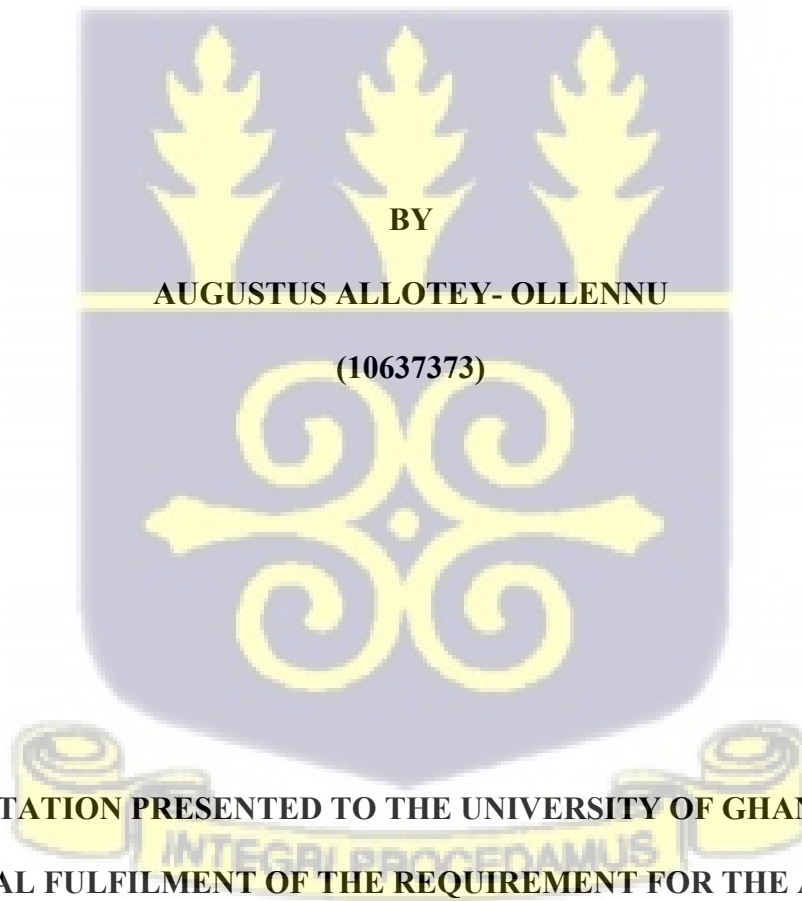


**PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTITIONERS AND MANAGERS ON THE STATE OF
PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN ACCRA,
GHANA.**



**A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON,
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES.**

JULY, 2020

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my original work written under the supervision of Dr. Gilbert Tietaah Senior Lecturer, Department of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana.



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ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore how PR is practice in the Ghanaian hospitality sector and understand the perceptions of managers and practitioners about the contribution of PR strategies and facilitate the development of the hospitality industry. Finally, the challenges and constraints to PR practice in the hospitality sector were also examined. Data from a qualitative in-depth interview of six key informants working in hotels, restaurants and travel and tour agencies in thematically analyzed. The study found that aside from a limited scope for media and customer relations, public relations practice has not fully formed as a distinct function in the Ghanaian hospitality industry. A narrow view of public relations was often adopted and practiced by personnel whose professional backgrounds and core job roles were in human resource, marketing, sales, operations and even accounting. Public relations was either treated as an afterthought or something anyone in the organisation could effectively carry out, or both. The function also tended to be symbolically represented at management through unrelated functional heads who may either be incapable or unwilling to initiate structural changes that will emphasize the role of public relations in these hospitality organisations. Nonetheless, there appeared to be significant optimism about the potential for public relations to drive growth and profitability of hospitality organisations, particularly in the cost-effective building of a valuable loyal customer base. Limited financial capacity, the relatively small size of most hospitality organisations and poorly suited professionals impacted the effective performance of the PR function. Based on these findings, we conclude that effective PR practice can help develop and maintain the reputational and relational assets of hospitality institutions in Ghana, as well as drive other underexplored areas of PR practice in the industry.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation first to GOD ALMIGHTY for HIS manifold grace and mercies. Secondly, to my Grandparents Mr and Mrs. Ollennu, mother Janet Ollennu. brother Seth Akwei Allotey-Ollennu, my Cousin and brother Professor Christopher Mate-Cole for their love, prayers, cooperation and financial assistance.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

The hospitality industry is believed to be among the fastest growing sector worldwide, and a very lucrative sector, as stated by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2011). In Ghana, the opening up of new hotels, restaurants, destination sites, and other hospitality facilities has necessitated the need to look at the state of effective Public Relations practice to promote the image and reputation of the hospitality sector.

1.1 Background

The hospitality industry all over the world has experienced significant growth and transformation to become a critical part of the socio-economic fabric of most countries, including Ghana. Changes in the work, recreation, travel, eating, and residential needs of people have created a multiplicity of demands that an equally unlimited number of hospitality business entities and their associated tourism sector have evolved to meet. What this means is that, the industry is characterised by intense competition that often threatens the profitability, growth and survival of hospitality organisations (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2003; Huertas, 2008; Seric, Gil-Saura, Ruiz-Molina, 2014). Improving customer retention and maintaining a favourable image and reputation among key stakeholders has become an effective strategy to derive competitive advantage in the industry (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2003; Tsai, Tsang-Cheng, 2012). Such a strategy invariably denotes the significance of public relations function (L'Etang, Falkheimer&, Lugo, 2007; Huertas, 2008; Wang et al., 2009). The public relations (PR) activity co-ordinates the construction of positive images of hospitality locations, activities and identities to engender mutually beneficial relationship among customers, local and multi-cultural communities.

Regardless of the seeming importance of public relations function in the hospitality sector, the limited scholarship that exists, are dominated by business marketing perspectives (Ha & Ferguson, 2015). This gap in scholarship and knowledge is more pronounced when one looks on the African continent and Ghana specifically. This study therefore hopes to explore the practice of public relations, its characteristics, nuances, perceived contributions and challenges within the Ghanaian hospitality industry. Specifically, this study sought to examine how PR is practiced within the hospitality industry, how the various institutions that form part of the hospitality industry- like hotels, restaurants, tourist sites, car rentals- perform and animate the PR function.

1.1.1 The Hospitality Industry in Ghana

The concept of “hospitality” has been defined variously by different sources and scholars. It involves treating guests and patrons who visit institutions and organisations to a memorable experience (Barrows, Powers, Reynolds, 2012). The hospitality industry is composed of business organisations that provide services to satisfy the needs of their patrons, customers, and the public. The hospitality industry has three (3) broad categories. The first category includes lodging and accommodation such as hotels, motels, and guest houses. The second group are the food and beverages comprising restaurants, chop bars, drinking bars and fast food outlets. Travel and tours: airlines, car rentals, trains, cruise ships, are the last category that make up the hospitality sector (Barrows, Powers, and Reynolds, 2012).

As a highly competitive industry, the priority of the hospitality sector is to provide quality service. The quality of service, ensures a more successful business. In other words, the objective

of hospitality institutions is to give guests value for their money, and to ensure that customers come back to patronize their services, and have fond memories of the place they visited (Collegesa, 2014).

In the Ghana Statistical Service report, hospitality Industry is among the sectors that have witnessed significant growth within the Ghanaian economy (GSS, 2015). The increasing development of the sector is attributed to various factors such as increased income levels, improved lifestyles, construction of tourism facilities, introduction of policy regulation from government (GSS, 2015). Despite the slow growth of the Ghanaian economy, the industry has recorded some modest gains. The World Travel and Tourism Council Ghana (WTTC, 2018) indicates that, from 2007 to 2014, domestic air travel more than quadrupled. The number of domestic air passengers in the country increased from 42,796 in 2007 to 360,222 in 2014 showing an increase of 7.42% since 2007 and growing at an average rate of 30.4%. In 2017 the sector's contribution to employment, through job creation and other indirect activities to the industry was 5.3%. This number is anticipated to rise by 14% in 2018 to 692,000. In terms of visitor exports the sector recorded GHC4,080.3m (USD929.5m) which is 4.9% of total exports in 2017, the figure is expected to rise by 1.6% in 2018. With regard to investment, in 2017 the sector raked in GHC733.9m which is 2.9% of total investment (USD 167.2m). It is also expected to go up by 4.1% in 2018. Tourism's direct value to gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 was GHC5.882.9m (2.9%). This is expected to increase by 5.0% in 2018 to GHC6.153.

1.2 Problem statement

Increasingly, the hospitality and tourism sectors are intimately connected to global, national and local community spaces, where relations, images and reputations must be diligently managed and enhanced. A co-ordinated public relations function is required to convey a consistent, unified message through multiple channels (Hudson, 2008; Seric et al., 2014).

Additionally, building reputation and relationship between hospitality businesses and their publics have been found to produce better customer loyalty between the hospitality organisation, institutions, and the industry as a whole (L'Etang, Falkheimer, Lugo, 2007; Tsai et al., 2012). Bad relationship and reputation management in the hospitality industry often lead to undesirable business outcomes such as low patronage and occupancy within the hospitality sector.

The hospitality and tourism sector requires PR activity and scholarship, in order to effectively deal with problems within the African and Ghanaian context where there continues to be limited knowledge about the perceived influence of PR in the hospitality industry. Therefore it is unable to realise its full potential and contribute meaningfully to the progress of the hospitality sector, because it is subsumed and merged with other departments such as Human Resource and Sales and Marketing in hospitality institutions within the industry. (L'Etang, 2013) notes that the way public relations is conceptualised, executed by different institutions and practitioners, is determined politically, economically, culturally and socially in many different countries and societies, and its potential has not been fully unearthed. This study which seeks to explore an understanding of PR practice within the Ghanaian hospitality industry provide scholarly

knowledge that would bring to the fore the peculiar structural, situational, and sectoral challenges confronting the Ghana and African hospitality industry as a whole.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study focuses on the following research objectives to address the overarching purpose of understanding PR practice within the Ghanaian hospitality industry.

1. To explore the characteristics and peculiarities of PR practice in the hospitality industries in Accra.
2. To seek managers and PR practitioners perceptions about the contribution of PR to the growth and development of the hospitality industry in Accra.
3. To ascertain the challenges and constraints to PR practice in the hospitality industry in Accra
4. To determine whether the PR function is performed by PR professionals or by professionals of other disciplines.

1.4 Research Questions

In this study, the following research questions are posed to help attain the above stated research objectives.

1. How is public relations practiced within the context of the Ghanaian hospitality industry?
2. What are the perceptions of managers and practitioners about the contribution of PR strategies and activities within the hospitality industry in Ghana?
3. What are some of the challenges and constraints facing the practice of PR in the hospitality industry in Accra?

4. Is the PR function essentially in the hands of PR professionals or professionals of other disciplines?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The evidence from this study will reveal how hospitality organisations have been using public relations function to relate and build reputation among their stakeholders and publics in the Ghanaian hospitality industry. Such knowledge may contribute to scholarly analysis and discussions on the nature of PR function within the hospitality and tourism industry, especially one that is dominated by effective PR practice.

Previous studies have essentially looked at structure and development of PR over the years and the way forward. This work also looks at PR, but highlights challenges such as lack of designated PR departments in hospitality institutions and fact that, the PR function is not handled by trained PR professionals but professionals in other disciplines like marketing and human resource. Although marketing and human resource appear to have some semblance of PR related functions. It is important to note that the PR function is distinct from the above disciplines. Therefore, this study seeks to underscore the fact that PR as a distinct practice is underexplored in the Ghanaian hospitality industry.

