

**FACTORS THAT SHAPE ADVERTISING AGENCY- CLIENT RELATIONSHIP  
SUCCESS IN GHANA**

**BY**



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**DECLARATION**

I declare that except for the materials quoted from various sources which have been duly acknowledged, this study is my original work produced from research. The study was conducted at the Department of Communication Studies under the supervision of Dr. Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin.

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## ABSTRACT

The advertising industry has seen tremendous growth over the years both globally and locally. One of the important components of the advertising process which has also evolved over time is the agency-client relationship. As a result of these changes, a lot of research has been carried out mostly in the developed world, to ascertain the factors that are associated with the success or failure of these relationships. This study sought to explore the issues with a focus on differences arising from the type of client i.e. whether a public or private organisation. In all, data was collected from four advertising agencies and ten client organisations of which five were private sector organisations and the remaining five from the public sector. In depth interviews were used to gather the data. The study revealed that credibility, commitment, partnership, proactiveness and communication were the main factors that underpin the success of advertising agency-client relationships. These factors hold true on both agency and client sides, irrespective of client type. On the other hand, unreliability, disrespect, mediocrity and poor communication were found to be the key factors that lead to relationship failure. However public sector organisations' limited understanding of the advertising process, excessive bureaucracy and delays in remuneration put a strain on agencies' relationships with the public sector clients as compared to the private sector. The study recommends that for improved relationships and the smooth flow of the advertising process, both agencies and clients will need to focus on trust, commitment, partnership, proactiveness and communication. Public institutions may also need to put in more effort to fully understand the advertising process. Overall, the study builds on the advertising literature with empirical information from Africa, a context that has been bereft in previous analysis.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my parents, Rev. Prof. F.K. Kumaga & Mrs. Gertrude Kumaga, and to all my siblings, Delali, Nuku, Mawunya for their support in making this work successful. God bless you.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the background to the study. It discusses and highlights the importance of agency-client relationships in the advertising process. It also describes the evolution of agency-client relationships globally as well as the issues associated with these relationships. The chapter also sets the context by describing the current issues and challenges that have been identified in Ghana with agency-client relationships. This is followed by a statement of the research problem along with research objectives, research questions, significance of the study and operational definition of terms.

#### **1.1 Background to the study**

Advertising is considered a powerful tool that can be used to change perceptions of individuals toward a particular product or service. The need to be innovative to keep products as well as services attuned to dynamism in consumer demands cannot be overlooked and advertising plays a crucial role in marketing brands. Due to this growing need, a lot of organisations tend to engage the services of advertising agencies with the expertise to help market their brands hence making advertising a booming business. According to Hanson (2014, p.268), advertising is “a multifaceted business that involves four major groups” namely; the client, agency, medium and audience. For advertising to be successfully conceived, designed, and executed to effect, there must be some level of harmony between these four actors.

Generally, advertising involves people much more than products because groups of people (e.g. client and agency) need to work together on a particular product/service to convince another group of people (audience) to purchase or cause behaviour change. Often the ability of the agency to deliver is contingent on how they can align to the aspirations of their client. The relationship between the agency and the client is therefore, very critical to advertising effectiveness. Waller (2004), has emphasised that the relationship between these two players is central to the success of the advertising process.

The relationship between an advertising agency and the client has long been described as a marriage because of its nature (Heo & Sutherland, 2015; Wright & Tully, 1974). It can be described as demanding, filled with ups and downs and involves a high level of interdependency. In this high-stake relationship, several factors can contribute to its success or failure, and these factors could also vary based on other factors such as institutional setting and type of client.

### **1.1.1 Evolution of Agency-Client Relationship**

The advertising industry has seen continuous growth. As a profession, it began in the 1840's when agents started selling advertising space to clients in new advertising-supported newspapers (Hanson, 2014, p. 269). The agency-client relationships began at this stage but in a different way because the agents were working for the newspapers. These agents however, later moved from representing newspapers to acting as brokers selling space for publications. The agents then moved from just selling space to supporting clients that needed help in developing the adverts for space until eventually, the agents began representing the clients instead of the media (Brierley, 2005). In

1868, N.W. Ayer and Son, the first advertising agency, was established, and this was one of the first agencies to write copy, produce creatives and plan campaigns for clients.

Currently, there are over 400,000 advertising agencies globally which means clients have a lot more options at their disposal (Global Advertising Agency industry statistics, 2020). Existing literature indicates that ad agencies fall under two main categories: full-service agencies and specialised agencies. More contemporary classifications break these down into sub-categories as done by Tena (2014) who identified three main types of agency-client relationship models that exist. These are the multi-agency, the single agency and the dedicated agency models. The Multi-agency model involves clients working with more than one advertising agency. The single agency model describes the situation where the client works with just one ad agency. The dedicated model requires the setting up of an ad agency to specifically take care of the communication needs of one client. These three models represent the different types of agency-client relationships that currently exist.

Research into agency-client relationship evolutions have also catalogued the different stages the relationship evolved through – its life cycle. Wackman et al. (1986), amongst the first group of researchers, viewed the agency-client relationship as proceeding through a life cycle with four phases. He identified four stages: Pre-relationship stage; Development stage; Maintenance stage; and the Termination stage. Similar findings were presented by other scholars including Arens (1999), Waller (2004) and Fam & Waller (2008). A revised version of the life cycle by Turnbull (2016) suggested six stages to reflect new developments within the industry as follows: pre-relationship, early relationship, transition, development and maintenance, dissatisfaction and exit

from the current agreement. Even though earlier studies suggested that agency-client relationships were terminated at the final stage, Turnbull (2016) suggested that it was an ongoing process that might not get to the termination stage but go through a review process. Across these studies and stages in the relationship life cycle, scholars have identified a plethora of factors shaping the success of relationships.

### **1.1.2 Issues in Agency-Client Relationships**

The advertising and marketing industry is estimated to be now worth USD 1.2 trillion owing to an increase in marketing in various forms; mobile, content marketing and social platforms as well as new digital platforms (Global Advertising & Marketing Revenue Forecast 2017-21). The influx of advertising agencies globally as well as the introduction of innovative ways of communicating offers a lot of options for advertisers/clients. With this, agency-client relationships have also assumed more importance as clients have more options to switch between.

Scholars have identified many factors that affect agency-client relationships. These factors include: trust, commitment, communication, creativity, proactivity, quality of service, strategic thinking and interpersonal chemistry amongst others (Levin, Quach, & Thaichon, 2019; Vafeas et al. 2018; Turnbull and Wheeler, 2016; Beverland, 2007). On the other hand, some other factors have contributed to the failure of agency-client relationships. These include: dissatisfaction with agency performance, poor communication and lack of cooperation (Yuksel & Sutton-Brady, 2011; Heo & Sutherland, 2015). Besides the above factors, it has also been established that external factors such as the economic context, networking/interactive environment, organisational factors among others, play an important role in agency-client relationship success or failure (Gülsoy,

2012; Halinen, 2002 as cited in Tena, 2014). As argued by Mortimer and Laurie (2019, p. 28), “there is growing evidence that as communication campaigns become more integrated and multi-dimensional, the relationship between advertising agencies and clients is tested to its limits”.

### **1.1.3 A background on Ghana’s advertising Industry**

The advertising industry in Ghana, like global trends, is on an upward climb. According to “The Report: Ghana 2012”, “Economic and media liberalisation has led to the growth of a highly competitive advertising industry, with new agencies emerging regularly”. In 2011 alone, advertising spending in Ghana amounted to \$177.4m (The Report: Ghana 2012). Advertising in Ghana has come a long way since the first advertising agency in Ghana, West Africa Publicity Limited (later Lintas), was established in 1927 (Kpikpi, 2016).

Currently, even though it is quite difficult to say with certainty the number of ad agencies in the country due to unavailability of data, records from the website of the Advertising Association of Ghana shows there are over 100 formally registered ad agencies in Ghana. These agencies supply different advertising services to the many local and multinational clients who must target ever evolving consumers (Yeboah-Banin & Amoakohene, 2018). In Ghana, advertising agencies are employed by organisations from different sectors and industries to promote services and products. These include institutions/organisations from the public and private sector as well as non-governmental organisations amongst others. Both the public and private sectors depend heavily on advertising agencies to communicate with their audiences/targets.

Despite the growth of the advertising industry in Ghana, it is an area that is understudied. Scholars have focused on some aspects of advertising in Ghana but have merely scratched the surface. One

aspect that has hardly been attended to is the nature of agency-client relationships in Ghana. Scholars have focused on the effects of advertisements on consumer behaviour, usage of telecommunication networks, products and services of financial as well as educational institutions etc. amongst others ( Nartey, 2010; Adjin-Tettey et al., 2013; Mensah et al., 2019; Atarah & Peprah, 2014; Oforu et al., 2013; Bashiru & Bunyaminu, 2013). Others have also focused on the effects of advertising through different types of media such as radio, online advertising and social media, amongst others. Ayimey et al. (2013) assessed the effects of radio advertising on the sale of herbal products in the Ho Municipality whilst Kpikpi (2016) examined the use of social media in Ghana from the agency's perspective. Additionally, Agyarkoh (2020) sought to identify and examine the challenges of radio and T.V. advertisements in Ghana.

