence of public relations as a function in the management of modern schools helps improve the programmes and services of educational organizations. The practice of public relations in schools has allowed practitioners to be part of the institutional decision-making at the college and university level. Schools that have integrated public relations consider it a basic function of the schools' management (Tianping, 2003). On the other hand, Bruning and Ralston (2001) argue that the integration of public relations in most educational institutions has been limited to operating in a single office with the sole focus of managing institutional reputation. The concern raised by Bruning and Ralston (2001) implies that different educational institutions have different public relations functions. In connection to this argument, Agyapong et al. (2013) conducted a study to better

understand public relations functions in private universities in Ghana. The study was explorative and relied on multiple case studies. Using personal interviews with the aid of an interview guide to gather data from public relations officers from three private universities in Ghana, it was revealed that counselling of students was not among the functions of the public relations departments of the three private universities. The study further found that educational public relations departments of the private universities do not take an audit of corporate social responsibility which enables the department to assess publics' views towards private universities.

Since public relations has become a tool for making an organization's needs and programmes known, it has been adopted by many higher education institutions to gain public support (Dornyo & Adiku, 2015). In Ghana, different tertiary institutions both public and private now have public relations units that are mandated to assist in interpreting attitudes, identifying and shaping educational policies, and carrying out activities that can earn public support for these institutions.

Carlsmith and Railsback (2001) posit that most educational public relations in tertiary schools have adopted the one-way communication model which is aimed at creating a positive image about the schools to the entire publics. This situation of most schools adopting the one-way communication model is no different in Ghana. This is confirmed in a study by Dornyo and Adiku (2015). The researchers examined the practice of public relations at Valley View University and Islamic University College which are private universities in Ghana. Dornyo and Adiku (2015) focused on finding out how communication officers from these two universities managed communication and the models of public relations that were used in the practice of public relations. After a qualitative in-depth interview was employed to gather data, it was revealed that the public relations officers failed in the strategic management of communications, and media relations was seen as the dominant

role these officers. The over-emphasis on media relations made the public relations officers of the two institutions mostly apply the one-way public information model in the communication process to the detriment of the more acceptable two-way symmetrical model.

Agyapong's (2011) study confirms that the functions of public relations units in most tertiary institutions in Ghana are limited and are under-resourced to perform public relations activities. Agyapong (2011) investigated the public relations practice, the type of public relations tools applied, the achievement in building a good corporate image, and the challenges of public relations practice in three private universities (Regent University College, Methodist University College, and Ghana Telecom University College). After the employment of an interview guide to interview public relations officers in these private universities, the study brought to light that the public relations departments were not adequately resourced. Public relations departments were not represented at the university council which is the highest decision-making body of the universities to enable them to disseminate management decisions to the university's publics.

In Nigeria, the practice of public relations in tertiary institutions has proven to be different from what exists in Ghana. The practice of public relations in many universities in Nigeria is not far from yesterday but authorities in these universities have become proactive and decisive in using public relations to promote good will through public spectacles which are public relations mercenaries (Adebola, 2012).



Adebola (2012) evaluated the perceptions of public relations practice in public tertiary institutions in the South-West geo-political zone of Nigeria. The focus was to describe the current activities, structure and effectiveness of public relations to create a conducive academic environment for the

institutions and their publics. After data were collected through survey and interviews, findings were that the practice of public relations by the universities was successful and created mutual relations between the universities and their publics. The study further found that the practice of public relations in the universities is favourable, and on a whole, public relations is a proactive measure which can be used not only for solving problems but also for creating organizational serenity.

Oluwagbemisola et al. (2018), on the other hand, conducted a study to identify the public relations strategies that are used to manage conflict at the University of Lagos. The researchers gathered both primary and secondary data on students and non-academic staff to identify the effects of public relations strategies on conflict management in the university. For the collection of primary data, survey questionnaires were administered to two hundred and fifty (250) staff and three hundred and fifty (350) students. The secondary data on the other side were gathered from journal articles, bulletins, relevant official publications, periodicals and records from the University of Lagos, and internet sources. After the analysis of data, the study revealed that strategies which are compromise or dialogue, effective communication, collective bargaining and confrontation are public relations strategies adopted by the university in the management of conflict. In the quest for conflict management, public relations practitioners are entirely involved in the decision-making process, and ultimately, the university's management is always faithful to the bargain of public relations.

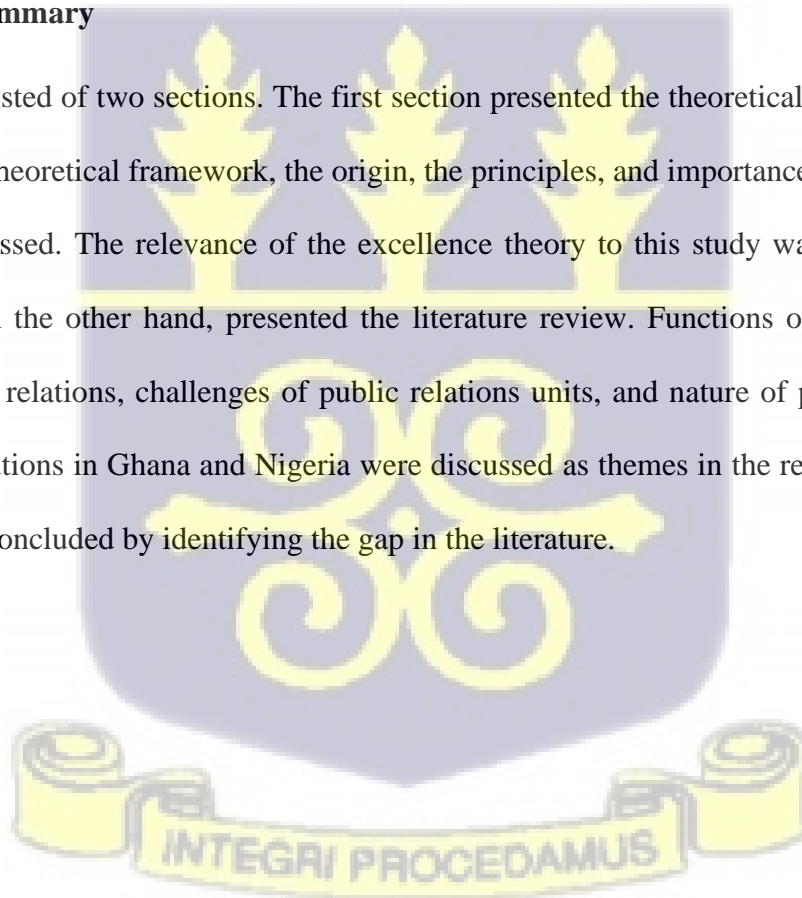
2.2.5 Literature Gap

The reviewed literature indicates that studies on public relations in higher learning institutions abound. The research works cited in the review of literature reveal that the practice of public relations in tertiary institutions exists in only one jurisdiction. Moreover, other researchers studied