This study is also an attempt to draw attention of PR professionals, institutions, agencies, to the personnel and organisational structure of PR within the hospitality institutions and the sector as a whole in Ghana. The general tendency to merge PR with other disciplines creates overlap and blurs the practice of PR as a distinct discipline, because such outfits cannot be considered as

rigorous PR outfits owing to their hybrid nature. This study advocates a distinction between the functions of PR and the other disciplines such as sales and marketing and human resources within the hospitality industry.

Information and data gathered during the study may help for teaching and learning. Information regarding new trends, challenges of the industry, and the way forward can provide basis for appraisal of methods, principles, teaching, practice, formulating theories, and policies for the hospitality sector.

In addition, the findings of the study may contribute to enhance the relationship between the hospitality industry and various users and beneficiaries of the services provided by the hospitality sector. The findings may serve as feedback for the hospitality sector. This is key in dispelling rumours and misconceptions, indispensable for remedying shortcomings and charting a way forward for hospitality industry; by way of providing new services to suit specific demands of the hospitality sector.

Additionally the findings of the study may contribute to craft innovative services for use in the industry, for example the use of information and communication technology to replace traditional customer delivery systems.

1.6. Operational Definitions.

Publics: Refers to groups of people (whether organized or not) that have direct or indirect relationship with an organization: customers, employees, investors, media students.

Hospitality Industry: Comprises a group of business organisations that provide services to patrons, customers, clients to satisfy their needs and give them a memorable experience

Stakeholders: Involves individuals or people, who have interest in, or are affected by the organization. Eg employees, customers, shareholders, communities.

PR practitioner: Refers an individual employed by an organization to develop and promote positive relationship between organisations and their publics.

1.7. Organisation of Study:

This study is divided into five parts. Chapter one comprises a short explanation of the background, the problem statement, the research questions, research objectives, and the significance of the study among others. Chapter two involves, review of the literature. Chapter three will discuss the methodology of the study: sources of data, approach to data collection, sampling techniques and interview guide among others are covered in this chapter. Chapter four comprise, data analysis, responses to interviews and discussions of the results and the limitations of the study. Chapter five shows a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the results obtained during the conduct of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the works of various researchers thereby assessing relevant knowledge as expressed in their respective works. This will serve as the theoretical framework on which this research reposes, with regard to the use of Public relations, corporate social responsibility, the internet, websites, social media, and perceptions of PR practitioners and managers of the hospitality sector in Ghana.

2.1: Conceptual Review

2.1.1: Public Relations Practice

Public Relations as a “modern term” was introduced in the United States of America by the United States Post Office Railway Union in the first decade of the twentieth century (Heath & Coombs, 2006). Although the practice is believed to have existed a long time ago since humans began to interact. The concept has evolved and gone through different phases as a “discipline and a career”. The earliest phase known as the “ Journalistic and Publicity Tradition”, during this phase of development, emphasis was placed on creating awareness and building the reputation of individuals or organisations through PR. This era is compared with modern day ‘advertising and promotional’ activities, where “the message for the widest possible audience” becomes significant. As the practice evolved into “The Persuasive Communication Campaign Tradition”, attention was given to providing compelling and comprehensive messages by the organization to its publics. Organisations must ensure that, the receiver (publics) understand and accept the message. The third phase is “The Relationship Building and Two –way Communication

Tradition” this tradition emphasizes mutually beneficial relationship between organisations and their publics.(Heath & Coombs, 2006)

Public relations as a discipline has experienced several definitions by both practitioners and scholars alike because of its evolving nature, or “theoretical underpinnings” shared by different scholars and practitioners . Therefore different definitions of the concept have emerged based on ‘varying assumptions, values, and perspectives’. This has generated endless argument about a common definition for PR (Davidson, 2016; Fitch & L’Etang, 2013b; Russell & Lamme, 2016) . One of the founders of modern PR Rex Harlow of Stanford University agrees with this assertion after he had reviewed 472 PR definitions in 1977. He said

“This historical review reveals how inextricable the development of concept has been, and is bound to the ‘movement of thought and action’ of the society in which the public relations practitioner does their work .It shows the present form, content and status of the public relations definition, but even more the effect of environmental factors and change upon its development (p.49).

“Public Relations” is not merely a terminology but a concept that depicts different meanings to different people depending on the cultural environment in which it is practiced (L’Etang, 2013). Most of the common place terms such as continuous ,” planned , deliberate, two-way communication, strategic management function” among others found in most PR definitions reflect the dominant idea of PR as a “functional/normative” discipline, which stems from Gruning`’s “Excellence” theory(Gower,2006, L’Etang ,2013b) .It also explains the PR concept as an evolving field of study with no standard definition as to its changing nature, theoretical framework ,and scope commonly shared by both scholars and practitioners. The concept

emerged from a study in 1984 which observed that PR could be used to accomplish organizational strategies and goals through regular interactions with its identified publics and stakeholders, the use of two-way communication to nurture and maintain a healthy relationships (Gruing, 2013). PR scholars such as Terry Flynn, Fran Gregory align with the idea that public relations is the “strategic management of relationships” between an organization and its various publics by using communication to accomplish organizational goals (Flynn, 2014). Among PR scholars there is a convergence that the discipline is about using persuasive communication to maintain a healthy relationship between an organization and its publics (Heath, 2010).

On the other hand, some scholars have “contested” the Excellence theory and have advanced different definitions because they are of the opinion that PR practice is characterized by different assumptions, values and worldviews (Curtin, 2012, Edwards, 2012, Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006) so to advocate a common definition would create a challenge. In addition the Public Relations Society of America in 2011 organized a programme on crowd sourcing to find a common definition that spells out the key elements of what PR professionals do, it was observed that the job of PR is “so complex” and entails various parts so it would be difficult to find a common definition (Rickey, 2012).

Other scholars have emphasized the technical aspect of PR, which has informed their description of the discipline as a “collection of communication techniques” thus insisting on the technical aspect of the discipline, especially since practitioners engage in crafting communication tools such as press releases, press statements, and interviews among others to interact with their publics. (Gregory, 2012). The very critical scholars have described PR as tool for “manipulation

and propaganda” because in their view PR practitioners seem to place the interest of their organisations above its publics and the larger society. They have challenged “normative concepts” especially the idea of symmetry in the light of apparent differences in power that exist between executives and employees within an organization (Berger, 2005; Reber & Beger, 2006) on one hand ,organisations and their publics on the other(Berger, 2005;Roper, 2005).

Another school of thought looks at the field of PR from a practical viewpoint. They argue that PR activity should impact the society in which it operates. Organisations operating in any society are expected to “adapt” to the expectations of the environment (Ihen & Verhoeven, 2012; van Ruler & Veric, 2004). For example German sociologist Jurgen Habermas advocates a paradigm shift in our outlook to PR to embrace the PR function as a sort of ‘cultural intermediary’(L`Etang, 2013b). Such “paradigmatic worldview” stems from the fact that PR practice is sometimes influenced by the cultural norms of their environment.

Moreover some scholars have looked at the ethical perspective of PR. Such scholars have argued that every profession has its ideals, norms, and principles that underpin its practice. In view of this , there should be a concerted effort in upholding the ethics of the profession. For instance whether it is ethical for PR to be used as a tool for propaganda, corporate social responsibility, and the whole problem of determining the worth of PR function to the benefit of society (L`Etang, 2013).

Just as the concept of PR has experienced different viewpoints, so has the role of PR practitioners been a subject of debate with many looking at it from various perspectives.

Generally, there are four identified roles namely expert-prescriber, communication facilitator, problem solving facilitator, and communication technician according to Broom and Smith (Broom,1992, Broom & Smith, 1979). Researcher's like Dozier have argued earlier that communication managers are no different from the 'expert prescriber', 'communication facilitator', and the 'problem- solving facilitator' roles. In addition, within the organizational setup they (communication managers) form part of the communication experts .However the role of the communication technician is different and focuses on the technical know-how of the PR work. He further distinguishes managers as the "policy –initiators" who take responsibility for the outcome of PR strategies. He added that the job of the technician involves crafting communication tools to execute policy initiatives of others (Dozier, 1992).

In contrast, another study undertaken by Viera and Grantham in conjunction with the Public Relations Society of America identified an additional role for the practitioner. They are classified into five (5)negotiator, policy advisor , brand officer, internal communicator, and press agent. Among these the negotiator and policy advisor are part of top management and make policy decisions (Viera & Grantham, 2013). The advent of technology; internet, social media, and the proliferation of media houses have further diversified the communication space and speed which hitherto were not available. The outcome is that, communication officer's perception of being in control of messages has eroded. Stakeholders can now communicate with institutions and each other more freely and frequently, which affects the way their relationship is managed (Gruning, 2009, Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010). Thus, it is required of practitioners to adopt a more consumer and audience oriented approach which places more premium on mutual relationship (Priem, Butler & Li, 2013; Luoma-aho, 2015), and also incorporates other roles into their practice such

as strategic counselors, business environment, trends spotters and digital experts.(Alfonsi, 2012). Whiles the expansion of the digital communication space has led to the elevation of the status of communication function in many organisations ,PR has failed to adequately exploit the opportunity to position itself as a significant management function (Lewis &Nichols, 2012, Rowe & Hutchins, 2014).This is due to a seeming lack of PR professionals capable of operating at the board level. In addition, most organizations are yet to involve communication officers at topmost managerial circles (Steyn, 2012). Furthermore PR role is thought to be a “support function” waiting to execute policy initiatives of their chief executives. Thus, it is perceived as ‘reactive’.

Due to its multi-facet nature, scholars have found it challenging to outline the required “competencies. Capabilities, skills” for its practice. Again the apparent small number of PR theories and methods, the general lack of consensus on a standardized theory and methodology commonly shared by most scholars have implications for the PR profession.(Meadows, 2014; Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2011).In the opinion of the PR fraternity the challenges confronting the profession are the inability to attract and develop the requisite skill and talent which may include the above (Holmes & Cook, 2016).Meanwhile, other professions have outlined measures to enable them streamline the profession by setting benchmarks and standards for practice, however PR appears to be having challenges in this direction.(Gregory, 2008, Lester, 2014; Manley & Valin, 2017)

2.1.2: The Hospitality Industry in Ghana

The hospitality sector forms an integral part of Ghanaian life and economy. The industry has undergone some remarkable improvement over the years. The nation is endowed with a lot of, natural attractions such as parks, waterfalls, castles, forts, mountains among others which have experienced some level of face-lift. In recent times there have been considerable, development in the hospitality/tourism infrastructure in arears such as hostels restaurants, salons, spas, to promote the image of sector, these developments attract a lot of patronage from people in and outside the country. This has generated, revenue, employment, foreign exchange, for the citizens and the government. The Tourism subsector is the third highest contributor of foreign exchange to the economy (Fosu, 2015; Lee-Ross & Lashley, 2010). The hospitality industry in Ghana is categorized into three (3). The first category is accommodation such as hotels, motels, guest houses, among others. The second category is in the area of food and beverages comprising restaurants, fast food chains, chop bars and outlets that provide food and beverages, The last category involves car rentals, trains, airlines, cruise ships.