Besides these, some scholars have assessed the associations between branding and advertising as well as celebrity advertising (Boateng, 2014; Ameyaw Domfeh et al., 2018). Another dimension of advertising that has seen some moderate research is the association/relationship between ethical issues and advertising. Whilst Boamah et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of the ethical policy on advertising mainly its implementation in T.V. advertising, Wellington (2016) assessed how some advertising practitioners conceptualised and applied ethical guides by the Advertising Association of Ghana.

From the above discussions, it is evident that research covering some aspects of advertising has been carried out and though not exhaustive, gives a fair idea of some emerging issues in advertising. However, despite the crucial role, the agency-client relationship plays in the advertising process, there is no scholarly research/data readily available currently, thus making

this research very important for understanding this phenomenon from a Ghanaian and African perspective.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The advertising process is a complicated one made up of different components. One of the most essential components is the relationship that is established between an agency and its client. Many scholars have stressed the importance of establishing a good partnership because it is central to the success of the advertising process (Waller, 2004; Fam & Waller, 2008; Boden, 2009; Tena, 2014).

Scholars have assessed the agency-client relationships from different dimensions such as the life cycle of the relationships (Waller, 2004; Fam & Waller, 2008), success as well as failure factors and relationship models (Tena, 2014). The complexities of the agency-client relationships go further beyond these as scholars such as Heo & Sutherland (2015) and Wright & Tully (1974) have proposed that the agency-client relationship can be likened to marriage. Even though the topic has been studied extensively, it fails to fully address other important factors that could influence or contribute to the success and failure of the relationship; one of which is the institutional settings of the client organisation.

In Ghana, as in many countries, the business sector has two main players, the public sector and the private sector players. Both have their operational guidelines, and both engage the services of advertising agencies for different purposes. Their different ethos, operational processes and orientations can have different implications for their relations with ad agencies and for what purpose. For instance, the typical private sector organisation mainly focuses on profit-making

when advertising whilst the public sector may focus on public educational campaigns or announcements amongst others. These goals could influence the nature of relationships established with the ad agencies. While previous research on agency-client relationships have identified several success and failure factors, the body of scholarship has yet to address how the differing characteristics of clients may change this.

Secondly, most of the literature focus on the perceptions of one party at a time in exploring agency-client relationship success and failure factors (Waller et al. 2010; Vafeas et al. 2018; Rahat & Naqvi, 2020). Research needs to be balanced where the views of both parties are considered in one discussion. Finally, what we know about agency-client relationship success factors comes mostly from developed countries in the West and Europe. Knowing that business practices in these places are likely to be different from other settings, including developing countries such as Ghana, we need to explore the applicability of the factors here. This study, therefore, sought to explore the factors that make advertising agency-client relationships successful in Ghana and whether differences in client type have anything to do with this.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To document the characteristics of agency-client relationships in Ghana.
2. To examine the factors that contribute to the success of agency-client relationships in Ghana from the agency and client perspectives.
3. To analyse the factors that contribute to the failure of agency-client relationships in Ghana from the agency and client perspectives.

4. To establish whether there are variations in agency-client relationships depending on the type of client (public or private).

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research also sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of advertising agency-client relationships in the Ghanaian context?
2. What factors account for advertising agency-client relationship success in Ghana, as seen by the two actors?
3. What factors account for advertising agency-client relationship failure in Ghana, as seen by the two actors?
4. Do agency-client relationship success factors vary depending on the type of client involved (i.e. public versus private)?

#### **1.5 Significance of study**

Advertising agency-client relationships have been studied extensively over the years, but some gaps still exist. This is especially so in Ghana where though there is a thriving advertising industry, there is a lack of information readily available on the sector. The study provides answers to the questions lurking on the nature of agency-client relationships in Ghana by forming the basis or foundation for further research in this area. In particular, it focuses on different client types, and the dynamics they bring to the agency-client relationship. This extends the agency-client relationship literature by highlighting the importance of the characteristics of the actors involved.

Secondly, most of the literature focus on the clients' perceptions of agency-client relationship success as well as failures and on factors that contribute to clients satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2016; Rensburg, 2010; Appiah-Gyimah, Boohene, Agyapong, & Boohene, 2011). A few scholars focus on the perceptions of the agencies as well (Haytko, 2004); but that is inadequate. Research needs to be balanced where the views of both parties are considered. This study provides this two-sided view and helps present a more rounded view of what makes the relationship work.

Finally, scholars tend to focus on assessing agency-client relationships in developed countries more than in developing countries. This does not provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon since factors may vary from one context to another. Factors that influence advertising agency-client relationships in developed countries may be totally different from factors that influence these relationships in developing countries. The study therefore contributes by presenting evidence on agency-client relationship success factors from a less studied and understood context – an African country. This enriches the literature with fresh examples.

The study does all these using a marriage analogy as theoretical background, which is unique also. It presents a new lens for exploring the phenomenon in the Ghanaian context using a concept that is widely accepted here and which scholars and advertising practitioners and their clients can relate to learning from the study findings. For the industry, the study's findings provide useful guidelines that both ad agencies and their clients (of different types) may use to enrich their relationships.

## **1.6 Scope of Study**

The main focus of the study is on the determinants of agency-client relationship success in Ghana and the variations that exist depending on the type of client. The study draws on data collected from advertising agencies and client organisations in Ghana. Initially it started as a dyadic study where the researcher tried to assemble agency and client pairs. However, clients' data protection agreements prevented agencies from easily volunteering information on their clients and their contact persons. Thus, the data used in the study comes from some agencies and client organisations some of which were not clients of the agencies.

## **1.7 Operational Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of key terms are adopted.

An advertising agency-client relationship exists when an individual or organisation (principal) employs an advertising agency (the agent) to assist in undertaking promotional activities (Based on the Agency theory) (Waller, 2004).

Boden (2009) also defines a business-to-business relationship (client-agency relationship) as an association between an advertising agency and its client (the advertiser). The term agency-client relationship will be used interchangeably with client-agency relationship throughout the study.

### **Private Sector Organisations**

Private sector organisations are basically organisations owned, controlled and managed by private individuals and are usually established for the purpose of making profit.

## **Public Sector Organisations**

The public sector is the state controlled sector of the economy i.e. organisations owned and run by the state.

### **1.8 Summary of chapter**

The chapter began with a brief background to study which is on advertising agency-client relationships and continued with a brief history on agency-client relationships from a global perspective. Discussion was then narrowed down to current issues in agency-client relationships globally and in Ghana. The chapter also discussed the problem statement, objectives of study and research questions. A premise was then provided for the relevance of the study in the given context followed with the scope of study and finally the definition of key terms for study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.0 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to explore relevant literature and theories on the factors that shape advertising agency-client relationship success or failure from different perspectives as well as some of the contexts in which they operate.

#### 2.1 Conceptual Review

##### 2.1.1 Advertising

The global advertising industry is now worth an estimated USD 1.2 trillion (Global Advertising & Marketing Revenue Forecast, 2017-21). It has many players who rely on a strong internal relationship and building an outside relationship with a target audience for its success. It is a resilient industry that has withstood the test of time; ever-evolving to keep pace with development and innovation.

In defining advertising, some scholars and industry players have attempted to provide all-encompassing definitions for the term and whilst some definitions are concise and straight to the point, others are more detailed. For instance, advertising, according to the American Marketing Association, is “any paid form of non-personal communication about an organisation, product, service or idea by an identified sponsor” (Hanson, 2014, p. 264). Even though this definition highlights some key points such as “any paid form of non-personal communication” and “by an identified sponsor”, it fails to elaborate on the medium. A similar but more comprehensive definition can be found in Kotler (2005, p. 762), where advertising is defined as “any paid form of

non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services through mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television or radio by an identified sponsor”. This definition also talks about the types of media used.

Richards & Curran (2002, p.74) attempted a more comprehensive definition describing advertising as “a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future”. This definition suggests that advertising is based on these five criteria: advertising is paid for by an individual or organisation; it is done via media which is usually mass; communication is carried out from the source to the receiver; an identifiable source exist (even though sometimes the source is not easily identified); and advertising is persuasive meaning the main focus is to cause behaviour change or evoke feelings towards a brand, idea etc. (Thorson & Duffy, 2012). However, it is good to keep in mind that not all advertising is paid for because now we have user-generated advertising by non-professionals, public service announcements produced pro-bono by advertising agencies and advertising contests organised by advertisers (clients) for non-professionals that appear in paid media (Thorson and Duffy, 2012).