on more than one university, but these studies are country-based and limited to only one country. Also, the focus of most cited works was on the functions and practice of public relations, rather than the relevance. Studies on public relations practice in tertiary institutions that focus on using two or more countries are yet to receive scholarly attention. However, this instance is considered a gap that needs to be looked at. Ultimately, such a gap compelled the researcher to conduct a study to examine the functions of public relations, its practices, and benefits for higher educational institutions by focusing on two countries; Ghana and Nigeria.

2.2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter consisted of two sections. The first section presented the theoretical framework of the study. Under the theoretical framework, the origin, the principles, and importance of the excellence theory were discussed. The relevance of the excellence theory to this study was elaborated. The second section on the other hand, presented the literature review. Functions of public relations, benefits of public relations, challenges of public relations units, and nature of public relations in educational institutions in Ghana and Nigeria were discussed as themes in the review of literature. The chapter was concluded by identifying the gap in the literature.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter of the study describes the data collection process and analysis. The chapter presents the research design used, population and sampling technique, data collection instruments, source of data, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study. Qualitative research refers to the studying of events and processes in their natural settings, “attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them and clarify any ambiguity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). A qualitative research approach allows the researcher to elicit and capture feelings, emotions, and personal convictions, none of which the researcher will not be able to capture using a quantitative approach.

For this study, a qualitative research approach was employed to enable the researcher assess how public relations functions establish its relevance in tertiary institutions through in-depth interviews with practitioners. Data were collected in line with the stipulated themes. Again, the qualitative method was chosen because it does not allow for generalization of findings to an entire population, but rather to have a depth of knowledge on the subject of the study (Keyton, 2015).

3.2 Population and Sample Size

The target population for the study was public relations practitioners of tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria.

3.2.1 Population

The population for this study was all public relations practitioners of public universities in both Ghana and Nigeria. The study focused on using a population of public universities who have public relations departments or units, and have public relations practitioners who have worked for at least two years in their respective institutions. The rationale for employing such a criterion for the population was practitioners working for at least two years have the cutting edge in the universities' mode of public relations practice. Further, the researcher chose to work with tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria due to the fact that English is the official language of both countries.

3.2.2 Sample Size

Three universities each were purposively sampled in Ghana and Nigeria. The sampled universities in Ghana were the University of Cape Coast, the University of Development Studies, and the University of Energy and Natural Resources whilst sampled universities in Nigeria were the Lagos State University, Bayero University, Kano, and the University of Port Harcourt. The universities were selected based on the researcher's easy accessibility to interviewees.

Moreover, six (6) interviewees were sampled from a total of the six (6) universities that were selected in both Ghana and Nigeria. The interviewees were heads of public relations departments in their

respective institutions. The number of sample size selection was based on the recommendation of Denzin and Lincoln (2011) who suggest that a sample size should be small enough to manage in a qualitative study, and recommended a sample size from six to thirty. Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommend that a sample size of five to twenty-five in a qualitative study would help the researcher to build and maintain a close relationship, and thus improve the “open” and “frank” exchange of information. The researcher believes that such a sample size should provide the requisite information to achieve the research objectives.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The study employed the non-probability sampling approach, specifically the purposive sampling technique. This technique was preferred as it enabled the researcher to select public relations practitioners (heads of public relations units) of the tertiary institutions in order to provide needed information to help in addressing the objectives of the study. In determining the practitioners eligible for the study, the researcher took the respondents through a screening process. Questions pertaining to the practitioners' positions and years of experience were asked. This enabled the researcher to select heads of public relations units with the requisite knowledge and experience in the practice.

3.4 Sources of Data

Primary and secondary data were used for this study. The primary data were gathered from the six interviewees who are the heads of public relations departments in their respective institutions. The primary data were the responses received during the in-depth interviews. On the other hand, the secondary data were gathered from journal articles, bulletins, relevant official publications,

periodicals and records from the respective universities selected for this current study. Some of the secondary data were obtained from the internet and websites of these universities.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

An interview guide as an instrument for data collection was employed in the gathering of the primary data for this study. The interview guide was semi-structured. The interview guide being semi-structured was made up of open-ended questions and follow-up questions. The open-ended and follow-up questions helped to provide clarity and addressed emerging issues during the interviews. The nature of the interview guide also allowed for open responses and new ideas to be brought up during the interviews with the heads of public relations departments in their respective universities. Moreover, the interview guide had four sections. The first section had the demographical data of the interviewees. Interview questions under this section highlighted on interviewee position, qualification, and structure of public relations. The second section focused asking interviewees on questions on the functions of public relations in the tertiary institutions. The third section had questions on the benefits of public relations in the tertiary institutions. The last section on the other hand, focused on asking questions about the challenges of practicing public relations in the tertiary institutions.

3.6 Method of Data Collection

An in-depth interview was employed as a method of primary data collection. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), an in-depth interview can be described as a one-on-one interview where the researcher asks an interviewee questions about a particular research topic. In an in-depth interview,

the researcher is interested in gathering information on the interviewee's opinions, motivations, values, experiences and feelings about a particular phenomenon. In-depth interviews are generally used in qualitative studies with smaller sample sizes (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The in-depth interview was conducted via Zoom online platform. Initially, the interviews were supposed to be face-to-face, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher opted for an online interviews to limit physical contact with the interviewees.