Hospitality/ tourism businesses are a group of business entities that provide services that satisfy the needs of patrons, clients, customers to give them memorable experience and reason to patronize their services again .Owing to the competitive and consumer-oriented nature of the hospitality industry “quality of service and customer satisfaction” are the two key elements that enable one to stay competitive and retain customers. The hospitality industry is ostensibly people –oriented as compared to other industries because of the crucial nature of the quality of personal interaction and the number of hours spent between practitioners and guests. In the opinion of (Amoako et al, 2012) to ensure that organization`s maintain their customers, it is

essential to notice the ever changing needs of our customers and make the necessary effort to meet them (practitioners see themselves as “problem fixers”). Furthermore hospitality organizations that are to ‘identify and satisfy’ the demands of their customers make good profit and have the edge over their competitors. There is a healthy relationship that exists between customer satisfaction, loyalty and organisations. Another very important ingredient in addition to customer satisfaction is “building relationship” ,(Sivesan, 2012) observes that when customers are satisfied with the quality of service of an organization it builds trust, commitment, on the part of the customer for the organization and translates into mutual relationship. (Narteh et al, 2013) also examined the influence of customer satisfaction and relationship that thrives between hotel industry and customers in Ghana. There is a healthy bond that develops between organizations that are able identify and satisfy the needs of customers. According to (Anabila et al 2012) due to the highly competitive nature of the hotel sector, hospitality organisations need relationship strategies to have a competitive advantage. This has led to a conscious effort on the part of hotels in adopting efficient relationship management strategies to ensure long-term customer retention. Generally customers come back when the quality of service is high .Again, one of the key elements in maintaining mutual relationship in the hospitality business is innovation and efficient service delivery. Innovation involves the introduction of new and improved goods, services, activities, that are; ‘functional , and user friendly’ ,intended to satisfy the needs of the customer, or finding innovative ways to improve existing ones(Talbot, 2010), however, this idea is lacking particularly in the hotel and restaurant sector, hence such organizations are not able to reap the potential benefits (King, 2016) . According to (Dzhandzhugazova et al, 2016) lack of requisite knowledge to create innovative services, products, among others would hamper the Ghanaian hospitality sector growth, development and competitiveness .On the other hand, firms that are

innovative within the hospitality industry are able to maintain their “portfolio ahead of their competitors “ and are able to retain loyal and committed clientele (Chang et al, 2016). For instance, in the hotel sector competition for customers is that intense and therefore repeat patronage is very key for the reputation and growth of the hospitality sector. Innovation in technology such as the introduction internet, Wifi, and websites is indispensable. Hoteliers have introduced on–line bookings by developing their own user friendly websites. These websites showing photos of facilities available to help customers form their own impressions about the facility long before they physically visit the site(Hang et al., 2011; Irimiea, 2012). These innovations enhance the ease of doing business and ensure customer satisfaction. Handling customers complaints in a prompt and timely manner through information gathering mechanisms like “websites, room cards , front desk logs” play a significant role in attracting and retaining customers(Simon, Mazilu, Andrei, Severineanu, &Dumitrascu, 2010). Such feedback can be used in training programmes and formulating policies for hospitality industry in Ghana(Chang et al., 2011; Stewart & Hitt, 2012). Lack of innovations in customer service to satisfy the needs of customers in the hospitality industry would lead to customer dissatisfaction and impinge on customer retention capability since the customers tend to find better alternatives from other competitors. In the opinion of Slack, hospitality organizations in the hotel subsector are losing out on repeat patronage because customers are dissatisfied with the quality of service so they prefer to look else where(Slack, 2010).

Introducing innovations in any organization is a key strategy to growth and development, and the hospitality industry in Ghana is no exception.. “Hospitality marketers” have initiated innovations such as “content marketing” for their products, services, and development of manpower

capabilities of personnel to add value to the sector and create awareness for their brand instead of an over reliance on the traditional method of advertising (Gustafsson et al., 2012)

The hospitality industry is among the sectors that contribute enormously to socio-economic development of Ghana due to the size and quality of its clientele, which involves mostly foreigners. In the light of the above the sector is expected to be endowed with certain high quality of skills and service; sadly in the opinion of many patrons the quality of skill and service offered are rather low, consequently they are not getting good value for their money (King, 2016; Thomas et al., 2011). There is a dearth of qualified labour force in the hospitality industry in Ghana (Hornsby & Scott-Halsell, 2015; Ravichandran, Israeli, Sethna, Bolden, & Ghosh, 2017). The scarcity of skilled labour force can be among others ascribed to lack of standardized practice. The challenges regarding curriculum of hospitality courses and programmes at the tertiary level. Gersh (2016) point to the absence of qualified “culinarians” and institutions that teach culinary skills. The contribution of both skilled manpower and qualified institutions in the hospitality sector is crucial to building its image. Again, there seems to be a disconnect between the culinary professionals being churned out by the institutions vis a vis the needs of the hospitality industry (Gersh, 2016). The Ghanaian hospitality industry needs high caliber of personnel (Lin, Chiang, & Wu, 2018). In order for the Ghanaian hospitality sector to develop, there should be adequate supply of high level personnel to meet the changing demands of the hospitality industry. There is an apparent lack of “communication skills” among practitioners in the Ghanaian hospitality industry as observed by (Milman, & Whitney 2014) most of personnel in the Ghanaian hospitality sector speak only one foreign language (English), this hinders effective communication with other nationals who do not speak English, many also are not able to express

themselves fluently in the English language. Beesley and Davidson observed that educational programmes and curriculum should be tailored to meet the skills required by the hospitality sector (Beesley, & Davidson, 2013). For the Ghanaian hospitality sector to be relevant and compete globally there should be a regular supply of high caliber of personnel to confront the challenging demands of the hospitality sector in Ghana. It is expected that educational institutions would restructure their curriculum to reflect current trends in the hospitality industry so that their graduates could be endowed with employable skills.

2.2: Review of Opinion/General Review/Literature Review

.2.2.1: Public Relations Practice and the Ghanaian Hospitality Industry

Public Relations is very key to the promotion and communication activities of the Ghanaian hospitality and tourism industry. Hospitality institutions in general engage with the media and other stakeholders through regular public relations activities and outputs, by issuing press statements, press conferences, interviews, trips to tourist destinations among others. Practitioners of hospitality and tourism industry produce press releases to increase awareness and create a favourable reputation among their publics on varying subjects such as policies, facilities, cuisine, programmes and events (Arcero, 2003).

As a tool for enhancing communication, the hospitality sector use PR to create cordial interaction between organisations and their stakeholders who could be ‘internal publics’ (employees and investors), ‘external publics’ (customers, suppliers, media, government officials among others). (Nelson, 2004) explains that, public relations is central to the Hospitality sector, more importantly, to communicate its ‘vision, mission, and values’ as a service industry.

The hospitality industry embark on various PR activities and events to promote its image and reputation. According to (Goldblatt, 2005) some events organized by practitioners to promote the industry may be grouped into educational, awareness creation and marketing , celebration of life , and for reuniting people .Events occupy a very prominent place in the calendar of most hospitality and tourism organisations and it forms part of its PR strategies (Celtic & Cetinkaya, 2013). Hospitality organisations and tourism destinations have associated themselves with national festivals such as Homowo, odwira .Afahye, among others by sponsoring these events. These events have become ‘demand generators’ and play significant role by contributing to the hospitality and tourism and travel and tours sector(Getz, 2005). Entertainment programmes are organized as publicity and for socio-economic benefits to the hospitality and tourism sector (Gertz, 2005; Small, 2007)

Allen (2009) Explains that hotels have ‘convention center’ for hosting international and domestic conferences of different types and form important events in the PR strategies of the hospitality and tourism sector since it offers opportunities for domestic and international travels. Incorporating such activities help to highlight an organisation's name and its operations. A carefully planned and executed public relations function can play a key role in a hotel's promotional campaign. Through public relations, you can project a hotel, restaurant, a tourist site, and its products and services to current and prospective customers (Brookins, 2017).

Relations with the media and other stakeholders of the hospitality industry takes various forms like press releases and conferences. PR practitioners in the hospitality industry employ press conferences to interact with the press and other stakeholders in the hospitality industry. They

also grant interviews and organize press trips for journalists, and other relevant publics and stakeholders to visit facilities and tourist sites.

Tourism destinations are part of goods and services offered by the hospitality industry in general. They thrive on media exposure. The image of a tourism destination gains prominence when media representation becomes greater, especially when the reader has no experiences of a destination (Jenkins, 2001). Images from hospitality destination are produced through various outlets and agents, including the news media. Hence, public relations managers must monitor and cultivate a favourable representation of their hospitality organisations in the minds of the media.

Within the hospitality and tourism industry, practitioners may create, co-ordinate or sponsor the organisation of events like trade fairs, exhibitions, concerts and festivals. All these events help to not only promote the image of individual hospitality organization, but also attract media attention and favourable visibility for the sector as a whole.(Gertz, 2005)

Workshops, corporate meetings, birthday parties, seminars, conventions and fellowship meetings are another PR technique used by practitioners in the hospitality and tourism sector. . These events provide the platform for engagements between professionals and promoters of destination sites, tour and travel agencies, from the same potential market to interact and promote the product and services they offer.(Small, 2007).

The PR practitioners of hospitality industry also engage in the merchandising of products as part of promoting and publicizing destinations. Publications of brochures, hotel guides, catalogues, maps, among others, inform potential publics and orient them to the places they visit. Such materials are very persuasive in order to convince readers to make a purchase decision (Huertas, 2008)

In the Ghanaian hospitality industry, informal communication or “word of mouth” (WOM) is significant in promoting the image and reputation of the tourism and hospitality industry. It serves as external source of information for planning trips, because it is seen as credible (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). Through WOM, current and prospective customers exchange views and information that points patrons to or away from products, services, and organisations (Seth, 2012).

Word of mouth (WOM) is perceived to create more interpersonal relationship, as opposed to communication that passes through mass-media channels about products, brands, services and their knowledge from producers/providers to customers. With the absence of commercial influence of WOM, consumers consider it as trustworthy source and can be persuaded by this kind of information than by media sources (Casalo et al, 2011; Litvin et al, 2008). In (WOM) the Human factor is the key element performing the task of promoting organizational image (Bharwani & Butt, 2012). As result there must be mutual relationship and understanding between the organization and the customer (Kusluvan et al, 2010).

2.2.2. Corporate social responsibility and the hospitality industry in Ghana

In the context of the hospitality sector in Ghana, many hospitality organisations have used some functions of PR, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) in building the reputation of their brands. The main objective of CSR is that, an organisation must do far more than just making profit and be conscious of social needs and contribute to the improvement of the social environment. Thus, it is expected of organisations to be “good corporate citizens” as well as “good neighbours”. This means, organisations are supposed to take care of the effects that their economic activities may have on the community and environment. Thus organisations, communities and environment are members of a stakeholder system (Figar & Figar, 2012).

“CSR is described as the continuous commitment by businesses through behaving ethically in their trade, and contribute to economic development, at the same time improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community at large” (Johnson, 2010)

In the case of the hospitality industry it is referred to as corporate sustainability. The hospitality sector engages in CSR for various motives such as philanthropic, ethical, economic among others. Within the hospitality sector reputation is very key to its survival in a highly competitive sector in which it operates. A bad image may likely result in unfavourable conditions such as reduced occupancy or low patronage. It is noted that CSR impacts consumer behaviour, hence the need to use CSR practices to satisfy customer needs (Blesic et al, 2011). In certain instances, customers may shun organisations that do not uphold the ethics of their profession (Schrader et al, 2006; Vassilikopoulou et al, 2005). In other words CSR has the tendency to boost corporate image when consumers view an organisation as ethical. It is believed that, improving the quality

of service of an hospitality organization is a socially responsible activity that an organization owe towards its customers, in other to attract them and establish a long and mutual relationship.