A more detailed definition by Bennett (1995) for the American Marketing Association describes advertising as “The placement of announcements and persuasive messages in time or space purchased in any of the mass media by business firms, non-profit organisations, government agencies, and individuals who seek to inform and/or persuade members of a particular target market or audience about their products, services, organisations, or ideas.” This definition is well

broken down to include the type of organisations (source) that pay for the service and includes the fact that it is for an intended target market; this definition cuts across.

One of the great industry players, Burt Manning, a former advertising executive of the J. Walter Thompson Company provides an interesting definition for the term advertising. Burt Manning describes advertising as “One of the important forces which serves the public interest. It is a form of open communication between those who sell and those who buy. It is a form of advocacy – open to any company or cause that wants to argue its case. The jury is the public. Every purchase is a vote” (Chunawalla, 2016, p. 4). This definition adds an interesting twist to the term advertising somewhat comparing it to a case in court and also highlights the fact that it is a form of advocacy open to all (potential sponsors) who have some product or service etc. to showcase but, in the end, the final decision lies with the consumer.

Ward (2018) considers advertising as an “attempt to influence the buying behaviour of customers or clients with a persuasive selling message about products and/or services.” Ward (2018) further adds that the goal of advertising in business is to attract new customers through defining the target market as well as reaching out to them with an effective ad campaign. Even though this definition is quite extensive, it fails to include that it is paid for and does not also make mention of the communication medium. However, the term “effective ad campaign” for identified target markets is an indication of the fact that advertising cannot be a “one size fits all” approach and also gives a clear picture of the nature of advertising presently.

Drawing on the various definitions above, six important elements emerge for the purpose of this study. Firstly, advertising should be a service that is paid for. Besides the exceptions provided

earlier, the definition of advertising for the purpose of this study should include the fact that it is a paid form of communication. The second element is the “non-personal communication” aspect. Advertising for the purpose of this study is non-personal; hence, it should be mass communication not at the individual level (one on one). Additionally, communication should be about an organisation, product, services, ideas or public sector announcements or campaigns. The third element is the “identified sponsor or source”. Advertising in this case should have an identified sponsor/source and in this study this source is either a private or public sector institution. The fourth element is the medium through which advertising is carried out. This study will focus mainly on mass media including digital media. The fifth element is the persuasiveness of the advertising. That is, advertising geared towards changing behaviour or changing the feelings or perceptions of people towards a particular product or service. It is good to note that the word advertising comes from the latin word ‘advertere’ which means “to turn the mind toward” (Kaptan, 2002); this makes persuasion in advertising a crucial factor for consideration. Finally, advertising should be targeted i.e. there should be a target market or audience to complete the process. These six elements are essential in defining advertising for this study.

The relationship established between the identified sponsor (client) and the advertising agency which is the focus of this study is central to the entire process and is influenced by a number of factors resulting in its success or failure because advertising is basically a people business. Understanding the advertising concept serves as the foundation for this study.

### **2.1.2. The Agency-Client Relationship**

Relationships are not static and need to be nurtured to develop into fruitful partnerships. Some scholars have suggested that the advertising client-agency relationship has a life cycle with four stages and each stage comes with its own factors to ensure effective management and success of the client-agency relationships.

Wackman et.al (1986) was amongst the first group of researchers to study the life cycle of the client-agency relationship. Wackman et.al (1986) viewed the client-agency relationship as going through a life cycle involving four phases. Wackman et.al (1986) identified four stages of the relationship and these are the pre-relationship, development, maintenance and termination stages. The pre-relationship stage focused on agency selection where both parties learn about each other and the agency “tries to sell its competency to the client”. The development stage involved working on the first adverts and advertising campaigns, the energy level is generally high at this stage. The maintenance stage referred to the deeper form of the relationship where a number of campaigns are conducted over a longer period and this stage could turn out to be the most productive as well. Wackman et.al (1986), however, noted that the literature did not differentiate between the second and third phases/stages). The termination stage is where the relationship ends and could be voluntarily or involuntarily depending on the situation.

Wackman et al. (1986) also identified factors influencing client-agency relationship success at each stage based on four sets of factors. The first factor which was work product had within it factors such as advertisements and advertising plans. The second factor, work patterns included the day-to-day aspects of the advertising process which covers control, coordination and

communication about advertising campaigns etc. This is followed by the organisational factors such as qualifications and experience of parties, corporate and agency policies, organisational structure of both parties, shift in marketing strategy and corporate politics. The fourth factor is the relationship climate which is referred to as the chemistry of the relationship and this includes level of trust as well as rapport between the two parties. The study revealed, however, that the factors mentioned above were reversed during the development and maintenance stage. According to Wackman et al. (1986), the pattern of client-agency development that emerged revealed that relationship factors as well as work pattern factors were the most important in developing and maintaining the relationship. This is not to say however that the organisational factors and work product factors were not important. Interestingly, however, cost of service which is an organisational factor was one of the main predictors of satisfaction according to study findings. At the pre-relationship stage, work product factors were primary and organisational factors such as agency's reputation, size, location and services were also part of the agency selection criteria. Relationship factors were secondary and work pattern factors were nowhere to be found. These findings, though dated, have not lost relevance, particularly in the context of this study.

Researchers have also revealed that the "people factor" is valued as an important factor by the advertisers/clients. The people factor referred mainly to factors such as interpersonal relations, creative ability, quality account team and integrity. The factors had similar value across all four stages/phases. This is in line with the marriage analogy by Wright & Tully, (1974) because all the factors involved boil down to one main factor, interpersonal relationships. Haytko (2004), also confirmed in a firm (client) to firm (agency) study that the most mentioned two relationship combinations were "partner/business friends and "partner"/ "personal". Partner was for the

interorganisational level and business friends as well as personal was at the interpersonal level between the account manager for the agency side and the brand manager for the client side. Partner refers to a project focused relationship that gives all the necessary information about the business and also has a high level of cooperation. Whilst Business friends allows some level of self-disclosure, personal allows full disclosure.

Studies have also revealed that trust, honesty and commitment contribute to building long-term relationships. According to Fam and Waller (2008), trust, honesty and commitment are more valued by clients during the first three stages. Secondly, findings revealed that factors valued at the development and maintenance stage include information exchange, joint working, understanding, communication effectiveness, conflict-handling, satisfaction, benefits, and relationship strength. At the dissolution stage, however, research identified closeness, bonding and client dependence were the most valued by the clients. Factors from Wackman et. al.(1986) for relationship success can be found within the people factor presented by Fam and Waller (2008) at the various stages.

The advertising client-agency relationship life cycle is not static and can evolve overtime. Focusing on the evolving nature of the client-agency relationship life cycle, Waller (2004) also reviewed literature on agency-client relationships life cycle based on the three stages in the account management lifecycle i.e. agency evaluation/selection, relationship development and maintenance, and agency review/termination stages. According to Waller (2004), however, stages may vary depending on the current stage of the relationship. The first stage may be selection for some clients but evaluation for others meaning instead of selecting a new agency, the client might be evaluating

the performance of the previous agency for reselection. Waller (2004) also refers to the final stage as agency review/termination because not all relationships are terminated, some may undergo review to either switch agencies when dissatisfied or review, evaluate and continue with current relationship when satisfied with performance. Unlike the previous cycle by Wackman et al. (1986), Waller (2004) presents a more flexible life cycle.

Additionally, Turnbull (2016) also presents a revised version of the life cycle based on existing literature and evidence from industry reports. According to Turnbull (2016), the life cycle framework which contains six phases reflects new developments in the industry. The stages/phases are: pre-relationship, early relationship, transition, development and maintenance, dissatisfaction and exit from current agreement. Turnbull (2016) acknowledged the fact that “the changing nature of client/ad agency relationships has not been recognised in existing life cycle frameworks presented in the literature” and gives a revised version of the client-agency life cycle based on empirical evidence and industry insights.

According to Turnbull (2016), the pre-relationship stage is referred to as “a complex one with many separate meetings taking place before the final pitch presentation”. The phase involves more than just selecting the agency (which has been the focus in existing literature). The pre-relationship also includes other activities such as the RFI (Request for Information) process, chemistry and credentials meetings as well as the role of intermediaries which are not adequately captured in the literature. The next phase which is the early relationship stage is the stage during which activities such as tissue sessions and pitch presentations take place for further briefing and discussions between the two parties. This is followed by the transition stage where the agency and client will

develop long term strategic plans as well as consider the tactical communication needs of the client. This stage also involves the movement of the client from their old agency to the new one and includes meetings with old and new agencies. According to Turnbull (2016), the IPA recognises the importance of this stage and argues that there is the need “to recognise it as distinct and different, and agree specific procedures, practices and payments for this time period”. Turnbull (2016) posits that the IPA considers this is an important stage in the client/ad agency relationship after which “clients and agency will be able to evaluate how well they are working together, identify gaps in knowledge or team members and have an agreement on remuneration” when completed.