Two weeks before the interviews, the researcher sent emails to the selected interviewees to seek their approval, and to brief them on the purpose of the study. Moreover, interview dates were scheduled to suit the interviewees' convenient time. Three days before the interviews, reminders and Zoom links were sent to each interviewee. Six (6) separate interviews were conducted with the six heads of public relations units. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. Before each interview, the researcher sought consent to record the interviews. Notes were taken as well.

During the interview, the semi-structured questions that were posed to the interviewees allowed for discovery, with the opportunity to follow topical trajectories as the conversation unfolded (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Also, the flexibility of answering questions was allowed for whiles staying in line with the guidelines that were provided in the interview guide (Wholey et al., 2015).

For the secondary data collection, the researcher scouted online for journal articles, bulletins, relevant official publications, periodicals and records from the public relations websites of the respective universities. The documents were then reviewed and relevant information were selected in line with the study requirements and objectives.

3.7 Data Analysis

The researcher employed a transcriptional and content analysis to generate codes for the data which eventually helped in the arrival of themes for this study. Thematic analysis was used in the analysis of data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), thematic analysis can be employed to make meaning of qualitative data where data are summarized according to the themes and sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes should address the research objectives or questions, and must be backed by the narratives. It is ideal due to the fact that it helps to generate themes that are relevant to answer the research questions.

After the data collection, the recorded data were transcribed. In the transcription, the researcher played, listened and converted the audio data into a text format. This was done for all the six interviews that were conducted. Each transcript was read thoroughly and edited concurrently. All the transcripts were carefully cross-checked to correct errors and repetitions.

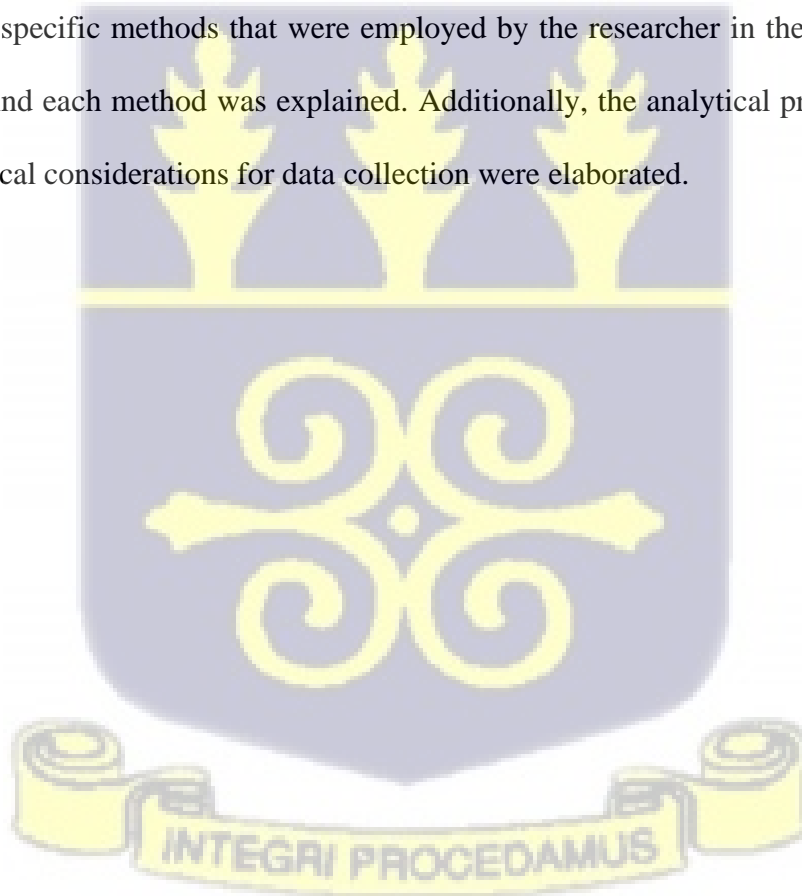
The researcher then conducted a coding process on the transcribed data. The coding process was in two stages; first cycle and second cycle coding. The first cycle coding process allowed the researcher to initially organize the individual data carrying the same ideas and concepts under one theme. The next stage was the second cycle coding process. In this process, the researcher organized the first cycle coded data to systematically build overarching themes to answer the research questions posed in this current study. In the second cycle of coding, the salient themes and recurring ideas were integrated to form dominant themes. This activity helped the researcher to make sense of the data and examine the themes amongst concepts that emerged from the interviews.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

To make this research ethical, the interviewees were assured that any information they provided would be treated with much caution and confidentiality. Also, data gathered were exclusively used only for academic purposes. The researcher ensured that names of interviewees did not appear in the reports and study.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology employed for the study. The chapter provided a detailed discussion on the specific methods that were employed by the researcher in the collection of data. The rationale behind each method was explained. Additionally, the analytical processes of the data collected, and ethical considerations for data collection were elaborated.



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two (2) sections. The first section presents the findings after analyzing the data that were collected for this current study, whilst the second section provides a discussion on the findings relative to the literature review and theory that underpinned this study.

In the first section, findings are presented on the demographic profile of the interviewees; functions of public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria; benefits of public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria; on challenges faced by public relations units in tertiary institutions in Ghana and Nigeria.

For the second section of this chapter, the findings are discussed based on the objectives of this current study. Moreover, the findings are discussed to confirm or disconfirm the findings of related studies that were reviewed as literature.

4.1 Presentation of Findings

4.1.1 Demographic Profile of Interviewees

This section presents the demographic profile of interviewees by providing their positions, educational qualifications, and years of experience as practitioners. The section also provides the number and qualifications of staff members in the public relations units of the sampled institutions as well as information on the publics of the public relations units in the tertiary institutions.

The findings of the study show that all the respondents were heads of public relations units of their respective institutions. However, some also doubled as Assistant Registrars. Also, out of the six interviewees, five had Master's degree qualification in either Marketing or Communications while the other one had a Master's degree in Human Resource Management. Again, it was noted that some interviewees had two Masters Degrees and/or professional certificates. Interviewees also had at least three years work experience in either communication or marketing.

The study further revealed that the public relations units in the sampled higher education institutions have between five to twenty-five members of staff. Also, the minimum qualification of the staff members in the various public relations units is a diploma in communication, marketing, business administration, or social science from a recognized tertiary institution.