Additionally, hospitality organisations are engaged in sustainability-related activities, such as donations to charity and communities in which they operate, as a way of giving back to the society. Such events are important elements in their sustainability commitments .Essentially social responsibility is an organisations “idea about its relationship with the society in which it does its business”. They employ various strategies in communicating these activities and efforts to consumers and their publics. They adopt the “stakeholder information strategy” which has the purpose of disseminating information about the organization, with the intent of informing its stakeholders and publics about its activities. Some of these hospitality brands, have individual (corporate) websites that report on the “CSR” efforts or its charitable activities. Other institutions use different methods to communicate their CSR-related information, these methods include, annual report, press release, newsletters, magazines, blogs for employees, stakeholders and publics.

Furthermore, the hospitality industry in Ghana use CSR to contribute to development efforts in areas where they feel are of real concern to the country. For example some the big multi-national hospitality organizations make contributions to the education and health sectors. Kayuni and Tambulasi (2012). They use such activities to “boost their profile”; it provides free publicity and visibility for that hospitality organization in the business environment.

One of the important responsibility of the hospitality industry and particularly the hotel subsector is the potential to offer job opportunities to indigenes of the community. Investments in the hotel sector both private and public creates job avenues and expands the economy. It builds the image of the sector (International Finance Corporation, 2012)

2.2.3 The internet, websites, social media, tourism and hospitality Industry in Ghana

The hospitality business, like any other business investment needs to be competitive to survive. Since the advent of the internet, the hospitality companies have found the need to do business on the internet, and set up websites. The internet has changed the way organisations communicate amongst themselves(B2B) and between organisations and their customers .It has evolved to become more interactive and a channel for cooperation and sharing of information(Li & Wang, 2011; Thevenot, 2007). This idea has also caught up with the hotel, restaurants, travel and tour operators. According to (Bodnar, 2010) more than 3million photos, 5million tweets, a million blogs (especially travel- blogs) are posted on social media platforms. As a result, it has offered the hospitality sector the opportunity to bring innovations to the way they build their image, sell products/services and even develop relationship. Moreover, the internet offers some unique features that offer enormous social communication opportunities to the hospitality industry in terms of customer relations, good image and brand awareness (Bilgihan, Peng & Kamdampully, 2014). This statistics demonstrates the influential role social media plays in the hospitality industry

Social media has greatly impacted the ‘information symmertry’. For example, a website is relatively cheaper, as compared to traditional forms of communication, and it offers more

information at a go, than traditional channels (Arola,2010) Although the initial objective of these organisations to set up websites was to provide information, these days the focus and emphasis is more about establishing lasting relationship between organisations and their customers, because consumers get direct access to the organization without travelling to the premises of the organization(Seth, 2012) . Once established, it allows hospitality facilities to do more “targeted business” all throughout with prospective audience globally. Consumers of hospitality product and services, particularly travellers search these sites for information to organize their travelling activities: they check for prices, facilities, and make reservations, in spite of geographical location, time differences(Koumelis, 2011) More than one-third of holiday travelers in apparently choose their hotels based on social media sites such as facebook This makes hospitality products easily available to the worldwide audience and allow ease of access to customer replies (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012).

The technology also allows consumers of hospitality product and services “to marry their needs” with internet technology .It also offers the greater benefit of interaction between organization and their customers one hand, and consumers can also communicate with other consumers using social media(Assenov & Khurna, 2012). For instance, hotel or restaurant websites, have electronic forms for customer to complete and hotels or restaurant can reply directly through electronic mail (email). This opportunity for interaction will enhance customer relations and strengthen bond between the customers around world and organisation. Social media also creates a virtual environment that helps to nurture and maintain long term relationship that translates into customer retention .The websites of these hotels ensure that customer needs, such as brochures, itineraries, and guides could be produced electronically (Dellarocas 2003).

Websites are used to create innovative products and services to make them more attractive. Questionnaires can be designed online to target guests who frequently visit the hotel to collect information on their attitude to services. The hospitality sector can use this information to improve upon their services that are not meeting customer expectations. Customers will be well informed about a particular hotel, leading to customer loyalty. Developing customer relationship through hotel websites help hotels to build customer data from customer bookings for accommodation, purchase behaviour, and desires, the information can be used to identify and target customers directly.

Websites could be used to display and share photos, videos, of facilities, destinations sites, and information between organisations and client on one hand, and among current and prospective customers. It could also be used to 'increase on-line presence' in other follow customers reaction to offers posted on the site in order to create customer profile (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004)

The emergence of the internet, and the advancement in technology has introduced an extension to customer relations efforts of the hospitality and tourism sector- electronic customer relations (ECRM).As a result of increasing competition in the hospitality sector, coupled with the flexibility of the internet architecture, many organisations are restructuring their relationship with their customers based trust, mutual relationship, and customer retention (Kim, Hong, Min, & Lee, 2011).ECRM is an 'innovative, engaging, and interactive tool' that ensures mutual benefits between business organisations and customers ('customer is perceived to be at the center of any organisation (Lozano, 2000).For this reason, the customer be it individual or an

organisation must form part of any organisation's activities and planning. global information and interactivity than any communication media (Rygielski et al, 2002),

The internet offers customers the possibility of high-speed it reduces cost of contact, therefore, the hotel sector have found it necessary to use the internet to win the loyalty of customers. Since most hospitality and tourism organisation offer virtually the same core product/services, so there is intense competition in the hospitality sector to build relationship with their customers. Asuch, there is the need for the hotels to focus on retaining customers. The priority is now on customer needs rather than products. Electronic Consumer Relationship Management (ECRM) is the leveraging of technology, internal resources, to accomplish regular customer engagement, by frequently improving the value of relationship between the customers and organization (Mohammed & Rashid 2012) The hospitality industry is embracing (ECRM) as a significant strategy for their consumer relations campaign, because technological tools enable organisations to accurately segment, profile and target specific customers. The competitive nature of the hospitality industry requires a customer-centric culture (Becker et al., 2009).

ECRM is a more efficient use of people, process and technology to enhance and maintain beneficial relationship with consumers and colleagues in the hospitality industry (Skaates & Seppanen, 2002). It can also help the tourism and hospitality industry to enhance their customer relations, by attracting more customers and establishing stronger and more lasting customer relationship (Falk, 2004) In addition it is a practice that ensures that consumer information and feedback are regarded as corporate asset,that can be used to formulated strategic programmes to improve customer relation (Falk, 2004).

Considering the significant role of social media (eg facebook, twitter, blogs) and its advantages for users to share photographs, videos and information with other users, hotel and tourism businesses have incorporated social media tools into their websites to enrich customers' experience in searching for relevant information (Sanchez-Franco & Ronald-Cataluna, 2010). For instance, by registering as a member, facebook allows members to create addition web-based sites for tourism institutions to disseminate information, sell products and attend to consumer requests (Kasavana et al, 2010).

In case of blogs, tourism and hospitality enterprises develop blogs (business to customer) where reliable information are provided on tourism sites and facilities, or several categories of interest- such as attractions, events, cuisine and destinations, or entertainment. Additionally blogs can be used to connect business to consumers to create a brand that may resonate with customers (Schmollgruber, 2007). The tourism companies use their social media platforms as extension to their customer service efforts, to engage clients by analyzing the comments on-line, to better understand and respond to customer needs and grievances. They are also able to get feedback from their customers' with regard to their views about their services (what the like or don't like) and their competitors. On the part of travellers, it assists them in taking major travelling decisions by searching, organising, sharing travelling stories and experiences. Customers travel planning process may be greatly influenced by information from social media (Litvin et al, 2008).

The use of social media by hospitality industry form part of their customer relations effort to enable hospitality institutions, to introduce innovative services, such as electronic word of mouth

(EWOM). EWOM is a new service which caters for the consumers, by offering easy, detailed non-commercialised information (Litvin et al 2008). The difference between traditional WOM and eWOM is that, eWOM tool is able to provide information that transcends the borders of one's immediate social surroundings. Through the searching of social media environment, clients are able to have access to travel news from colleagues and relatives who form part of their social circle, and also find information from other internet users worldwide (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). Moreover the use of social media, by tourism and hospitality operators, enables them to share travel experiences, perspectives with both previous and prospective clients by using various versions - including text, image, audio and video (Thevenot, 2007) As compared with other information channels, social media is believed to equip consumers of hospitality and tourism products with more comprehensive knowledge and information (Gretzel, 2011). It must be emphasized however that, greater premium is placed on information from specific tourism and hospitality websites than when they appear on generic social network site (Burgess et al, 2011).

Tourism and hospitality enterprises have created other avenues of engaging consumers in addition to the traditional ones, to attract clients to create an engaging and fruitful relationship. Since consumer interaction is crucial to mutual communication, social media provides that excellent environment for mutual relationship between tourism and hospitality organisations and consumers (Pantelidis, 2010; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

Moreover, PR practitioners and managers in the hospitality industry use the Internet to perform their media relations role. The press is among the most important groups with which an

institution must communicate with. For PR practitioners to achieve their media relations objectives and goals, PR practitioners in hospitality and tourism institutions use the internet to enhance their media relations function, by making information readily available on their corporate website via the internet to make the work of the news media easier and more efficient and effective. Information about the hospitality institution, profiles of their executives, contacts of PR practitioners and managers, events and programmes, speeches among others can easily be accessed and used by the news media. (Pantelidis, 2010)

2.2.4 Perceptions of PR practitioners and managers in hospitality industry

PR practice in the hospitality industry in Ghana is becoming influential as a profession. In every country, the cultural, social systems differ, and these influence people and their practice. This affects how certain functions are perceived and practiced including PR (Larbi, 2009). For instance, PR practitioners in hospitality use different methods to maintain relations with their external publics and stakeholders. For instance, they send gift hampers during festive occasions, such as Christmas and New year to their numerous clients. Secondly, they organise annual award ceremonies to honour clients, stakeholders, and business partners who contributed to the success of the institution throughout the year. In addition, global trends in the practice of PR like social media interventions have influenced how the function is perceived, and the hospitality industry in Ghana is not immune to this process. This has also influenced the culture of the PR function.

PR practitioners in the hospitality industry perceive the hospitality sector to have certain peculiar characteristics, that are PR oriented. For this reason, the hospitality sector needs trained PR

professionals to handle them, in order that the hospitality industry could take advantage of the full potential of the PR profession and function.

The hospitality industry, unlike the non-hospitality industry, is customer-oriented (provides services, products, that cater for the needs and interests of their customers). Thus, there is the need to be very tactful, and “customer conscious” in providing products and services, tailored to suit clients` tastes, preferences, sentiments, emotions and feelings. Any service infraction or bad guest experience can have adverse effects on both, the reputation and sales of hospitality institutions. Again, in the hospitality industry, projection and protection of a brand in the “hearts and minds!” of their publics is paramount. Any negative remark or comment about any institution in the public domain can tarnish the brand of an organisation. Situations such as these, call for PR professionals, since the goal of PR practitioners and managers is to preserve the reputation of their institution from internal and external threats (Wakefield, 2001).