According to Turnbull (2016), the literature establishes that the development and maintenance stage is where client preferences begin to change and what was considered important such as creativity during the earlier stages no longer holds but rather focus is on other factors such as personal relationships developed between both parties. Additionally, the personal relationships that are established between the client and agency during this stage are considered significant in maintaining the relationship. Literature also identifies the different relationship styles that have emerged and so on. According to Turnbull (2016) however, there is also a need to “explore the evaluation of relationships and expectation management during this stage”; for instance, there is limited knowledge of how key performance indicators (KPIs) are evaluated and the nature of review audits. According to Turnbull (2016), most of the life cycle frameworks conclude with termination but industry sources elaborate on the fact that even though sometimes clients get dissatisfied and even call a pitch, they are likely to remain with the incumbent agency most of the

time. Literature suggests that whilst terminating client-agency relationships may be easy for the client, there are switching costs involved.

From the above, it is clear that the agency-client relationship life cycle has evolved overtime and may need further studies to develop a true reflection of the current situation. Secondly some of the additions presented by Turnbull (2016) could reflect what exist in some particular context but may not be applicable to all contexts especially the African context.

## **2.2. Determinants of Agency-Client Relationship Success or Failure**

Agency-client relationships, like any other relationship, are contingent on certain conditions or factors and when these conditions are not met, the relationship strains. To start with, every client has expectations of their agencies that need to be met fully or even partially to sustain the relationship. Turnbull and Wheeler (2016) conducted a study on advertiser's expectations of advertising agency services amongst advertisers in the UAE. The main aim of the study was to explore what expectations advertisers have of ad agencies beyond the selection stage to services provided in the future. Four main themes/sets of expectations emerged from their study: craft, affinity, functionality and perspective. The craft in the study referred to the creative skill of the ad agency, a point that most of the participants agreed was a key factor in the selection process. Participants had more confidence in agencies that were recognised for their craft through awards and or achievements. Aside from the creative skill being a primary criterion, participants also believed that it should be backed with knowledge of the industry and local market knowledge which they agreed was hard to find.

The second theme was affinity. The study revealed that advertisers like to feel a sense of affinity towards the agency they select. This can simply be referred to as the people factor where the advertiser's team bonding with the agency team from the onset including having similar policies amongst others was considered very important and beneficial for the establishment of a good partnership. With regard to functionality, participants preferred ad agencies that function effectively as marketing communications service providers as well. This included strong media negotiation skills and ability to provide services through different communication channels. Under this theme, cost was not considered as very important.

Lastly, participants considered the strategic thinking ability of the agency as extremely important. Aside from this, advertisers also want an ad agency that will bring perspective to their business and even challenge them on their strategy if possible. However, participants did not provide specific requirements for these. These expectations were not just for the moment but also for the future; implying that clients considered these as factors that will result in agency-client relationship success in the future.

Service quality is an important success factor that can influence the type of agency-client relationship established. Levin et al. (2018) sought to determine the dimensions of service quality of advertising agencies and their effects on relationship quality between an advertising agency and their clients through the social and economic exchange. The study which was carried out in Australia and New Zealand identified three key areas for relationship continuance in a professional service context and these were: service quality, relationship marketing and project management. Levin et al. (2018) posits that service quality which includes creative competence, project

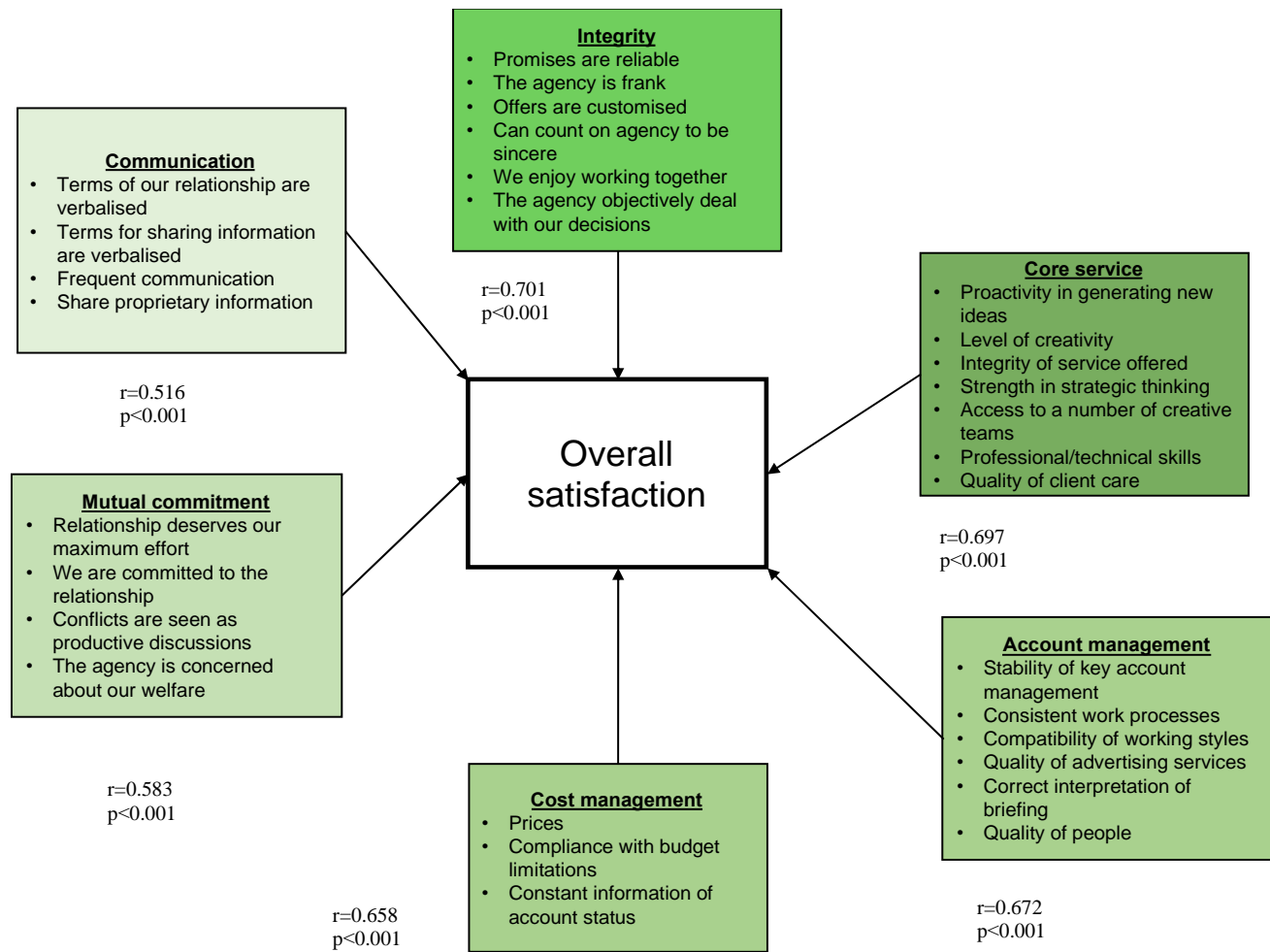
management processes and project outcomes (campaign results), helps develop social ties between the two organisations i.e. client and its agency.

Secondly, value perceptions are formed through an evaluation of all the agency's offerings, including creative competence as well as the results of the project. The three key service quality areas that lead directly or indirectly to the continuance of the client–advertising agency relationship were creative competence, campaign results and project management processes. These three are key drivers of social (interpersonal relationship) and economic (value) exchange evaluations, and eventually relationship quality. Agency performance, particularly creative competence, emerged as the most important determinant of the client–agency relationship continuity or success. Interpersonal relationship was seen to be mainly formed on the basis of the execution and demonstration of creativity, project processes, and project outcomes. Findings also revealed that “social exchange/ interpersonal relationship was a stronger predictor of relationship quality than the economic based aspect or value”. Findings from the study imply that the agency's performance is a key contributing factor to the success or failure of the relationship.

To identify the role of the service quality variables in enhancing customer satisfaction in Ghana, Appiah-Gyimah et al. (2011) assessed customer satisfaction in the outdoor advertising industry using the SERVQUAL model. The SERVQUAL model suggests that the “differences between customers' expectations about the performance of a general class of service providers and their assessment of the actual performance of a specific firm in that class results in perceptions of quality” (Appiah-Gyimah et al., 2011, pg 84). SERVQUAL's five determinants of service (reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles) formed the basis for the questionnaires.

Results revealed that service quality indicators such as responsiveness and empathy significantly impact on customer/client satisfaction. In other words, understanding the client's needs and acting accordingly significantly impacts customer satisfaction which reflects in the agency-client relationship established. Since the study was carried out in the Ghanaian context, it provides some factors that may be considered important in establishing successful agency-client relationships in Ghana.