In addition, publics of the public relations units in the selected tertiary institutions are students, alumni, faculty, parents, development partners, donors, suppliers, other tertiary institutions, the government through the ministry of education, chiefs and people of the community in which the institution is situated and the general public.

Furthermore, channels of communication for the public relations units are social media (mainly Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), the university's website, electronic and traditional mail, television, and radio.



4.1.2 Functions of Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana and Nigeria

This section presents the findings on the functions of public relations in tertiary institutions in West Africa. The interviewees explained the functions performed by the public relations units.

Findings of the study revealed that functions of public relations in the selected higher education institutions vary depending on the institutional goals in relation to its PR activities. However, the primary function of public relations is to project the image of the institutions and also maintain relationships between the institutions and their various publics. All respondents agreed that the basic function of public relations in tertiary institutions is to maintain relationship between the institution and its publics as well as protect the image and reputation of the institution. The respondent from UCC noted that public relations practice in the university is benched on relationship management between the institution and its publics. He said:

PR in the university is more of the normal traditional role of trying to create a very good rapport with the institution and its various stakeholders. As part of doing that, we employ various strategies to make sure that the kind of relationship established will be beneficial to both parties.

The UENR practitioner also mentioned that the public relations projects the image of the institution.

He said:

The PR office projects the university's image to the outside world and informs both the general public and the university community about events of the university. So generally, we project the positive image of the university, that is, creating visibility for people to get to know about the university and its operations when it comes to its research findings and other inventions that may be going on, the programmes it is running, and other internal activities of the university.

The UPH practitioner also added that the core function of public relations is to implement mutually beneficial programmes to both the institution and its publics. He said:

PR's function is to implement programmes that will have mutual benefits to the organization as well as its internal and external stakeholders.

The practitioner from Bayero University also highlighted that the reputation of an institution is influenced by its public relations practice. He noted that:

The public relations unit manages the reputation and image of the institution. How people perceive the university is our responsibility. We have to ensure that the university has good reputation and image in the eyes of the public.

Again, it was observed that, media relations forms one of the main functions performed by the public relations office. All six respondents indicated working closely with the media.

The UDS practitioner noted that the University Relations Office (the public relations unit of UDS) facilitates all media related engagements. She mentioned that:

During special occasions we arrange for media coverage. We also share some achievements or key issues with our friends in the media for publicity.

The head of public relations at the University of Cape Coast also mentioned that they engage the media in advertising the university's programmes and vacancies. He noted:

Although social media has lessened how frequent we engage the media in our activities, we still contact them when the need arises. For instance, we sometimes publish vacancies of academic and non-academic positions in the traditional media. When we open applications for students, we sometimes publish as well. We also organise press conferences when we have to.

The LASU practitioner also added that the public relations office organises press briefings and press conferences when necessary. He said:

When the Vice Chancellor wants to meet with the press or something happens that needs to be addressed publicly, we organise the media for a press conference.

The practitioner at the Bayero University also mentioned that the public relations unit shares news items with the media for wider publication. He said:

Apart from the press conference, we also share news worthy stories with the media for wider publicity. Let's say when the university wins an award or students conduct some ground-breaking research, we share the news with the media. Any significant milestone that needs publicity is shared with the media.

Another function highlighted was community relations. Four of the practitioners mentioned that, the public relations office coordinates engagements with the community in which the institution is situated and its environs. The UCC practitioner noted community relations as a key function performed. He said:

We do community relations. At the University of Cape Coast we are surrounded by about 10 communities that are very close to the university. So, community relations is one of the key aspect of the functions that we perform.

He added that, as part of the community engagement, the university has instituted programmes aimed at adding value to the community. He noted:

The university's college of education has launched the *Adopt a School Project*, whereby the college will adopt various schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis to mentor and make sure they perform well. This, is a community service championed by the PR unit.

The Bayero practitioner added that the public relations unit organizes outreach programmes as part of its community engagement. He said:

The public relations office coordinates with the communities around on behalf of the university. We even organize outreach programmes in these communities. For example, during the initial outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, we collaborated with the medical department and created awareness of the virus. We also shared sanitizers and face masks.

However, the University of Development Studies practitioner argued that, although community relations is supposed to be part of the functions performed by the public relations unit, the DICROP has assumed that role. She stated:

Normally, as part of our functions, we are supposed to have interactions with the chiefs of the communities around us. We are supposed to engage the people and initiate programmes to help them as part of our social responsibility but DICROP is in charge of all that. Some functions ascribed to University Relations is being performed and sometimes duplicated by DICROP.

In addition, the practitioners indicated that other functions performed by their offices include internal and alumni relations, content management of the institution's social media platforms and website and drafting reports.

The UPH practitioner indicated that the IPPR fosters relationship between the university and the alumni. He noted:

One of our key activities at the IPPR is to manage the alumni database and engage them when necessary. We ensure continuous contact and communication with our past students. For instance, when we have events like fund raising, we invite them to come to our aid. Many of our alumni are very well-established and support the university as and when.

The practitioners at the University of Cape Coast, Lagos State University, and Bayero University indicated that the public relations office oversees activities of the broadcasting units. The Lagos State University practitioner mentioned that the public relations office manages the LASU broadcasting station, internal relations, among other functions. He said:

We produce reports like the annual report and we are also in charge of relations with the press. We manage content on all of our media platforms; we also manage events and the institution's broadcasting station. We have a radio station (LASU FM), which is also being managed by the public relations unit. Again, we do internal communication that is, managing correspondence within the institution. We also do media monitoring.

The UCC PRO revealed that apart from managing the university's radio and television stations, the public relations office also offers mentorship to communication students. He said:

We have a communications department, that is, the Department of Communication Studies at the University, so we mentor the students through training and from time to time some do their internships at the public relations office. We also head the campus broadcasting services - ATL FM, TV UCC.”

The BUK practitioner added that “the University has a radio station, BUK 98.9 FM, which is managed by us.”

Again, the practitioners noted that, the public relations office is responsible for developing campaigns to publicize the institution to attract potential students. The practitioner from the Bayero University noted that the public relations office initiates campaigns aimed at marketing the institution. He said:

Sometimes we have what we call the school engagement campaigns where we engage the secondary schools through fairs organised either by us or by other organisations. For instance, if the Admissions office decides to do outreach services, we go and educate prospective students about what the university does.