In the Ghanaian hospitality industry, PR practitioners and managers tend to practice both the two- way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical model.(Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2008) With the two- way symmetrical model, programmes offer benefits to both organisation and its community. On the other hand, with the two-way asymmetrical model, CSR initiatives inure to the benefit of hospitality institution. For instance, to ensure a successful implementation of any CSR initiative within the community in which an organisation operates, PR practitioners of the hospitality institution must “build bridges” with their stakeholders, through direct and indirect interaction to achieve mutual goals, and persuade them (society) to support the hospitality organization`s CSR programmes (Oksiutycz &Enombo, 2011), pointing to the two-way symmetrical model.

Conversely a hotel can use CSR to create a competitive advantage and differentiate itself from competitors to build its image, reputation and consumer goodwill (Porter& Kramer, 2006), using the two-way asymmetric model. It is also the perception that, the one-way communication is more common among hospitality industry since it is used for publicity – to promote and sell products, create positive image for the organisation and inform consumers about the organization (Oksiutycz & Enombo , 2011).

Although most of the PR practitioners and managers in the hospitality industry participate in management meetings and decision- making, they are perceived to perform more of the technical function which mainly involves writing press releases, speeches, drafting annual reports (Oksiutycz &Enombo, 2011).Most of the PR practitioners in the hospitality institutions have to report to the general managers (GM) or Chief executive officers (C.E.O) for final decision.

In terms of PR research in the hospitality industry it is believed that, not enough research is done. In general, PR research is seen as an “expensive activity” which most institutions cannot afford. However research is conducted when there is going to be a launching for a new product, to promote and sell the products (Oksiutycz & Enombo, 2011).

2.3: Empirical Review/Review of Empirical Studies

2. 3.1: Theoretical Framework

2.3.2 The Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory first expounds the essence of communication to organisations. The basic principle that underpins this theory, is that communication has significance to organisations

because it helps to promote good and lasting relationships with strategic publics as well as management (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p57). It also estimates the importance of public relations as a strategic management function to the success of the organization (Ehling, 1992). Again, it emphasizes the need to involve top PR professionals in the execution of managerial and administrative functions and also empower them to have access to strategic decision-makers (dominant coalition)

The model of excellent Public Relations is a “two-way symmetrical model”. To achieve excellence, Grunig and White emphasized that Public Relations has to be “symmetrical, idealistic, critical and managerial” (Grunig, et al., 1992; 2002). In the hospitality industry, PR is perceived as a technical function in support of other managerial functions. However, the excellence theory explains PR as a peculiar management function that enables an organisation to engage with its strategic publics to attain organisational goals, and expect the organisation to help them (publics) also to accomplish their own goals. Thus organisations, publics and stakeholders depend on each other to build mutual relationships and to achieve goals that they set for themselves (two-way symmetrical). Therefore, organisations are not autonomous (only exist to make profits). The excellence theory suggests that PR adds quality to any institution by establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationship with its strategic publics and stakeholders. In addition the theory measures the efficiency of PR practice by evaluating the quality of the relationship between an institution and its strategic constituents. The theory enumerated several unique features of an excellent Public Relations or communications department. These are, “empowering the public Relations function”, “communicator function”, “integrated roles”, and “relationships with other functions and models” of Public Relations.

The empowerment of the PR function; PR is considered effective when organizations encourage PR to be part of core management function. When top PR officers are involved in key management process of the organisation and form part of developing communication strategies that identify key publics of the organization, PR is then seen as being empowered. PR contributes to top management by surfing the environment to identify key publics who bear the brunt of decisions taken by management. An “excellent” PR outfit interacts with these publics to relate their concerns to strategic management, therefore making it possible for strategic publics to have a voice in the decision- making process of the organization. Communication programmes from such departments are strategically coordinated because they are based on research with realistic, “measurable”, outcomes that can be evaluated and implemented. There must also be proof of how the communication programme has achieved short and long term objectives of the organization in terms of building lasting mutual relationship. Again PR function can be of value to any organization when senior practitioners have the capacity to affect key decision-making process or have influence with top management.

The communicator function; As part of the function of an “excellent” PR outfit, practitioners play dual role as a manager and a technician. As technicians, they carry out the daily communication programmes of their departments. Conversely as explained by (Gruning & Gruning, 2002) in “less excellent” departments all the practitioners including senior officials play the role of communication technicians. When senior communicators are excluded from top management PR loses its value as a management function. Additionally an “excellent” PR department must have at least one senior communicator who coordinates PR activities of the department. In the absence of a senior communicator , a member of the top management can play

the role. “Excellent” PR units are manned by professionals who have the requisite know-how to execute the function.

Relationship with other functions and models; the excellent PR outfit are supposed to craft their communication strategies and programmes using the two-way symmetrical model which incorporates relationship building and participation between organisations and its strategic publics. Moreover the two- way symmetrical model embraces both communication and research to ensure cooperation and participation of strategic publics than the other communication models.

Integrated Roles; A number of organisations have no designated PR departments devoted to all their communication activities. Some organization have separate departments for each function. Other organisations have subsumed PR under Human resource or Sales and marketing. Another organization may outsource their communication needs to firms outside their organization. When public relations function is relegated to a “supporting function” it becomes very difficult to strategically coordinate communication resources from one “strategic publics to another” which an integrated PR department is supposed to do.

The relevance of the theory to the Hospitality industry is seen in the way PR function is structured and executed in the hospitality industry in Ghana. Hospitality PR department must play its dual role of technical and managerial functions. Excellent PR departments go beyond execution of technical support, to efficient management of their organisations. However, in most hospitality organizations in Ghana there are no designated PR personnel and department. The PR

function is subsumed under Human Resource and Sales and Marketing , relegating the PR role to a technical one which results in an ‘asymmetrical communication’. The current situation within the hospitality industry undermines the value of PR .Excellent communication units contribute to organisational effectiveness by deploying a communication strategy that enables strategic management build mutual relationship with key stakeholders (when its contribution brings value to the fortunes of the organisation), then Public Relations can be said to have added value to the organisation (Gruning& Gruning, 2002)

In the Ghanaian hospitality industry PR function is essentially executed by non PR professionals because most practitioners and managers perceive PR as a function that can be “performed by everybody”. Nonetheless just like any other sector it is important for Public Relations practitioners to be part of the top decision-makers (the dominant coalition) of the organisation, to counsel other managers involved in the decision making process, about the effects of those decisions on their strategic publics. In other words, they (PR managers) incorporate the feedback of the publics into formulating strategic communication policies by conducting research and listening to them (publics) before decisions are implemented.

“Excellent PR units” ensure open and effective two-way communication internally and externally. Internally, open and regular communication enhance employees` satisfaction with ‘job and organisation’.Externally, by establishing symmetrical, and regular communication with their strategic constituents on whom the organisation eventually depends ensures beneficial relationship. However in the hospitality industry in Ghana, though there is regular two -way

communication it is skewed towards dissemination of information and publicity purpose (asymmetrical) which turns to inure to the benefit of the hospitality industry.

“Excellent PR Departments” help to establish what roles Public Relations practitioners play in their organisation and how the placement of the Public Relations function - strategic, operational, communication, technician, impacts on communication and Public Relations activities in an organization (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). The expectation is that, the technical expertise of a PR practitioner must be translated into managerial knowledge, to assist top management in formulating programmes, policies in order to accomplish the communication goals and objectives of the organisation. Since PR departments are part of the subsystems of any organisation they contribute to shaping the strategic direction of the organisation (Gruning, & Gruning, 2002)

2.3.2 : The Open Systems Theory

The systems theory takes its origin from biology and was introduced in the 1950's because there was the need to develop a system of theory to explain the empirical world (Boulding, 1956; von Bertalanffy, 1951) Another angle from which the systems theory emerged was from ‘cybernetics’ systems theory in mechanical engineering (Ashby, 1954; Wiener, 1948). Cybernetics explains the ‘control and communication’ in a machine. The cybernetic systems idea became helpful in explaining social systems (including organisations) particularly the aspect that relies on ‘feedback or control elements that ensure systems maintain their stability. Social organisations also thrive on feedback particularly PR managers as part of their management function. Thus from the above perspectives: mechanical, organic and social systems

(organisations) depend on ‘interaction’ with their environment. As a service industry, hospitality communication practitioners thrive on feedback to identify concerns, grievances, and to address the needs of stakeholders and publics. The next source of systems theory comes from research on organizational communication and how its structure functions (Parsons, 1977). The theory stresses how systems and its component function, the ‘interdependence of the parts’ and ‘self – organisation of systems’ in response to the demands of the environment. There are four components such as ‘adaptation, goal attainment, pattern maintenance, and integration’. These components ensure the system maintains its ‘existence and effectiveness’. Adaptation; facilitates exchange between the systems components and the environment to ensure the development of the system. Goal attainment; the deployment of resources to achieve goals in connection with other systems of the environment. Pattern maintenance and integration, dwells on how to develop and maintain the system’s ‘frames of reference’ and how to use resources to achieve coordination internally.

Since the systems theory draws from several disciplines its tenets can be applied to ‘organisms and human behaviours’ in other disciplines, As a result, systems theory is seen as a macro –level theory that can used to explain social systems (Kast & Rosenzweig 1972). It explains the relationships that exists among ‘subsystems’ of an organization in relation to the environment to learn how organization`s cope with situations within the environment. For example departments of organisations such as communication, marketing ,sales . human resource among others form the ‘subsystem’. Owing to its ability to analyze ‘complex organizational behaviour’ in relation to its agencies, systems theory have become the foundation for organizational communication research (Poole, 2014, p.50).

KEY CONCEPTS

The systems theory seeks to analyze complex relationships and interconnections between the parts of the systems and the organization –environment relationship. A system is able to function based on the ‘structure and patterns’ that emerge from the relationship and the interactions that exist among the parts, In view of the emerging relationship among these components, each system differs. Unlike other systems, social organisations have their peculiar aims and objectives.

Systems theory operates on three levels: the environment, the social organization as system, and human participants within the organization. This three-tier level operation generates dialogue among the disciplines through systems theory. It observed that relationship can be achieved from diverse angles. For example, it is common knowledge that in every social system where individuals congregate and interact relationships are bound to develop among individuals and the environment resulting in interdependence among individuals, social systems, and environment. Such pursuits of relations and interdependence can occur in human organisations .In the hospitality industry there is the building of relationship and interdependence. Hospitality practitioners may identify the needs of customer to provide service to satisfy the customer, this may lead to repeat patronage which can create customer loyalty and retention. The second approach can be examine on a nine-level approach arranged in hierarchical order of complexities in behaviour of ‘constituent unit’. Such as frameworks, clockworks, thermostats, cell, plant, animal, human organism, and allow social organization and transcendental system (Boulding, 1956) From ‘cells’ level upwards systems become ‘open and complex’ and permit influences that enable it sustain itself.(Schneider & Somers, 2006).However as ‘theoretical system’ evolved

to explain other systems like Open and social organisations systems, the hierarchy approach was used to explain and analyze the extent to which traits of ‘agency are present in systems. Six levels exist in the open systems such as determined systems, reactive systems, goal driven system, problem solving system, self-aware systems and multi-vocal systems (Poole, 2014).At one (determined) level there is less consideration of ‘agency’ because system operates in a ‘predetermined manner’ at level(six) ‘agents’ can manifest themselves in diverse conditions including ‘problem-solving and monitoring process’. Thus, as systems attain increased levels of ‘agency’ it becomes flexible and susceptible to change.