The effect of service quality and other factors on client satisfaction was further explored by Rensburg (2010). The purpose of the research was to develop a conceptual model to assess advertisers' satisfaction with South African advertising agencies through the conceptualisation and measurement of service and relationship quality. The study proposed a conceptual model for understanding key factors that shape satisfaction with the services offered by South African advertising agencies. The model drew together two distinct approaches: (1) service quality associated with service output and performance, and (2) relational exchanges between advertisers and advertising agencies. The model identified six satisfaction factors namely integrity, core service, account management, cost management, mutual commitment and communication as shown below.



**Figure 1. Conceptual model to illustrate the satisfaction factors employed by advertisers when assessing overall satisfaction (Rensburg, 2010).**

Findings revealed that each of the factors had a significant impact on and correlation to each other as well as a moderate to strong correlation to overall satisfaction. However, integrity, commitment and communication showed a strong positive correlation to overall satisfaction. The findings support the view that satisfaction is the result of both service and relationship quality factors. Client satisfaction has been identified as one of the factors that result in agency-client relationship success and this model presents relationship success factors that can be found in literature as well. Rensburg (2010) posits that client satisfaction is not only about performing the obligations in the

contract but also requires some level of proactivity to discover more about client's needs and expectations and respond accordingly. Generally, client satisfaction results in the retention of agency-client relationships.

Proactivity which plays an important role in the agency-client relationship as stated in Rensburg (2010) can have different dimensions depending on client/agency perception of proactivity. Beverland et al. (2007) assessing dimensions of proactivity within advertising agency-client relationships identified four characteristics of agency proactivity. Proactivity is agency initiated; involves horizon expansion; promotes strategic reflection; and serves as a signal of relationship commitment. Beverland et al. (2007) posit that proactivity contribute to client satisfaction (Rensburg, 2010) and is a motivator for renewing services. Reactivity on the other hand just reduces dissatisfaction. Study also revealed that agencies make use of credibility-building methods, multiple communication channels (including formal and informal), relationship commitments and resource support collectively to boost their proactive abilities.

In spite of the establishment of proactivity's role in enhancing the agency-client relationship, not all clients appreciate this move from agencies according to Boden (2009). According to Boden (2009), some clients perceive the agency as a service provider paid by the client and not as an independent institution to be considered a strategic partner; agencies on the other hand want to be seen as strategic partner who can do more than just providing services. Creativity may be considered less important in influencing the relationship.

Martin et al. (2007) assessed agency-client relationship factors between ad agencies and the clients. Martin et al. (2007) concluded that relationships failed because of miscommunication and misunderstandings due to lack of dialogue and attitudes of both agency and client towards each other's field of operation. Success factors according to Martin et al. (2007) were: clear definition of roles, agency's ability to work outside core services i.e. innovative and proactive; a correlation between experienced outcome and expected outcome; and understanding of each other's position in the pyramid model (Pyramid model reflecting marketing communication strategy — Smith et al. 1998). The key solution proposed was communication i.e. agencies developing an effective communication process.

Yuksel & Sutton-Brady (2011) further examined agency-client relationships factors from selection to the termination. From the client's perspective: qualifications of the agency personnel and an agency which matches with current marketing strategy of the client organisation were the most important criteria in selecting an agency. Other important factors identified in the literature include the ownership or partnership of the agency by an international group, size of agency and current work of agency (that is what agency has prepared for the specific proposal) and agencies running campaigns with other brands. Past work of the agency (track record), equipment of the agency, and referral of satisfied clients were not considered that significant. Clearly from the above, the people factor is the most important in selecting the agency.

On the other side however, the client considered dissatisfaction with agency performance and disagreement over campaign objectives in that order as most significant criteria in switching agency or factors that result in relationship failure. Aside from these, agencies not giving enough

attention to client's business and organisational changes for both the agency and the client were other major influencing factors. Movement of key people from agency was the very least important. The agencies, however, had different perspectives when it came to factors that lead to loss of accounts or clients. For the agency, changes in the size of agency; poor communication, performance, or service; and personnel changes were considered most significant criteria in losing clients. Other important variables were changes in the client's corporate or marketing strategy, personality conflicts, and changes in policies. The least important factors were declining sales, unrealistic demands by the client, conflicting compensation philosophies, and conflicts of interests. One key point worth noting from the study is that agency and client have divergent views on factors that result in termination of the relationship; they however agree on a few points but at different levels.

To better understand the client-agency relationship in the advertising industry in India, Ammani, (2012) examined the factors across different topics amongst advertisers and agencies in India. The first category was to examine the nature of advertising agency-client relationships that existed. Results showed that relationships were mostly described as very strong, strong, moderate, poor and very poor with very strong having the highest score. None of the relationships were poor or very poor because any relationship that got to that stage was terminated. The second category focused on the criteria for selecting advertising agency and creativity and innovativeness of the advertising agency as well as the ability to present advertisement topped the list. These were followed by track record, reputation of agency, agency personnel, cost effectiveness, simplicity, branding, and positioning amongst others.

Tenure of client-agency relationship was the third category (average tenure for agency-client relationship in India was nine to ten years). This was reflected in the results because 80% of the advertisers either changed their agencies sometimes or rarely did (more than half of respondents change once in five to ten years). This was followed by the fourth category which focused on reasons for change which revealed that about 80% of advertisers switch agencies because of change in management. This suggests that clients hire agencies because of the people working there (people factor) but contradicts Yuksel & Sutton-Brady (2011). The other factors were brand failure, product conflicts (because of mergers, take-overs, or new product interactions), international alignments and disenchantment with each other.

Relative importance of key factors in agency selection was also assessed and creativity was the most dominant (all respondents agreed) with other factors such as strategic planning, media ability, service level and cost consciousness having varying scores depending on client. For the generation of new ideas, 40% were provided new ideas most of the time whilst the other 40% sometimes and the last 20%, rarely. For autonomy, over 90% of agencies were given moderate autonomy whilst 5.4% were given partial autonomy and according to Ammani (2012), there is always some form of conflict between agency and client concerning autonomy or freedom. More than half of the clients opted for just one agency whilst less than 50% worked with multiple agencies. Even though the use of the single agency model contradicts Tena (2014), it could also be an indication that advertisers in India are not versatile when it comes to advertising and it could also be a reflection of their economic status. From the study, it is clear that factors such as creativity cut across i.e. all clients agree that the agency's creativity is key. In summary, the agency's performance is a key factor in determining the relationship success or failure.

### **2.3. Empirical Review**

The context in which research is undertaken could also have a bearing on agency-client relationships yet research on advertising client-agency relationships tends to focus more on the economically developed countries. With a goal to identify factors that determine the success or failure of the agency-client relationship in the context of emerging countries, Triki et al.(2007), conducted an exploratory study among partners in a Tunisian small to medium-sized business context. Three categories of factors that interact simultaneously to determine the nature of the relationship as well as influence the level of satisfaction of both partners were identified.

The first category was the performance of the agency which comprises creativity, campaign results, media management, prices, size management, experience, proactivity, and reactivity. The second category was the internal policy of the client which includes rigidity degree and agency evaluation system. The third was the interpersonal factors which create a synergy between both organisations and intensify the effect of factors such as mutual trust, communication, social distance and quality of the personnel. Findings revealed that problems of role definition, ambiguity and incongruence as related to each partner could serve as threats to the relationship between agency and client. The study also revealed that advisor role is considered by both parties to be the primary role of the agency above even the creation role. According to Triki et al. (2007), this may be as a result of the cultural context in which the study was conducted where the history of advertising is quite different from what we see in the advanced economies. Given this, clients seek direction/advice from their ad agency for other communication and marketing needs (for recommendations and to resolve problems) aside from advertising.

To assess the effect of power which could be balanced or one-sided on the agency-client relationship, a study was conducted by Zolkiewski et al. (2008) on power balance in advertising agency-client relationships in the Greek advertising market. The aim of this research was to investigate the impact of the balance of power in client agency relationships. Results revealed that power is usually in the hands of the client and could negatively affect the performance of the agency as well as the agency-client relationships. The word power appeared to be disliked by most of the participants suggesting it was a problematic concept. A majority of the participants believed that the clients have most power in client-agency relationships because they are the paymasters but they also acknowledged the fact that when it comes to reputation and expertise, the agency retained power over the client. Findings also revealed that clients that have informational power gain even more power over the agency. According to Zolkiewski et al. (2008), the agencies appear to be dependent on clients as a result of intense competition within the industry.

However, Zolkiewski et al. (2008) posit that clients also like to be associated with agency's image and also gain from their expertise so clients will want to maintain a cooperative relationship with the agency. According to Zolkiewski et al. (2008), study revealed that clients and agencies are often in conflict in the Greek market in spite of relationship improvements in other markets such as the USA. Three main causes of conflict were identified and these were: lack of daring (clients not ready to accept innovative ideas i.e. client are conservative); lack of knowledge of the advertising process; and the status where the clients feel they always need to be involved and have the final say making changes even when it is not necessary. According to Zolkiewski et al. (2008), agencies had adopted three responses to the management of disagreements: compliance, compromise, or resistance. However, most of the agencies try to persuade clients first and come

to some sort of compromise in the end but comply if client still insists; a few however, just comply when clients disagree and resisting the client's decision is very rare. In spite of all the differences, Zolkiewski et al. (2008) presumed that personal relationships (people factor) could be an important factor in the agency-client relationships because of its proximity to Turkey where the culture fosters and values social bonds within the business context. The study clearly shows that clients do not really consider their agencies as partners and this can have a negative influence on the client-agency relationship and the advertising process as a whole.