The LASU practitioner also indicated that the public relations office produces online campaigns to engage with their publics. He said:

Under the CIPPR, we have the media unit, which also has a sub-unit directly responsible for producing visually appealing designs and sometimes short clips or documentaries used in developing campaigns for our social media platforms to engage our audience and attract potential students and even partners.

In further assessing the functions of public relations in institutions of higher learning, it was revealed that, the Catering Unit of the University of Cape Coast is managed by the Public Affairs Directorate through the public relations office although this role is not considered a fundamental public relations function. The practitioner noted, “We also have the University Catering Services and the the University Senior Common Room, both under the PR Unit.”

Summary

Most of the functions performed by the public relations offices in tertiary institutions conform to the fundamental public relations functions, namely, employee communication, media, alumni, and community relations. However, other related functions such as advertising and marketing, which are outside the core PR functions, are also performed by the public relations offices.

4.1.3 Benefits of Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana and Nigeria

This section presents the relevance of public relations to tertiary institutions by evaluating the interviewees' responses in line with the tenets of the excellence theory as well as exploring how public relations functions contribute to the achievement of institutional goals.

The excellence theory argues that for public relations to be valuable and relevant to institutions, it must conform to excellent practices through the “empowerment of the public relations functions, communicator roles, organisation of the communication function and its relationship to other management functions and models of public relations” (Grunig & Grunig, 2008).

With respect to empowerment of the public relations functions, the study revealed that the head of the public relations unit is either part of management or represented through the Registrar. The UCC practitioner confirmed that the Director of Public Affairs is part of the dominant coalition. He said, “The director is a member of management, and he advises management appropriately when necessary.” The BUK practitioner confirmed the public relations office is duly represented through the Director of Public Affairs.

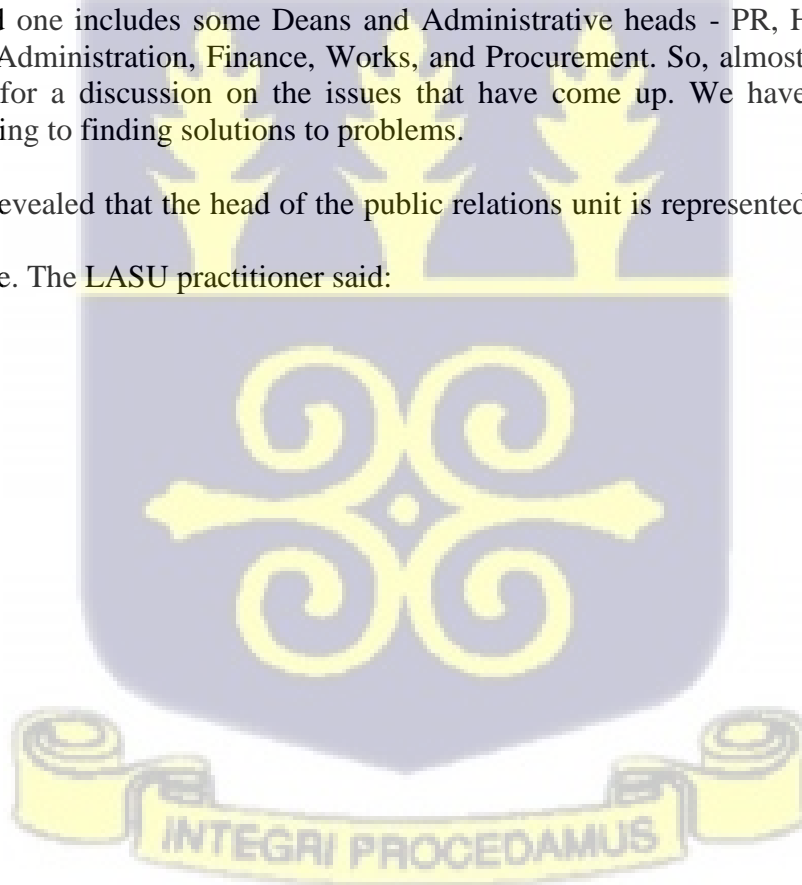
However, the UDS practitioner confirmed that the head of the University Relations (UR) is not part of management but is represented through the registrar's office. She said:

The university relations is not part of management; for example, when they have management meetings, the head of UR is not part of it. However, we channel our concerns through the Registrar's office, hoping that our issues will be addressed.

In UENR, it was noted that although the head of public relations is represented through the Registrar's office, management, through the Vice Chancellor has developed innovative ways to include units heads in its decision making process. He said:

Our current VC has a practice of having some type of management, he calls it expanded management meeting. Expanded because, under normal circumstances, management meeting is among the vice-chancellor, pro-vice-chancellor, and the registrar, but the expanded one includes some Deans and Administrative heads - PR, Human Resources, General Administration, Finance, Works, and Procurement. So, almost every two weeks he calls for a discussion on the issues that have come up. We have that platform of contributing to finding solutions to problems.

LASU and UPH revealed that the head of the public relations unit is represented through the Vice Chancellor's office. The LASU practitioner said:



Since the CIPPR is under the Vice Chancellor's office, it makes it easier for us to be included in decision-making, which we do through meetings and the Registrar.

The UPH practitioner also added that although the public relations office is not a directorate, and not part of management but the office is recognized and absorbed in the decision-making process through the Vice Chancellor's office. He said:

I am not part of management but through the Vice Chancellor's office, thus through the Registrar, my views and opinions are duly represented.

In relation to the communicator roles, the excellence theory proposes that the manager and technician roles should be played by different practitioners (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). The study revealed that at the University of Cape Coast and Bayero University, the manager does not play the role of a technician. The UCC practitioner stated that the Public Affairs Directorate headed by the director (that is, the manager) has sub-units which include the public relations office, hence the director plays a supervisory role while the head of PR and other members of the unit execute the technician role. He said:

There are sub-units under the Public Affairs Directorate, which includes the public relations unit; the heads of these units are responsible for the day-to-day activities of their respective units, and they eventually report to the director who carries it to management.