In systems theory ‘components’ operate in a hierarchical form and are ‘interdependent’ on one another and cannot function without the assistance of one another. The ‘components’ of the system can be ‘tightly coupled’ where components are ‘closely interdependent ‘ or ‘loosely coupled’: smaller subsets of closely linked parts are loosely joined together.

At the level of organizations, there is the interdependence of organizations on one another in the same environment. Underneath this interdependence are ‘permeable boundaries’ that exist among organisations. In essence, social organization has to keep ‘permeable boundaries’ to a certain extent to allow materials in to the organisation or release products into the environment to survive. There is a process of exchange of resources and products between the organisations and into the environment. The resources that come into the organization are the (input) whereas the products that the organisations release into environment are (output), the components of the system work together in other to transform the resources into products and release it into the environment. During this input and output process the system generates two outcomes: ‘negative

and ‘positive feedback’. The positive feedback transforms the system and brings ‘improvement or growth’. The “negative feedback’ rectifies mistakes in the system to sustain its present state. As the environment undergoes a change the systems also creates the ability to become ‘complicated’ as the situations in the environment turns complex. As the system turns complex organisations develop the capacity (requisite variety) to function within the system to march the different conditions in order to survive. In view of these conditions the entire system is bigger than ‘the sum of its parts’. Such linkages to the system due to ‘interactions and interdependence’ among the parts make the system unique. The cooperation among parts creates the framework and characteristics of the system known as ‘emergence’. ‘Emergence’ is the result of the activities and interactions that occur at the lower-level. By depending on each other the components get to the final level through diverse routes and conditions known as ‘equifinality’.The transactions within the environment enable the system to develop the ability to grow and sustain itself without going down which is referred to as ‘negative entropy’. The system attempts to keep a stable condition or ‘homeostasis’ by stabilizing the energy that comes in. If what is produced (output) falls below expectation (goal) according to ‘feedback’ the system would bring in additional resources to keep up the ‘throughput process’ so as to maintain the expected state.

The application of the Open system theory thrives on how units(departments) within the organization ‘affect and are affected’ by other departments(units), and how organisations respond to its environment . For the purpose of the study we would be looking at environment, organizations and human participation relationship .In such an environment, information forms the basis of relationship and interaction among the “actors”. Information dissemination through

communication helps organisations to 'organise' their environment in this regard information must be free of any 'equivocality'. PR departments become 'conduits' from which information gets to the environment. Therefore it is essential for the organization to have a designated PR department manned by a professional PR personnel to strategically manager information sent into the environment to avoid ambiguity and satisfy needs and desires of stakeholders and publics. (Weick, 1979). Weick explains that the environment exists because of 'actors' previous 'interpretation/processing of actions/information,' that enable them adapt to the environment they create. The ability to organize depends on collective behavior of others (organisation, publics, stakeholders).Such 'interdependent' and collective behaviour is important in 'resolving equivocality'. In others words, information coming from organisation to their publics and stakeholders must not act a 'barrier' but meet their needs and be devoid of all uncertainties. When the information from an organization satisfies the needs of the publics and stakeholders there is a 'convergence' in terms of 'shared ideas and interest'. Out of the 'convergence' a structured form of 'behaviour/relationship' is created which is incorporated in the organization's variation, selection, and retention.

According to Weick variation process is information adapted by the organization. A selection criteria is developed over a period which clears any equivocality. The retention involves the removal of both previous and current elements of equivocality in the entire information process. System theory operates on the principle of ' networks of relationships' members of this network, have individual routine task to form a network of relationship which contributes to the output of the organization(Katz & Kahn 1966)However the system theory looks at organisations in their entirety at different levels of the communication structure in their 'network of relationship'

Communication networks according to (Monge & Contractor 2003, p.3) ‘patterns created through flow of messages among communicators through time and space’. However in organisations communication is either “formal” and “informal”. Formal communication involves (roles, positions) informal (interaction). Nonetheless in the hospitality sector communication role seems informal contrary to systems theory of hierarchical structure and roles. The communication role is not structured because there is no professional PR, communication function is handled by other professionals such as marketing or sales personnel and sometimes by Human resources persons (who perform the PR function in addition to their core duties) because there is the perception that PR can be performed by everyone, informal (interaction) and appears not to be recognised as a ‘profession’.

Systems theory helps us to understand how organisations behave and communicate in terms of their relationship to their environment. Organisations are able to do better when they adopt the open system and depending on how well they cooperate with their environment, they may grow and be very efficient. Open systems theory explain the communication process of organisations in relation to their environment in terms of information dissemination and feedback from the external environment. The systems theory is applied to ‘study situations, diagnose problems and prescribe solutions’. For example, practitioners in the hospitality sector interact regularly with their customers to establish mutual relationship and maintain customer loyalty, as a result feedback is instant which leads to an improvement in customer service.

Open system is used to evaluate ‘effective communication systems for organisations’. Communication is the ‘backbone’ of an organization. It plays a critical role in organizing the

‘system’ ensuring efficient and effective operation through ‘integration of subsystems for stability of larger systems. PR department is a subsystems that connects to other subsystems of a network such as marketing, sales, human resource among others to achieve organizational goals and help stabilize the larger system. Organisations need a well structured communication network system since they communicate at different levels and fronts , internally(stakeholders and publics , employees) and with the outside world .Communication improves organizational efficiency and effectiveness in terms of ‘internal and external feedback’ as additional information. However the hospitality sector seems to lack proper ‘communication network. When PR is placed under other subsystems such as marketing or human resource it becomes increasingly dysfunctional and the subsystems are plunged into a disequilibrium which could negatively affect the larger system. Furthermore when the communication subsystem is compromised for a long time as it is currently, it creates incoherence. It also contravenes the basic tenets and core principles of the practice.

With globalization and the advent of information and communication technology(social media), communication in the hospitality industry has become very swift, and the distinction between PR function and other related disciplines have become blurred due to over generalisation(Yoon & Kuchinke, 2005), others have outsource the PR function to other organisations outside.

2.4: Gaps in Literature

This study explores the structure of PR/communication department in organisations especially the hospitality and the tourism sector. The objective was to examine whether the hospitality sector has a designated PR/Communication department and which professionals are in charge of

the PR function .Other studies have looked at the structure of PR/communication departments in organisations. International Association of Business Communicators (Moss et al, 2017), the association conducted interviews with 26 Chief Communication Officers (CCO`s) from each of the five continents and from the survey sample of 278 (CCO`s) in organisations around the world. The study found out that most organisations operate ‘hybrid structures’ depending on their individual circumstances. However no ‘one dominant PR designated structural model emerged’.

Other ‘academic literature’ have focused on the ‘appropriate structural design’ that enables organization to be efficient and effective. Scholars such as (Pfeffer, 1982) and (Mintzberg,1979, 1983, 1990) and (Robbins, 1990) looked at ‘how communication/PR department structure may affect or be affected by variables’. Some scholars have explained the phenomenon from public relations point of view where organizational or functional structure regarding the relationship between public relations and marketing within organisations tends to somewhat blurred (Berger &Reber, 2013; Gregory, 2008, 2013;Gruning, 1990; Gruning, Gruning & Dozier,2002;Zerfass &Franke 2012; Zerfass, 2010) the . However this study looks at PR within the hospitality industry as distinct discipline which requires the handling by PR professional and not professionals from other related discipline. Consequently this research reviews the PR practice as well as personnel in charge of the PR function in the hospitality sector in the light of the above. Nonetheless this study lays no claim to have exhausted the examination of PR practice in its entirety. Undoubtedly there other aspects like training of practitioners, adaptation of PR practice to current exigencies are fields that would also require research and recommendation to make PR practice more dynamic.

2.5: Summary of the Chapter

This chapter reviewed extant Literature on PR practice .It looked at how PR has evolved as a concept through it various phases/traditions such as press agent, publicity, persuasive communication , relationship building as well as the diverse view point of PR scholars concerning the PR profession . It also examined the structure and function of PR within the context of the Ghanaian hospitality organisations in particular and the industry as a whole. In addition the study explored how PR practitioners deploy aspects of the PR function to execute their corporate social responsibility in the hospitality sector. The study further assessed how PR practitioners in the hospitality and tourism industry have utilized internet, social media websites among others to enhance the PR functiuon. The views of practitioners and managers were sought regarding the contribution of PR to the growth and development of the hospitality industry. Two theoretical frameworks were used the Excellence and the Systems. The Excellence theory explains how a well structured and functional communication/PR department can help to achieve organizational goals. The Systems Theory expounds the principle of interaction and interdependence of subsystems/departments to the benefit of the larger system.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter detailed how the study was accomplished. It included an explanation of the research methods employed to organise empirical data on the research. It specifically described the research design, research approach, population, sample size and techniques, research instrument, and data collection procedure for primary data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

The research design referred to the entire strategy that was used to organise the different parts of the study in a consistent and logical way. It ensured that the research problem is addressed effectively. It formed the model for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data (De Vaus, 2001). The research design used was the descriptive approach. Descriptive research is a type of research that attempts to describe the situation or problem from the sample drawn from the research area (Piesie-Anto, 2012). The aim of a descriptive research design is to give exact picture of factors that are relevant to the research question. In the case of this study, the researcher attempted to describe how PR is situationally conceptualised, valued and practised within the Ghanaian hospitality industry. This study made use of the qualitative approach. Qualitative research approach can increase the researcher's level of understanding of the problem that is been studied. Qualitative techniques are flexible and permit the researcher to look at new areas of interest (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011)

Qualitative research involved the examination of a variable or phenomenon in a deep comprehensive manner (Rhodes, 2014). The approach emphasized the methods employed to bring out the data. It stressed less on techniques to explain data. Additionally, it can be employed as an analytic inductive approach/strategy which essentially uses detailed reading of data to bring out ideas, themes and models, patterns and categories from the data to arrange and explain the . The qualitative design employed in this study used interviews of participants on PR practice within the hospitality sector, with the aid of an interview guide. The interview guide had open ended questions that allowed for follow-up questions aimed at probing into issues relevant to the study.

3.2 Research Population

Population is essentially a large group of individuals or objects that have common features and form the main focus of a study. Polit and Hungler (1999) “stated that population is the sum or total, of all the objects, subjects or members that agree with a set of characteristics”. The population for this study are PR practitioners in hotels, restaurants, travel and tour business and all other entities operating the hospitality industry.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Owing to the fact that the study could not in actuality examine all PR practitioners in hospitality industry in Accra, there was the need to select population elements to represent the entire population. The reason for sampling is that, by choosing certain sections of that population, a researcher may reach a conclusion regarding the whole population (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

The sample for the research was drawn from different fields of expertise, and participants who possessed diverse traits. The underlying consideration was that participants had to be directly or indirectly performing or overseeing PR functions within their respective organisations, hence purposive sampling method was used for the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique, where information- rich elements are chosen to avoid redundancy and promote the best use of scarce research resources. With this method, various PR practitioners were selected from major hotels, restaurants, and travel and tours in Accra. The hotels selected were the -Accra City Hotel, and the Movenpick Ambassador hotel. For the restaurant`s: Southern Fried Chicken, Frankie`s restaurant were selected. Adansi Travels Limited and Global Wings Travel and Tours Limited were the travel and tours companies from which PR practitioners were selected based on prior discussion. All these hotels, restaurants and travel and tours were included in the study based on the level of PR activities they undertook, on regular basis such as CSR, Media Relations, Investor Relations among others. In terms of the sample size, six participants were recruited and interviewed for the study.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures are the techniques by which important data and information are gathered to be analyzed. While collecting the data, the researcher must recognise the kind of data to be collected, source of data, and the method to be used to collect the data. Primary data was gathered using interview. A semi- structured interview guide was the major instrument for data collection .The interview was used as answers questions in the research objectives. An audio recorder was used, with the consent of subjects to record interviews to be transcribed later. The average length of the interview was 25 minutes. All participants were offered anonymity.