Gülsoy (2012) assessed the state of advertising agency-client relationships in Turkey as a developing country by examining academic research and reports of the business press. The main aim was to review some literature on the subject with the aim of offering some insights to advertising agencies and advertisers on more effective management of the business relationship. He was of the view that the Turkish advertising industry had achieved a level of sophistication that puts it on the same level with its counterparts in some more developed markets. However, as an essential component of the industry, the relationship between the advertiser and the advertising agency had some issues to resolve. An example of such an issue was the economic volatility which could have serious implications for both the client (budget cuts) and the agency (diminished income and loss of human resources). For such a problem, he suggested a necessary human resource management system in place to maintain critical agency personnel and to emphasize their own accountability in the advertisers' marketing communications investment. This study can be linked to the Ghanaian context considering the fact that it was conducted when Turkey was still a developing country hence some of the factors that were discovered at that time could be relevant in the Ghanaian setting.

Mortimer and Laurie (2019) assessed the agency-client relationship within the Integrated Marketing Communications context to ascertain whether the agency-client relationship was moving away from the business alliance relationship towards the traditional agency model. Four main themes emerged from findings focusing on why and how the relationship is changing. The first was client ownership of the consumer journey which was considered important by both client and agency. The remaining three: lack of a strategic role of agencies; client responsibility for task allocation; and agency specialisation were concerns raised only by clients. The study revealed that indeed the relationship is changing because clients now understand the philosophy of IMC and are adopting a more integrated communications approach in order to create consistency across the various touch points that make up the customer experience. Consumer behaviour data is now being generated in-house and ad agencies are being forced to step back because the client has now gained some level of expertise. In view of these and more, agencies are now losing their positions as strategic partners and have become vulnerable. The study reveals how the changing context of advertising can influence the agency-client relationship.

Considering the role of interpersonal relationships in agency-client relationships, Turnbull (2014) sought to explore the nature of social exchange between agencies and clients among UK advertising agency Account Managers/Directors. Five types of the social exchange friendships emerged from findings. They were: professional friendships, strictly business, faking it, Non-disclosure and Forbidden friendships. According to Turnbull (2014), findings revealed that most clients and agencies prefer 'strictly business' style relationships and few clients and agencies socialise outside work. While in some cases clients were seen to disclose personal information, there was no evidence of any personal disclosure by the Account Managers. While many claimed

to like their client and get on well with them, these findings suggest that social bonds are not strong. These findings are similar to the results discussed by Haytko (2004).

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.4.1 The Ad Agency-Client Relationship: A marriage theory perspective**

The client-agency relationship plays an important role in successful advertising campaigns because it is the channel through which both parties (agency and client) communicate and exchange ideas. The client-agency relationship can be considered a complex business relationship which can be analysed from different dimensions. Davies and Prince (2005) describe the client and agency as the decision-making units of organisations that are represented by account teams and usually headed by an advertising manager and account director, respectively. Davies and Prince (2005) go on further to add that these representatives may have their own separate identities and motives but tend to mirror the culture of their organisations. Both client and agency are represented by people who need to work together for successful campaigns. According to Waller (2004), an advertising agency-client relationship exists when an individual or organisation (principal) employs an advertising agency (the agent) to assist in undertaking promotional activities (based on the Agency theory). Boden (2009) also defines a business-to-business relationship (client-agency relationship) as an association between an advertising agency and its client (the advertiser). Haytko (2004) posits that in firm (client) to firm (advertising agency) exchange relationships, “boundary spanners are economic agents representing their firms contractually to achieve specific goals”. The term boundary spanning refers to the creation of linkages that integrate and coordinate across organisational boundaries (Beechler et al., 2004). According to Beechler et al. (2004), boundary spanners (go-betweens, interfacers) establish and maintain these organisational linkages.

Boundary spanners in the advertising client-agency relationship refer to the account management personnel from both sides i.e. the client and agency.

Haytko (2004) identified different categories for defining firm (client) to firm (advertising agency) and interpersonal relationships within the advertising industry based on the perspectives of advertising agency account managers at different levels. The main aim of the study was to examine how interpersonal relationships influence firm-firm (interfirm) relationships as well as define it. Haytko (2004) identified three categories for the firm-to-firm relationships and three categories for the interpersonal relationships, all within the advertising client-agency relationship. The firm-to-firm relationship was defined and categorised based on the compilation of relationships between the group of individuals working for both sides, i.e., agency and client.

The categories identified for the interfirm relationships were the Vendor, Partner and Surrogate manager. The vendor, as the name implies is the service provider who takes orders and is expected to deliver with total obedience i.e. this type of relationship is project focused. The partner is strategy focused and involves agency in all aspects of the business. The surrogate manager, which is rare, represents the situation where one person from the agency side controls both sides of the inter-organisational exchange to the extent of having some level of control over the recruitment process for the brand. The interpersonal relationship categories were based on the relationship between the individuals such as the brand manager (client) and the account manager. First of all, there is the “Strictly business” type of relationship which is project focused with no personal interaction, self-disclosure and knowledge base. The second type which is the Business friends, involves some level of self-disclosure, little outside of work interaction as well as limited

knowledge base and is likely to end when contract ends. The third which is described as personal relationship involves highly intimate self-disclosure, significant outside of work interaction and fully developed knowledge base.

All participants indicated that personal relationships made their lives (work and personal) easier and happier which could result in job satisfaction in the business context. According to Haytko (2004), the most mentioned two relationship combinations were “partner”/ “business friends” and “partner”/ “personal”; these combinations were usually with relationships that had been established beyond two years and the agency put in extra efforts to achieve that sort of relationship. The other two combinations mentioned were “vendor”/ “strictly business” and “vendor”/ “business friends”; with these two, the client side made little or no attempt to develop the relationship. These patterns indicate that the type of interpersonal relationships that exist have a direct influence on the client-agency relationships established and that the nature of the relationship can be influenced by the nature of the people involved.

The advertising client-agency relationship has also been described as a marriage and a “subject of entirely too much mystique” (DiMingo, 2004 as cited in Boden, 2009). It is likened to a “hard-headed, result-oriented marriage intended to produce specific, measurable results” (DiMingo, 2004, p.2 as cited in Boden, 2009).

The agency-client relationship and marriage analogy is seldom discussed in recent times even though it is still relevant. It dates back to the 1970s. Wright and Tully (1974) used the analogy to describe two types of husband-and-wife alliances which are closed and open marriages. These

were discussed in the context of three eras; the product era (the 1950s), the creative era (1960s) and the position era (1970s). The closed marriage was described as “a static state marked by rigid expectations and restrictive interpersonal relations” whilst open marriage was considered as a “process in which dynamic interaction takes place between husband and wife and realities and expectations are constantly changing”. With the closed marriage, the husband dominates; the wife submits; authoritarian control is exercised; interpersonal relations are manipulative; there is lack of freedom and trust; and it exists as a single entity—the couple. On the other hand, the open marriage is characterised by: equality of mates; honest and open relationships; self-growth and mutual trust; responsibility for self and acceptance of mates’ self-responsibility; equal freedom and identity of both partners; and it allows for independence in a synergistic one-plus-one relationship.

According to Wright and Tully (1974), the product era witnessed the dominance of the client over their advertising agencies where ad agencies took cues from the client and the focus of advertising as given by the marketing client was more on the product features and customer benefits i.e. the focus was on what to communicate not how to communicate. This practice was very typical of the closed marriage. There was a shift in dominance in the 1960s from the client to the ad agency (matriarchal closed marriages) meaning this time the client took the backseat whilst the ad agency took centre stage because the agencies managed to convince their clients that how you communicate was equally important for their product. This era was marked with creativity and the proliferation of many short term and part time partners in the form of creative boutiques and media agencies. In this era, serial monogamy and polygamy amongst others were quite common and divorce rates (termination of client-agency relationships) were high as well because both clients

and agencies had the opportunity to experiment. According to Wright and Tully (1974), some clients even chose a life of “celibacy” where they established in-house advertising agencies.

There was however a U-turn back to the client dominated relationship in the 1970s known as the position era. The main difference between the product era and the position era was the fact that emphasis was placed on the position of a product in relation to competitors as part of the marketing strategy. In the 1970s however, new client-agency open marriages were being established alongside the closed marriages, but concrete examples of open marriages could not be identified at that time. However, from experience, Wright and Tully (1974) developed the criteria by which open marriages can be identified. The client-agency open marriage offers a framework for individual development; neither partner dominates; independence, equality, mutual trust and respect for each other’s exclusive rights and special competencies. Additionally, with the open marriage both partners work together, and their productivity and capabilities are combined.