On the other hand, practitioners for the remaining institutions perform only the technician roles since they are represented by managers outside the public relations office or domain. This implies that the managers (in this case the Registrars) may not have the technical expertise to adequately supervise the public relations functions. This was clearly indicated in their functions. For example, the UPH practitioner said, "As part of producing content, we draft articles, factsheets, and stories."

In terms of the organisation of the communication functions and its relationship to other management functions, it was evident that all of the institutions performed the core public relations

functions as well as other communications related activities. The UENR practitioner mentioned that the activities carried out by the public relations unit are core to the practice. He said:

We coordinate the media during events; we produce souvenirs for the university; we also manage content for website and social media; we do media monitoring and everything related to public relations.

Also, the study revealed that the public relations functions are not performed separately from other functions. The study revealed that the University of Cape Coast public relations unit performs marketing related functions. The practitioner noted that:

When it comes to a public university, the PR unit performs all other communications related functions. When we go for fairs, we have to convince people to buy into our programmes and enroll, which may not be a typical PR function but purely marketing.

The UENR practitioner also confirmed that they participate in outreach programmes to market the institution to potential students. He said:

We also reach out to potential students, particularly the SHS students and try to explain to them why the University of Energy and Natural Resources should be their first “port of call” if they intend to further their studies.

The practitioner from the Bayero University also noted that the public relations office organises fairs to reach out to potential students.

Finally, on the models of public relations, the study showed that all the institutions practised a two-way symmetrical public relations. The study revealed that, the universities are not only focused on dissemination of information to their various publics but rather they have instituted ways of receiving feedback, which are duly addressed. The UDS practitioner said:

We communicate with our publics, which include our students, our partners, our suppliers, our partner organisations and even our sister institutions. You cannot rule out what the advent of social media has done in terms of attaining a two-way communication because now we notice that it is not what you tell people about your institution but more or less what people are telling each other about the institution so that makes it even more interactive. Now, in a matter of minutes you are able to get feedback from the people you engage with. So that is what I mean by a two-way channel; it is almost a dialogue now. We just do not churn out information.

The UPH practitioner also confirmed that the feedback received, is sometimes redirected to the appropriate offices to be properly addressed if it is outside the domain of the public relations office.

He said, “When we receive concerns, depending on the concern we address it through the appropriate office mandated to deal with those kind of issues.”

Again, the study revealed that public relations is key to the achievement of institutional goals. The

Bayero practitioner noted that:

Although some units in the university question the relevance of public relations and how it is helping the university, I can proudly say that the increase in applications from potential students each year is as a result of the good work we do by projecting a positive image for the school. The various campaigns we do on social media and our websites as well as the outreach programmes make the school attractive for both potential students and faculty and even donors.

The UENR practitioner also mentioned that through effective internal and external communication, public relations contributes to institutional success. He said:

Our activities are deeply rooted in the university’s successes. From internal communication, which seeks to promote synergy among staff members through effective dissemination of information and external communication, which includes engaging our alumni and all relevant stakeholders, is the ultimate in achieving organisational success.

Summary

In line with tenets of the excellence theory, the findings indicate that two of the six institutions have the senior public relations executives as members of management; all the public relations units practice two-way symmetrical communication; all six institutions perform public relations and other communications related functions, even though the public relations functions are practised together with other functions such as marketing. Again, the findings revealed that two out of the six institutions have different practitioners for manager and technician roles.

4.1.4 Challenges Facing Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana and Nigeria

This section presents the challenges impeding public relations practice in the selected institutions. Recognizing the challenges provided clarity to the limitations imposed in establishing the relevance of public relations in tertiary institutions. These challenges mitigate the effective functioning and excellent practice of public relations. The study revealed that inadequate funds remain a major challenge to the practice of public relations in tertiary institutions. Inadequate funds was a pertinent challenge evident in all of the interviews conducted.

The UENR practitioner noted funding as a key challenge. He said, “Funds allocated to this unit are relatively insufficient considering the activities we carry out to project the image and reputation of the institution.”

The UDS practitioner also noted the lack of qualified personnel for public relations roles also served as an impediment to the public relations practice. She said:

Another key issue in PR practice in tertiary institutions most especially public institutions is the lack of qualified personnel. We have qualified practitioners in some technical offices such as finance and the legal office but at the university’s relations office, the university assumes that any Assistant Registrar who can write good English, for example, can run the office.

Another challenge notable in all the interviews was the lack of resources. The institutions noted the lack of modern equipment cameras and other accompaniments were major setbacks in the successful implementation of their duties.

The Bayero public relations practitioner mentioned that the absence of licensed software and computers was a key challenge. He said:

Another challenge we face is inadequate resources such as computers and even licensed software. Not all our staff have computers and sometimes we have staff sharing computers. Our graphic designers also do not have the licensed editing software, some purchase from their pockets while other use pirated copies which is not best practice.

Summary

The major challenge faced by the public relations units was noted to be inadequate funds. However, lack of qualified personnel overseeing public relations functions and inadequate resources were also identified as key challenges.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical underpinnings and the appropriate literature that either supports or debunks the findings. The findings were presented in line with the study's objectives.

4.2.1 Functions of Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana and Nigeria

Firstly, the study revealed that the practice of public relations in higher education institutions in Ghana and Nigeria are similar with few variations. The key functions which are common to all the institutions are relationship management, media relations, employee communication (internal relations), and community relations. To explain further, the public relations units in their respective institutions work to maintain relationships with students, parents and other stakeholders, and engage with the media on behalf of their institutions either through press conferences, briefings or press agency. The public relations units maintain internal and community relations by managing and facilitating the flow of information within the university, and communication between the institutions and communities where they are situated. However, the variations in the functions of public relations units in some of the institutions include marketing, advertising, and event management. Some of the public relations units in executing their functions market their institutions to prospective students,

advertise by distributing brochures and flyers, and organize events for students. Some of the institutions have integrated public relations units into university council to provide expert advice to the council in any decision-making process. This finding indicates that the effective implementation of public relations functions serves as a catalyst for establishing relevance.