Primary method was used to collect data from the field at first hand. The primary data collection method used by the study, helped to gather important raw data from the field of study through interviews that were conducted.

3.5 Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis began after the various interviews, transcription and editing was done to ensure accurate information, and also to check for consistency with responses given by the participants. Data analysis is referred to as the process of inspecting, cleaning, and transforming materials gathered from site, with the aim to focus on important data for conclusions and compilation of accurate results to form the basis of decision making (Piesie-Anto, 2012). Data analysis facilitated the interpretation of data collected. Thematic data analysis was used to make sense of the data collected. It involved the identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes in textual data to determine how these themes and patterns help answer the research questions posed.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter data was analysed using analytic inductive approach and guided by the research objectives set at the beginning of the study. The objectives of this study were to explore how PR: is practiced within the context of the Ghanaian hospitality industry, and understand the perceptions of managers and practitioners about the contribution of PR strategies and activities to the growth and development of the hospitality industry .Finally the study also sought to ascertain the challenges and constraints to PR practice in the hospitality sector in Accra. Findings are also discussed in this chapter in the light of the research objectives raised as well as where relevant, background literature and theory.

4.1: Findings and Discussions

The findings and discussions in this chapter were done in consonance with current trends and principles governing PR practice. These serve as basis and underpins the analyzes, evaluation of this research.

The inductive approach brings the out the themes, patterns and categories emerged after a careful reading. Some the categories. a) A look at PR function within the hospitality industry. Statements by participants: 'Sales and marketing over sees all PR related issues, especially marketing', 'we don't have actually have a PR department, the general manager and myself (human resource manager usually handle the PR function'. 'we do not have a PR department'. 'We have not grown to the extent of a designated PR department.'(PR as unstructured function).

b) Profile of the practitioners and managers in the hospitality industry. Statements of participants: 'It is handled by my sales executives and myself', 'one particular person is dedicated to marketing and PR function of the organisation' 'The PR role is handled by myself (human resources manager) and the general manager'. 'The marketing manager handles the PR role' 'The PR function is executed by the operations manager'. 'Sometimes I (accountant) performs the PR function

c) Practitioners and managers views about PR. Statements by participants: 'It depends on who you meet to explain yourself in PR manner'. 'We are a service company so every staff in essence is a PR for the company'. 'Every staff is a member of the PR department'. (PR as something everyone can perfectly perform)

d) Limitations of the PR functions within the hospitality industry. Statement of participants. 'We just need to get the right, relevant and qualified individuals to be in this field of practice'.

'Most of the institutions and agencies in the hospitality are very small in nature and operate on a very small budget. Therefore, they are not able to maintain a PR department'. 'Training of PR practitioners and their managers in the hospitality to be abreast with modern trends and practices'. 'Travel agencies have small staff, very limited operating budget. So it makes to employ professional PR practitioners to handle their PR functions' (Challenges and constraints of the industry)

Participants were from hotels, restaurants and the travel and tours in the Greater Accra region. The PR function in the hospitality sectors, have no designated PR departments or managers. The

PR functions are merged with, either Sales and Marketing or Human Resources departments. PR, in these organisations is executed by males, who are either Sales and Marketing or Human Resource Managers or sometimes Accountants and Operational Managers. The PR practitioner of Movenpick Ambassador is the sales and marketing manager, and he has performed the PR function for past ten (10) years. With regard to Accra City hotel (Novotel) the PR role is handled by the sales and marketing manager. According to him, he has three (3) years working experience as a PR practitioner for Accra City hotel. The restaurant sector, involves: Frankie's and Southern Fried Chicken. In both organisations the PR role is performed by males. The PR manager for Frankie's restaurant, is their Human Resources Manager, who has executed the PR function for his organisation for five (5) years. In the case of Southern Fried chicken, their PR role is taken care of by Sales and Marketing Manager, who has five (5) years working experience. As regards the Travel and Tour sector, the organisations are- Adansi Travels and Tours limited and Global Wings Travels. In Adansi Travel and Tours, the PR duties are performed by the Operations manager, since the inception of the organisation five (5) years ago. Global Wings Travels has an Accountant acting as a PR manager for the past three (3) years.

A total of five key themes were identified from the thematic analysis these were: PR practice as an inconspicuous unstructured function (no designated department or professional) as something everyone can expertly perform, symbolically represented at management through unrelated functional heads, the presence of some perceptions about PR practice, and finally the capacity limitations for PR practice in the Ghanaian hospitality sector. The first three themes related to the contextual characteristics of PR practice within the Ghanaian hospitality industry. The fourth theme addressed the perceptions of managers and practitioners about the contribution of PR

practice to the growth in the industry. Finally the last theme explored the constraints faced by practitioners within the sector. These themes, their data exemplars are presented and discussed in the ensuing sections.

4.2: PR practice as an Inconspicuous Unstructured Function

Regardless of the growing recognition and value of public relations practice as a competitive transformational tool in other parts of the world, notably the West, findings from this study's interviews indicate that public relations practice is subsumed under sales and marketing or human resources, has not a fully formed department and a designated PR professional, and not a distinct function in the Ghanaian hospitality industry. This presents a complex and problematic outlook for the industry in Ghana.

Complex in the sense that, though participants generally acknowledge that PR departments in any organisation functions as the mouth –piece between that organisation and its publics , nearly all of the participants reported the lack of properly organised PR roles and departments in their various hospitality organisations. For instance, the participant acknowledged that PR as "a strategic communication tool" have helped his organisation to project its image and reputation. He explains that, PR has helped in projecting their 'brand' in the "hearts and minds" of their publics, as the preferred destination for doing business, conferences, ,seminars, workshops, among others, to the various government organisations within Accra. He explained that, because of their "hospitable and serene environment" the people are willing to patronise their facilities.

Another participant, acknowledges that his organisation has employed some functions of PR to “build bridges” between communities in which they operate. He mentioned that, as part of projecting the reputation and image of their organisation, they embark on CSR initiatives and programmes to fulfil their community relations objectives of the hotel. For instance his organisation made a donation (in terms of bedsheets, mattresses, curtains) to the Accra psychiatric hospital last year.

“Accra City Hotel won corporate social responsibility, hospitality sector, of the year. So we are passionate about such courses”. the participant explained.

Without unique identity and structure, public relations practice in the Ghanaian hospitality appears to be essentially assimilated or usurped by other more defined roles and functions like marketing, sales, customer service operations, and human resources. Particularly, this study found out that the PR function in most of the institutions sampled is merged with sales and marketing or the human resource department

“There is no designated department for PR. So, that function more or less falls under the sales and marketing especially marketing” the participant shared.

Personnel and the heads of these departments that assimilate public relations function in the Ghanaian hospitality industry perform dual roles, they perform their core duties as sales and marketing or human resources managers in addition to performing the PR function. For instance, a participant of a major restaurant recounts that, he has performed and overseen public relations related activities for about five years.

Similarly, in the travel and tours sector of the hospitality industry, another participant have been combining both functions for the past five (5) years.

L'Etang et al.(2007), Huertas (2008) and Seric et al, (2014) “point out that the hospitality and tourism sectors have been theoretically and practically dominated by marketing discourses to the detriment of public relations perspectives”. This study's findings give credence to the above argument .However, this trend does not necessarily bode well for the sector in the competitive era it finds itself .Traditional Marketing concepts like product, price, place, and promotion cannot fully satisfy the increasingly sophisticated communication needs of the hospitality entities (L'Etang et al,2007) as well as the reputational and relational work required to maintain a competitive edge in the industry (Huertas, 2008). With hospitality products and brands in Ghana as in other parts of the world being largely intangible and diminished profitability resulting from price manipulations, public relations presents a useful strategy to stay ahead in the industry. Ghanaian hospitality organisations may, therefore inadvertently be underutilising if not ignoring the transformational capacity of public relations in their organisation by subsuming and subordinating the function under other roles. Beyond the media relations work that most participants seem to point to in describing the narrow and obscure PR work undertaken in their organisations, there is more room for public relations to contribute to the sector. Unconstrained PR efforts can reduce the cost of acquiring and maintaining customers, increase profitability and drive issues and crises management, community relations and corporate social responsibility, internal communication, multi-cultural communication, public relations research, monitoring and evaluation.

Another plausible source of explaining the weak communication and public relations role in Ghanaian hospitality organization`s is by looking at the Excellence studies (Grunig, 1992; Grunig et al,2002). Theoretical discussions stemming from these studies among other issues suggest that the way an organisation and its communication function is structured influences communication process(Moss,.Likely, Sriramesh, Ferrari, 2017).Factors such as the organisations communication structure, strategy, and environment identified by Grunig (1992) may indeed be limiting the scope for communication and public relations in Ghanaian hospitality institutions .Ghanaian hospitality entities characterised by relatively weak communication structures and lack of qualified human resources (PR) emphasis other functions over public relations will inevitably lead to the limited PR practice observed in this study. One participant asserts, the need for his organisation to have a designated PR department to project the agency in the eyes and minds of its publics, but that” the organisation have not grown to the extent of having a designated PR department” . The participant explained.

4.3: PR as Something Everyone Can Expertly Perform

Among the hospitality organisations/institutions examined, participants were of the view that, public relations was a function for all. Every staff of the organisation /institution was obliged to perform the function at one time or the other .According to the participant, the PR function can be performed by any of the staff members, from the sales and marketing manager to the waiters, and front desk personnel. He said,

“It depends on who you meet to perform that function, we have waiters who meet customers as our first port of call, before they go to the cashier. When it

comes to meeting the government officials or bodies it goes to top management.” The participant stated.

He further explained that, it is structured that way because, when it comes to food, customer service, and related issues, they believe the best people to handle that are waiters, or assistant (manageress in the kitchen) and the front desk, because they have been trained to perform that function.

A similar opinion was shared by the acting PR officer (an accountant) . He believed that, hospitality products are intangible, therefore, every staff was somehow linked to the PR department and can be called upon to perform the PR function. He explains that

“The organisation in which we find ourselves is such that, each and every one has to do the PR work. Every day you have to make sure that people hear of you, so we all are involved in the PR work of the organisation.”

The participant, also explains that, the PR function, was merged with sales and marketing, and the department oversees all functions with regard to the image and brand of the institution. In terms of the number of people who perform the function He stated

“We do not have a specific individual, that handles the PR function, in my department we are nine (9) in total, and we all multi- task”.

He further explained that the department is divided in two sections, there is a conference and events unit which oversees all events that take place at the premises of the hotel including conferences, parties, and workshops. The other section comprises, Key Accounts Unit, which

takes care of the corporate organisations that the hotel deals with. The managers of these two units also double as PR leaders, he added.