However, just as real marriages between men and women do not work out well sometimes, some client-agency marriages also end up in divorce. Some of the causes of divorce identified were immaturity of the partners; incompatibility of partners; and rigid role expectations as well as inhibitions associated with closed marriages. Likening it to boys and girls being raised in all-boys and all-girls homes respectively, Wright and Tully (1974) proposed both client and agency’s lack of understanding each other’s business due to lack of knowledge (of each other’s business) could be the underlying factor causing most of the divorces. Wright and Tully (1974) hypothesized that successful advertising campaigns and long-lived client-agency relationships were possibly a reflection of the client-agency open marriage than the closed marriage.

Wright & Tully, (1974) also proposed guidelines for clients and agencies to help them achieve successful open marriages. First of all, both parties must recognise the special character of the advertising relationship and be unselfish and ready to adapt and share with other partners (polygamy). Secondly, the client must choose the right agency right from the beginning through proper scrutiny. Thirdly, both parties should consider the relationship as a marriage meant to last not just a passing affair and should be given a lot of thought from the onset. Fourthly, both sides should check a proposed mate's track record before making or accepting a marriage proposal to ensure compatibility. Fifthly, both teams should respect each other's territory in terms of rights and freedoms. Sixthly, open and frank communication is critical for a successful open marriage. Both parties must know and respect other requirements of an open marriage such accommodating each other's shortcomings and avoid flirting. Finally, both parties must plan for a dynamic rather than a static marriage. While this evaluation was done many years ago, its tenets are still applicable to agency-client relationships that exist today in the sense that both open and closed marriages exist.

Furthermore Topin (2011) also likened the agency-client relationship to marriage describing it as a "long, slow walk toward the altar" which still takes time to build into successful marriages even in the face of the digital age and "me-first attitudes". Topin (2011) attributed the current changes in agency-client relationship life spans to changes in the business environment and cultural shift as a result of digital technology as well as social media "where chemistry, trust, and relationships seem to have lost their value". This further affirms the relevance of the marriage analogy in assessing the advertising the agency-client relationship.

A study carried out by Tena (2014) identified three main types of client-agency relationship models. The three models identified were: the multi-agency model; the single agency model; and the dedicated agency model. With the multi-agency model, companies hire more than one ad agency to take care of their communication needs. Within this context however, there are different levels of collaboration with the agencies. First of all, a client could work within a single network agency by creating a team across the group. Secondly, a client could also build a team made up of professionals in different agencies. Finally, the client can have several agencies teaming up to work on their advertising needs. The multi-agency model has its own advantages and disadvantages according to Tena (2014). The main advantage is the “opportunity to build a team of the best agencies to deal with your specific strategic and tactical needs” (Wellington, 2006, p. 24 as cited by Tena, 2014). Interaction with all ad agencies to ensure effective collaboration to achieve results was considered a key disadvantage (Tena, 2014). The multi-agency model can be compared to the polygamous marriage mentioned by Wright and Tully (1974).

The single agency was the second model which was considered rare or almost extinct. For this model, the client works with one ad agency to take care of all advertising needs. The main advantage for this model is the fact that it ensures consistency in the messages spread across, ease of interaction and collaboration. One disadvantage however has to do with agency resources which may not always be adequate to achieve client’s objectives. The single agency model can be referred to as a monogamous marriage in the Wright and Tully (1974) marriage analogy.

The dedicated agency is the third model. The dedicated agency refers to ad agencies that are specifically established to serve one client where clients have tight control over work. This model

is often formed initially by collaborating agencies or teams that end up becoming a dedicated agency. This model could be in the form of a partnership or a complete agency with its own office space. The model allows for easy coordination and management which reduces cost; there is also cooperative interaction and agency is created based on client's characteristics. The downside to this model however is the lack of diversity in terms of clients which could have an adverse effect on productivity especially the creative aspect because the creative juices of the agency employees flow in one direction all the time. This model also reflects back on the monogamous marriage in Wright and Tully (1974).

It is good to note that the three models presented by Tena (2014) failed to address the life of celibacy mentioned in Wright and Tully (1974) which refers to in-house advertising agencies being established by some clients to take care of their advertising needs.

On the whole, client-agency relationships have been in existence for many decades and have evolved overtime but not totally transformed. Marriage was used to describe the relationship because real marriage involves nurturing (Heo & Sutherland, 2015) and partners need to complement each other and not dominate. For a marriage to work, both partners need to understand each other and be ready to compromise sometimes when the need arises to achieve success. As to how closed or open the client-agency marriage is will depend on the client's understanding of the advertising process and the ad agency's commitment to achieving the objectives. In terms of the models that are commonly used, the multi-agency model is widely used by a lot of clients in spite of its setbacks. However, the dedicated model which is not too popular is believed to be one of the

best options by practitioners because it allows for free flow of work (Tena, 2014). Finally, some of the current models identified have undergone some form of modification to continue existing.

The marriage analogy forms the main theoretical foundation for this study.

## **2.5. Gaps in Literature**

From the foregoing review, the following gaps were identified in the literature. First, the literature focuses on unitary views from either clients or agencies when analysing relationship success or failure factors to the neglect of a balanced view. Secondly, scholars tend to focus on assessing agency-client relationships in developed countries to the neglect of developing countries. This is in spite of the fact that factors that influence advertising agency-client relationships in developed countries may be totally different from factors that influence these relationships in the developing countries.

Finally, scholars have focused on clients in general but have not assessed the differences that may be found as a result of the sector to which the client belongs. It is worth noting that the public sector hires advertising agencies to take care of their communication needs as much as the private sector, if not even more. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012, p. 434) the government market “offers large opportunities for many companies, both big and small”. Government organisations are major buyers of goods and services and similarities can also be found between government buying and business buying (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012, p.434). However, Kotler and Armstrong (2012), also present a caveat in that “there are some differences that must be understood by companies that wish to sell products and services to governments”. This is an indication that there may be variations in factors that influence advertising agency-client relationships when comparing

clients from the public sector to clients from the private sector. These serve as the foundation for this study.

## **2.6 Summary of the Chapter**

On the whole the chapter has reviewed existing literature on advertising agency-client relationships. It presented a review of the scholarship on advertising agency-client relationship with an emphasis on the determinants of relationship success or failure. The chapter also presented a theoretical background to the study using the marriage analogy as applied by scholars to the agency-client relationship. To conclude, some gaps were identified in the literature and discussed.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research approach and the processes followed in executing it. The chapter also describes the methodology, study population and sample as well as the procedures followed in data collection and analysis.

#### **3.1 Research approach**

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is suitable for unravelling the complex dynamics of an issue (Creswell, 2007). The study's focus on agency-client relationships is, therefore, better suited to this approach. A relationship can be described as complex because of its many dynamics and the layers of factors that affect it. Considering the fact that DiMingo (2004) describes the agency-client relationship as a marriage and a "subject of entirely too much mystique", the qualitative approach offers the opportunity to engage more deeply to better understand the complexities. Secondly, relationships vary across situations and parties, making them not easily quantifiable and generalisable.

The research method that was used under the qualitative approach was in-depth interviews. This is the method of choice when qualitative researchers seek a deeper understanding of issues from different perspectives including personal experiences. The purpose of this study is tied to human relationships which require deeper interactions making interviews the best method for the study.

### **3.2 Population and Sampling**

The population for the study was all registered full-service advertising agencies in Ghana who work with both public sector and private sector clients. Reliable data on the number of full-service advertising agencies in Ghana is difficult to come by. Therefore, it is difficult to put a figure to their size in the Ghanaian economy. However, data from the Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG) presents a good proxy. According to the umbrella association for advertising agencies and practitioners in the country, over 100 agencies are registered as members.

Using the AAG database as sampling frame, full-service agencies were selected using criterion sampling. Criterion sampling allows you to review and study cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001). The criterion used in agency selection was that they be full-service agencies where they are likely to be working for different clients with different needs. Four advertising agencies were interviewed based on this criterion and their readiness to participate. Snowball sampling was used to select the client organisations to be interviewed. Snowball sampling is useful when samples with the target description are not easily accessible (Naderifar et al. 2017). In the case of this study, it is impossible to identify clients of an agency without the researcher being on the inside. Snowballing, therefore, offered the best means to identify and gain access to clients through their agency representatives. Originally, the researcher intended to interview a client each from the public and private sector for each agency interviewed. The idea was to snowball from the agency interviewee to interviewees on the client side. However, this proved difficult as agency personnel were not willing to neither share their client details nor disturb them for interviews. Thus, it was only in a few cases that this approach was used, yielding five client interviews (one client worked with two of the agencies) for three agencies.