This current finding can be well understood by the theory of excellence which explains that public relations practice can contribute to the effectiveness of an organization when the organization practices excellent public relations (Grunig et al., 2002). Excellent public relations is manifested when an organization employs different functions of public relations to communicate effectively to their publics (Grunig & Grunig, 2011). In this study, it has been brought to light that the tertiary institutions employ the functions of relationship management, media relations, employee communication (internal relations), and community relations to maintain relationships between their internal and external publics.

This current finding of the study is consistent with that of Odongo (2009), and Anggreni (2018). Odongo (2009) assessed the trends of public relations practice in tertiary institutions in Kenya, and his study identified inter-college relations, media relations, internal communication, “college-general public relations” and provision of expert advice to management to inform decision making and policy implementation as functions of public relations in the institution. Also, Anggreni (2018) in Indonesia evaluated the functions and position of public relations at Mahendradatta University. After analyzing his data, the study found that the functions of the public relations office in the university include giving expert advice to management and solving critical problems, communication facilitation between the institution and its publics both in academic and non-academic fields. The findings further revealed that public relations practitioners facilitate internal communication, develop communication

strategies aimed at promoting the institution, and develop communication materials such as press releases.

4.2.2 Relevance of Public Relations in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana and Nigeria

Secondly, the study found that the relevance of public relations practices is manifested by practitioners' membership of the dominant coalition, and occupying the director or managerial role but not the technician role. Most of the public relations practitioners were part of the dominant coalition. The heads of the public relations units are members of management or represented through the registrars' or Vice Chancellors' offices during the decision making process by the management of the universities. Though, some of the heads of public relations units are represented by the registrar, they are sometimes invited to advise the management when necessary in any decision-making process. However, in only a few institutions the relevance of public relations practice did not attract much attention since practitioners perform only technician roles, and the units are headed by managers outside the public relations office or domain.

This current finding can be explained by the empowerment, involvement and managerial principles of the excellence theory. According to the principle of empowerment, for public relations to be relevant, there is a need for the senior public relations officers to be members of the dominant coalition or have a direct reporting relationship with senior managers who are part of the dominant coalition (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). The relevance of public relations in organizations is also explained by the principle of involvement which posits that public relations is needed to be part of the management process which eventually works together during the decision-making process to contribute to the overall goal of an organization (Grunig et al., 2002). On the other hand, the

managerial principle suggests that public relations units or departments must be headed by a manager who must carry out the functions of a communication manager but not just a technician (Kriyantono, 2019). In this study, most of the practitioners are part of the dominant coalition, involved in the management process, and occupy the managerial role in their respective institutions.

This current finding is consistent with that of Oluwagbemisola et al. (2018) but inconsistent with Agyapong's (2011). Oluwagbemisola et al. (2018) conducted a study to identify the public relations strategies that are used to manage conflict in the University of Lagos. Consistent with this finding, in the quest for conflict management, public relations practitioners are entirely involved in the decision-making process, and ultimately, the management of the university is always faithful to the bargain of public relations. However, Agyapong (2011) investigated the practice of public relations in three private universities (Regent University College, Methodist University College, and Ghana Telecom University College). His study revealed that the public relations departments were not represented at the university council which is the highest decision-making body in the universities to enable them to disseminate the decisions of management to the university's publics.

4.2.3 Challenges Faced by Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana and Nigeria

Lastly, the study revealed that the challenges faced by the public relations units are inadequate funds, lack of qualified public relations personnel, and lack of resources such as logistics. Inadequate funds remain a major challenge to the practice of public relations in tertiary institutions, followed by the lack of logistics such as modern equipment, cameras and other accompaniments which hinder the successful implementation of duties of public relations practitioners.

Findings of the study is well elaborated by the excellence theory which asserts that the practice of public relations in an organization must be organized and managed to make the organization more effective (Dornyo & Adiku, 2015). In this particular study, the challenges faced by practitioners result in disorganized and under-managed public relations units which render the units to be less effective. The principle of knowledgeability under the excellence theory further suggests that good a public relations department must have staff who have in-depth knowledge about the practice of public relations (Grunig et al., 2002). Lack of qualified personnel as a challenge indicates that most of the workers in the public relations departments lack in-depth knowledge about the practice of public relations.

Moreover, this current finding supports those of Narteh et al. (2013), Nurhanifah (2018), and Gezihagne (2018). Narteh et al. (2013) assessed public relations practices in selected universities in Ghana and found that public relations do not perform their roles effectively in the private universities due to lack of qualified staff and logistics. Nurhanifah (2018) examined public relations strategies for improving institutional image, using the State Islamic University of North Sumatera in Indonesia as a case study. The study revealed that lack of funds, qualified personnel and inadequate facilities are key challenges faced by the public relations department. In addition, Gezihagne (2018) evaluated the practice and challenges of public relations in public universities in Ethiopia. The study revealed that financial constraints, lack of public relations professionals, lack of appreciation and recognition for public relations functions by management, absence of logistics and weak governing structure of the public relations units were the key challenges faced by the universities.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter was presented in two sections. The first section presented the findings based on the objectives and research questions that were raised in the study. The findings presented demographic profile of interviewees, functions of public relations units, benefits of public relations units, and challenges face public relations units in tertiary institutions of Ghana and Nigeria. The second section discussed the findings of this current study relative to those of earlier studies and the theory that underpinned the study. The current findings were consistent with those of Odongo (2009), Anggreni (2018), Oluwagbemisola et al. (2018), and Nurhanifah's (2018) but inconsistent with Agyapong (2011).



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter next presents a summary of the major findings. It then goes on to draw conclusions, discuss limitations, and finally makes recommendations.

5.1 Summary of Major Findings

The findings of the study revealed that although the functions of public relations in higher education institutions in Ghana and Nigeria may vary, the core function of the PR units in universities is to create visibility and project the image of their universities. Other functions include media relations, community relations, internal and alumni relations, and content management for websites and social media platforms. Some practitioners also perform roles outside the public relations functions, including events management, marketing, and advertising.

Premised on the tenets of the excellence theory, the findings of the study also revealed that the public relations units are empowered. Thus, either the senior executive is a member of the dominant coalition or the unit is represented by another senior executive, which is usually the Registrar. Again it was established that in some institutions, different practitioners play the manager and technician roles. Comparatively, in other institutions the head of the public relations unit only performs the technician role whiles the manager role is performed by a principal officer outside the public relations unit.