On the face value, the above findings would appear to be positive as it may mean hospitality were prioritizing PR practice by making staff member's responsible. However, a careful analysis reveals that PR function is rather treated as an afterthought and underserving of a formal and structured definition of roles and responsibilities like other functions in the organisation. In an age where cutting edge communication expertise is being leverage to manage hospitality brands, be they places, products, services or event, unskilled, unrelated or inexperience may produce a stagnating if not deleterious effect on organisations image, reputation and relations.

The view that everyone and anyone can perform PR activities also denotes a dilution of coherence, strategy, accountability and role sophistication.

4.4: Symbolic Representation in Management through Unrelated heads

The participants also conceded that, the PR function should be part of top management to liaise between management, publics and stakeholders (internal and external).As part of top management, practitioners would be involved in taking strategic communication decisions with regard to their organisations. As Head of the Human Resource Department of a major restaurant, and the one who oversees public relations related activities, the participant was part of strategic decision- making process of the institution:

There is a managing director, general manager and human resource manager (himself). Three of them usually take decisions for the company, he is the third in

command in the organisation, so he is very much involved in decision making.

The participant restated.

In a similar response, another participant believe that managing the image and brand name of the institution was very key. He emphasized that, implementation of the strategy is the function of PR professional, so the one who also performs the function must be part of strategic management:

“A meeting is held on how to push the image and branding of the organisation, a strategy is formulated and implemented by the marketing officer who executes that function” .The participant emphasized.

Again, the above findings suggest some representation at management level by functional heads that directly or indirectly oversee some PR related activities. Firstly, it can be observed that almost all the functional heads have no public relations backgrounds and expertise. It may be argued that these orientations constrain the influence of public relations at the management level and may also account for the limited scope of public relations direction and functions that flow from management downwards .Moreover the Excellence theory underscores the focal role of public relations as part of an organisation`s subsystem that contributes to shaping the strategic direction of the organisation. Findings from the study may suggest that such connections and influence are weak as PR is manifestly made subservient to functions like marketing, sales, human resource management and operations.

4.5: Some Perceptions about the Usefulness of PR in Relationship Management

A regular occurring theme across participants was that PR acts as an important tool for establishing and maintaining good customer relations in the hospitality industry. The services offered by the hospitality industry are oftentimes intangible (not physical products you can always examine before you buy). Therefore, there was the need to be tactful, because one may be dealing with emotions, sentiments, and egos of customers. Managing relationship with stake-holders/publics is very important, because “word of mouth” can make or unmake organisations in the hospitality industry. The participant of a major hotel acknowledged that, in the hotel sector building relationship is key.

“Repeat customers, they have been here before, they love it, and would want to come again. For this reason for thirty (30) years we are still running and still successful, we have their database, we keep contact with them, encourage them to come. We are also lookout for business people who organize events that need our facilities, so we encourage them to come. The Sales and Marketing Manager explained.

He further emphasized that, managing relationship with stakeholders/publics in their institution is the function of the Sales and Marketing department, and directly under the Marketing officer, who liaises between their organisation and their publics.

In the absence of a tangible service, product, clients of hospitality often rely on an organisation's reputation and image in making initial purchase decision (Grenler & Brown, 1997: Kandampully

& Suhartanto, 2003). This is where effective public relations management comes in handy. It is essential for effective development and maintenance of communication that establishes a favourable image and reputation for the hospitality organisation as well as promotes sales and organisational sustainability.

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4.6.: Capacity limitations for PR practice in the Ghanaian hospitality sector

The practice of PR in the hospitality industry is fraught with challenges that make it difficult for public relations practice to effectively take root in the industry and significantly affect it. The main issue identified here by participants was the relatively small size of hospitality organisations and the very limited financial resources at their disposal. One participant had this to say:

“Most of the institutions and agencies in the hospitality industry are very small in nature, and operate on very limited budget. Therefore, they are unable to maintain a PR department.” The participant shared.

Another participant in the hospitality industry identified the lack of qualified PR practitioners with requisite skills in the hospitality industry as the bane of the hospitality sector. He said, “We need to get more expertise working in this field. People who are trained in this field to work”.

As much as the issue of inadequate financial resources and specialised PR practitioners may be valid and may to an extent account for the weak presence of public relations in the Ghanaian hospitality sector, another observation may also be relevant. The organisational strategy, structure, dominant coalition in hospitality organization must be restructured. As far as the prevailing dominant coalition of organisations in the Ghanaian hospitality industry continues to be apathetic towards public relations practitioners, organisational strategy, structure and resource allocation may not be very favourable to the growth of PR practice.

Nonetheless, the ever changing and competitive nature of the hospitality industry demands a regular supply of skilled professionals with industry insights to perform various functions, including public relations.

Participants in the hospitality industry acknowledged the need for hospitality organisation to have designated PR departments manned by professionals with the requisite skills. According to them, the sector is evolving and undergoing a lot of developments. There are new practices and trends being introduced into the industry (social media, websites travel sites, blogs, among others). As a result, practitioners and managers must upgrade their knowledge and skills through training and education to keep abreast with modern trends in the industry. He believes training will help improve the skills of PR practitioners:

“Regular education and training of PR practitioners and managers in the industry about current practices and trends will help to improve the PR practice” he explained.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This study set out to explore the complexities of PR practice in the hospitality industry and the perceptions of practitioners and managers of PR. Also, this study examined the challenges and constraints to PR practice in the hospitality sector in Ghana. Data from a qualitative in-depth interview of six key informants working in hotels, restaurants and travel and tour agencies in Accra was collected and thematically analysed. Following from the presentation of findings and discussions in the previous chapter, this chapter summarises the key findings and presents the conclusion of the study. Limitations and recommendations associated with the study are also outlined and presented here.

5.1. Summary of Findings

The first objective of this study was to explore how PR is practiced within the context of Ghanaian hospitality industry. In this regard, though participants sampled showed that some public relations related activities were being carried out, especially in the field of media and customer relations, public relations practice has not fully formed as a distinct function because of the absence of designated PR department, professionals and negative perceptions about PR as (a function that can be performed by everyone) in the Ghanaian hospitality industry. A narrow view of public relations was often adopted and practiced by personnel whose professional backgrounds and core job roles were in human resource, marketing, sales, operations and even accounting. Public relations was either treated as an afterthought or something anyone in the organisation could effectively carry out, or both. The function also tended to be represented at

management through unrelated functional heads who may either be incapable or unwilling to initiate structural changes that will emphasise the role of public relations in these hospitality organisations.

Moreover, the study revealed practitioners in the hospitality industry acknowledged the need for hospitality organisations to have properly defined PR roles and departments as the functional mouth –piece of their institutions. The practice whereby the PR function is attached or subsumed under the sales and marketing or human resource department, with the heads of the departments performing the role in addition to their core functions demonstrates lack of appreciation of the PR in the hospitality.

Fortunately, and in relation to the second objective of this study, there appeared to be significant optimism about the potential for public relations to derive growth and profitability of hospitality organisations, particularly in cost-effective building of valuable loyal customer base.

Finally certain key constraints to effective public relations practice were unearthed in this study. Limited financial capacity and the relatively underdeveloped hospitality organisations impact the effective performance of PR function. The human resource involved in maintaining a PR department is a major disincentive for many hospitality entities in Accra and accounts for the absence of designated PR departments in most hospitality organisations.

The study also revealed the absence of qualified PR professionals in most hospitality organisations to effectively execute the function and demonstrate compelling returns on

investment in most of the hospitality institutions. Most of the hospitality organisation have employed the services of sales and marketing or human resource managers who multi-task. Therefore these organisations were not interested in employing professional PR managers who will drive communication efforts targeted at improving the institution's reputational and relational assets, because they consider it as an additional financial burden.

5.2 Limitations of Study

This study was limited to hospitality entities in Accra. Findings may therefore not completely reflect the realities of what happens in the entire Ghanaian hospitality sector. However, this study and its finding remain useful as an exploratory entryway to understand PR practice in the Ghanaian hospitality sector. This is because Accra is arguably the hub of most of the hospitality sub-sectors in Ghana, and that the use of key-informant interviews was helpful in bringing out rich and relevant information that spoke to the current state of PR practice in the hospitality industry.

5.3 Conclusion

This study has shown that public relations is yet to be fully formed as a professional practice in the Ghanaian hospitality industry. It remains a relatively unexplored and unexploited avenue for developing and maintaining the reputational and relational assets of hospitality institutions in Ghana. The observation that non professionals as well as some congnate units are handling functional roles that tend to dominate hospitality management are not necessarily best suited for the hospitality industry. It is imperative to provide a liberating space for public relations practice to move beyond the current narrow ambit of media relations to contribute to reducing the cost of

acquiring and maintaining customers and increasing industry profitability. Public relations can within the Ghanaian hospitality sector, also champion hitherto underexplored areas like issues and crises management, communications, multi-cultural communication, public relations research monitoring and evaluation.

5.4 Recommendations

The study recommends that PR practitioners in the hospitality sector should deepen their collaboration and cooperation in order to create an institutionalized front with the aim of advancing the interest of PR practitioners, putting in place a training and regulatory body that will deal with issues touching on ethics. This body could also track best practices in the world and incorporate same into their activities thereby constantly updating and creating dynamism in PR practice in the hospitality industry.

Hospitality institutions can also consider undertaking regular organisational reviews to restructure personnel and resource allocation to other professional areas like public relations that can more effectively and efficiently contribute to the bottom line and long-term survival of their business.

In addition hospitality institutions should ensure, they align PR function to respond to the specialised skills and competencies of PR as management function for the hospitality industry to reap the full potential and expertise of the profession nationally. The current situation undervalues PR's contribution to the growth and development of the hospitality sector.

PR institutions and practitioners should embark on increased sensitization drive to establish the indispensability of engaging qualified personnel to undertake PR work rather than employing other professionals of related discipline (marketing or human resource).

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How long have you been working in your current institution/ organization in a Public relations/ corporate communications role?
2. How is the PR function structured within the organisational/institutional set up?
 - (i) Do you have a designated PR department?
 - (ii) How many staff perform the PR role?
 - (iii) Who answers to who (organisational structure)
 - (vi) Is it merged with another department? Or the function is performed by an identified individual?
 - (vii) To what extent are PR practitioners involved in the organisations strategic management?
3. Who are the key publics or stakeholders of your organisation (probe for exhaustive list).
4. How does the organisation manage its relationships with each of the above publics/ stakeholders (eg which departments or officer is in charge of what? Why? eg of PR functions/activities).
5. How does the organisation maintain and promote its corporate image and reputation?.(Which department or officer is in charge of what? publicity, media relations, investor relation employee relations, guest or customer relations, events management, PR research and planning PR marketing and evaluation, CSR and community relations?)
6. In what way(s) would you say that the PR function is particularly important to the success/growth of the hospitality sector in Ghana? (Specifically how have PR activities impacted your business or organisation?)

7. Compared to other (non- hospitality) sectors in which PR might be performed, how different would you say the PR practiced in the hospitality Industry?

8. Describe the issues/factors that inhibit/ constrain the effective performance of PR activities and tasks within the hospitality industry.

9. What needs to be done to strengthen PR practice in the hospitality industry?

10. What would be (i) one fulfilling experience you can share?

(ii) one regrettable memory you might share?

11. Finally, how do you see the future of PR practice within the hospitality industry?