Finally, the study revealed that the key challenges faced by the PR units in the selected tertiary institutions are inadequate funds, resources and lack of qualified personnel.

5.2 Conclusions/Implications

Based on the objectives and findings obtained in this current study, the following conclusions were made. Firstly, it is clear from the first finding that the tertiary institutions in both Ghana and Nigeria have not shifted from the practice of the fundamental function of public relations which is to maintain relationships between organizations and their publics. Also, most institutions have integrated other roles such as advertising and marketing which are not core to the practice of public relations functions into their public relations units.

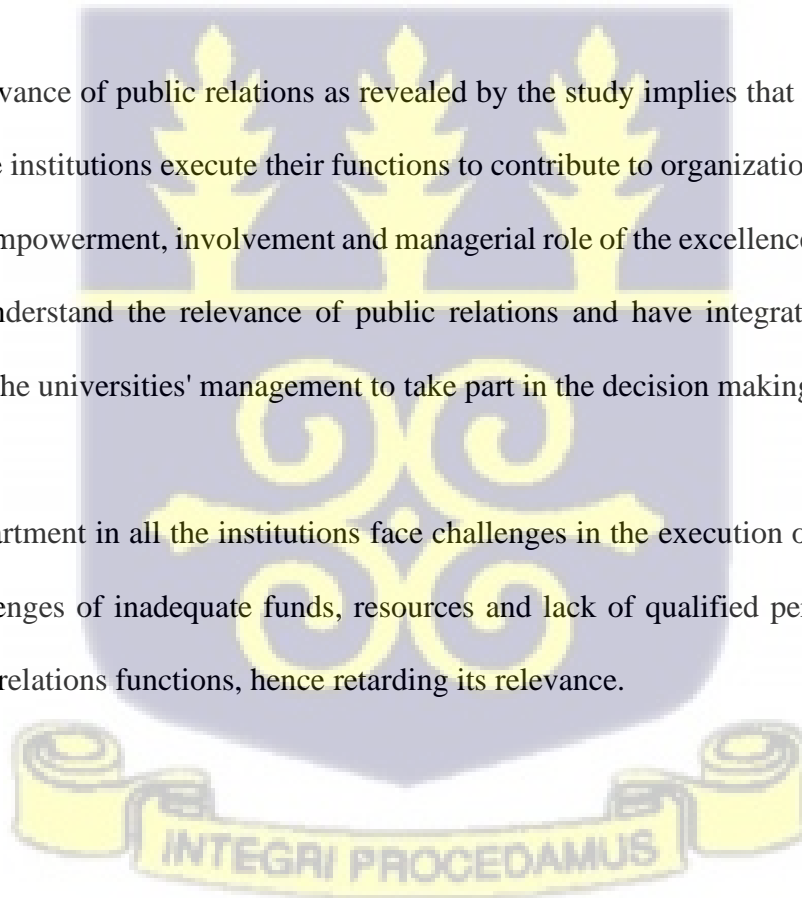
Secondly, the relevance of public relations as revealed by the study implies that the public relations departments of the institutions execute their functions to contribute to organizational goals following the principles of empowerment, involvement and managerial role of the excellence theory. Moreover, the institutions understand the relevance of public relations and have integrated public relations practitioners into the universities' management to take part in the decision making process.

Lastly, every department in all the institutions face challenges in the execution of their functions. It is clear that challenges of inadequate funds, resources and lack of qualified personnel impede the practice of public relations functions, hence retarding its relevance.

5.3 Limitations

In the execution of this current study, the following limitations were encountered.

Firstly, the researcher was limited to selecting only English-speaking countries. Though, public



relations is practiced in other French-speaking countries, the researcher could not select tertiary institutions from these countries due to the language barrier. Although the services of interpreters could have been employed, limited funds was a key constraint.

Secondly, though a sample size of six (6) (three institutions each from Ghana and Nigeria) was recommendable, the researcher had initially planned to select ten (10) institutions. However, due to the unavailability of interviewees which became a major setback during the data collection, the initial number was reduced to six (6) institutions.

Lastly, the planned interview method for data collection was supposed to be a face-to-face interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions, the researcher was forced to adopt the online interview. The online interview did not provide the luxury for the researcher to observe the non-verbal cues of the interviewees in responding to the interview questions.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of the study, the following recommendations are made to ensure the continual improvement, support, and contributions of public relations to higher education institutions.

For researchers and scholars, future studies on the practice of public relations functions can be broadened to include higher education institutions in Francophone countries. Such inclusion will create comparable perspectives on the practices of public relations in Anglophone and Francophone institutions.

For effective implementation of public relations functions, it is important that institutions of higher learning make efforts in addressing the challenges faced by public relations units including recruitment of qualified personnel for public relations roles and allocating enough funds for PR activities.

Public relations practitioners in executing core public relations functions should be separated from other functions like marketing. Practitioners should distinguish themselves from advertisers and marketers to make the practice of public relations stand out.



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APPENDIX

Interview Guide Part One: The Demographic Data of The Respondents

1. Please can you tell me your positions?
2. What is your educational qualification?
3. Please when did you start your PR practice?
4. What exactly is your role in the institution?
5. How many staff do you have in your public relation units?
6. What is the qualification of the staff in your PR units in the tertiary institutions?
7. Who are your publics, and how do you communicate with them?

Part Two: Functions of the Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in West Africa

8. What are your general function as PR officer in the institution?
9. How is public relations unit empowered in the institution?
10. How is PR function separated from other functions in the institution?
11. What channels are available for publics to report to your institution?
12. How does the head of the PR unit given space at the decision-making table?

Part Three: Benefits of Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in West Africa

13. How does the functions of the PR unit contribute to the achievement of the university's goals?
14. How does the university consider public relations relevant?
15. How does your role as PR practioner feed into the overall institutional goal?
16. What is your own assessment of the general contribution of the PR unit to achieving

institutional goals?

Part Four: Challenges Facing Public Relations Units in Tertiary Institutions in West Africa

17. What are some of the challenges confronting the PR units in the universities?
18. What may be the cause of the challenges facing the PR unit in the university?