The researcher relied on her networks to gain access and negotiate more client interviews using snowballing from industry contacts. In the case of these interviews (one additional agency and five clients), the organisations were not necessarily clients of the agencies interviewed. However, care was taken to ensure that they frequently use the services of ad agencies and therefore had perspectives to share. Altogether, interviews were held with four ad agencies and ten client organisations. The researcher would, therefore, like to clarify at this point that because of the challenges, analysis was done generally not based on the agency-client duos.

Data collection was stopped once it was realised that a point of saturation had been attained. According to Fusch & Ness (2015), data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study and when further discovery is no longer easily feasible. It was realised at some point that respondents were providing very similar answers expressed in different ways indicating that enough grounds had been covered to make the study valid.

Agency interviewees were qualified by their roles as client-facing employees of their respective agencies. Thus, people who dealt directly with clients (playing the role of account managers) were interviewed. These were deemed suitable because they are responsible for liaising with clients of the agency (Neidle, 2002). For the clients, the targets for interviews were marketing and communication department personnel who usually coordinate advertising efforts of their organisations and therefore liaise a lot with agency account executives/managers.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedure**

Primary data was gathered from the field through in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct interviews. This allowed the researcher to divide the interview guide

into two sections for both agency and client. For the agencies, the introductory section focused on gathering general information about their clientele and relationship factors considered at the initial stage. This was followed by the main section which focused mainly on determinants of relationship success or failure and the relationship factors based on client type (public sector and private sector clients). The introductory section for the clients focused on factors considered at the initial stage i.e. before hiring an ad agency and for renewal. The main section focused primarily on determinants of relationship success or failure and experiences with current ad agencies. Interviews were held in the offices of interviewees making them more relaxed since they were used to that environment. However, some interviews were conducted on phone because interviewees were not physically available. Interviews were scheduled at the interviewees' convenience. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. The researcher conducted all interviews and took notes as well. All interviewees were assured that their identities will not be disclosed to ensure free flow of information. All interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to analysis.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedure**

A number of data analysis procedures have been provided by scholars (e.g. Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2013; Creswell, 2007) for making sense of qualitative data. The type of data collected determines the type of approach to be used for analysis. For the purpose of this study, the data analysis procedure was based on the approach proposed by Miles et al. (2014). This approach was selected because it helps in breaking down data in a meaningful way and the assumptions made at the beginning of the approach perfectly describe the type of data collected for the study.

According to Miles et al. (2014), there are four main steps involved in analysing qualitative data. These are first cycle coding, second cycle or pattern coding, within-case and cross-case analysis, and assertion and proposition development. The approach is premised on the assumption that researchers have collected data in the form of handwritten or typed notes, audio or video recordings, among others. Further assumptions also acknowledge the fact that the raw data must be processed into write-ups typed directly or transcribed before analysis; in this case the audio recordings were transcribed. The study data met these assumptions making the approach suitable for analysis. For the purpose of this study, the main method used to collect data was recorded in-depth interviews. Besides these, the researcher took notes.

### **3.5 First cycle coding**

The sections that follow explain how the researcher applied the Miles et al (2014) analytical approach. Codes have been defined as labels that “assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles et al. 2014, p.71). They are usually attached to chunks of data that vary in size (Miles et al. 2014). Three elemental methods namely, Descriptive, In vivo and Process coding are proposed. The descriptive method focuses on assigning labels to different portions of data in the form of a summary while In Vivo makes use of words or short phrases from the participant’s own language. In the case of process coding gerunds are used to connote observable and conceptual action in data (Miles et al. 2014). For the purpose of this study, two of the coding methods descriptive and In Vivo were used. To commence the coding process, transcripts were read over and over again to familiarise with the data. Secondly, the data was coded based on responses to each question on the interview guide. Some codes were picked directly from text (In Vivo) while for others, labels were assigned to capture the essence of

responses from which In Vivo codes could not be lifted (descriptive). Miles et al (2014) provide two main methods for generating descriptive codes (i.e. deductive and inductive coding). For the deductive, a provisional list of codes is developed prior to the study which can be from the research questions, conceptual framework, hypotheses and so on. Inductive on the other hand, is based on emerging codes during data collection. Both methods were employed for study. A provisional list was developed based on existing literature while new codes emerged from the researcher's engagement with the data. Some existing (deductive) codes that were drawn from the literature were revised to fit the evidence.

### **3.6 Second Cycle coding – Pattern codes**

The second cycle coding is a way of grouping summaries from the first cycle into smaller number of categories, themes/constructs. At this stage, information from first cycle coding is pulled together into meaningful smaller units of analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The pattern codes developed from the first cycle codes are based on the research questions and objectives for the study. After developing pattern codes, two main approaches are provided for reporting: narrative description and visual displays (Miles et al., 2014). Narrative description identifies and elaborates on the pattern code, weaving its component first cycle codes into the narrative and supporting it with field note data as well (Miles et al., 2014). Considering the nature of this study and the sort of data collected, the narrative description was the best approach in terms of reporting on pattern codes. In view of this, narrative description was used to elaborate on the pattern codes. Below is a sample from the data in a table form showing some first cycle codes and the pattern codes generated from the first cycle codes:

**Table 1: Sample from first and second cycle coding data for Agencies**

Questions	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C	Agency D	Pattern codes
<b>First Cycle Codes</b>					
<b>1.What factors do you consider to be key in building a successful relationship with your client?</b>	-Transparency -Credibility -Consistency (this goes hand in hand with commitment) -Time can be a factor but the 3 are the main factors because with time, meetings are held with clients to plan ahead and timelines are set so everyone knows exactly what they are supposed to do and when to deliver	-Communication -Trying to understand the client and what they are about -Meeting deadlines and timelines	Client should see the agency as thinking about their business every time and this can be done through: -Insight generation; -finding out new trends in the market; -finding out about new competition; -new ways of marketing; - new platforms for engaging consumers -trends that are occurring in the lives of consumers that will be useful for the client in either developing new products or new and effective ways of marketing -Agency should be seen as a business partner	-You must be able to demonstrate that you have mastery of the job -You should know the client’s brand more than the client mostly through research to develop their trust -You need to know what makes the client happy, move beyond the formalities -If possible, you should be able to try out the service or product of client to experience what you are advertising	Transparency Credibility Consistency Expertise Partnership Know client and brand inside out Communication Forward-looking Reliability
<b>2.What factors can serve as relationship stressors even to the point of account loss?</b>	-Delay in delivery -Not achieving targeted objectives without reason	-Not understanding exactly what the client wants -Missing deadlines -Not communicating with clients frequently -Lack of self-control on the part of agency when dealing with difficult clients	-Agency not being proactive in terms of sharing information (frequent communication with client) -Client not keeping their part of the bargain in terms of funds -Delay in delivery (could be both sides) -Taking smaller clients with smaller funds for granted	-Disrespect from clients -Not cooperating with agency because client doesn’t understand how the agency operates - Misunderstanding each other	Unreliability Poor communication Breach of contract Disrespect Low commitment Low level of Proactiveness

### **3.7 Within-Case and Cross-Case Analysis**

Within-case analysis is mainly used to describe, understand and explain what happens in a single, bounded context. The main aim of the cross-case however is to see processes and outcomes across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions and then develop more solid explanations. One advantage of the cross-case is that it increases generalisability up to some level making it applicable in a similar context. For this study, both approaches were employed. The within-case analysis was used to analyse the themes that emerged from the different organisations within the same sector (i.e. agencies, public and private sector clients). After this was done, themes for all the sets were analysed using the variable-oriented approach under cross-case method to determine the similarities and differences. The variable-oriented approach is basically used to identify themes that cut across cases. In view of this, recurring themes were identified and compiled to establish the factors across.

### **3.8 Assertions and Propositions**

Assertions and Propositions are ways of summarizing and synthesizing a huge number of individual analytic observations (Miles et al., 2014). Whilst an assertion is a declarative statement of summative synthesis usually confirmed by evidence from the data, a proposition is a statement that puts forth a conditional event (Miles et al., 2014). In this case, assertions were made based on the data in comparison to existing literature and new factors that had emerged from findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS OF STUDY

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses findings from primary data collected from the field based on the research objectives which are: to determine the nature of advertising agency-client relationships in Ghana; to identify the factors that contribute to the success or failure of agency-client relationships in Ghana from both the agency and client perspectives; and to establish whether there are variations in agency-client relationships depending on the type of client (private or public).

In order to gather data free of biases, there was an agreement between the researcher and the interviewees to apply some level of confidentiality in discussing findings. In view of this, the true identities of the advertising agencies as well as clients involved have not been disclosed. However, each has been assigned letters which are used throughout the discussion.

For the four advertising agencies, the letters A, B, C and D have been assigned. **A** is the Unit head for the account management and media buying department and has about 30 years of experience in advertising. He represents the first ad agency and the oldest agency that was interviewed. The second interviewee, code-named **B** is an Account Executive with about five years of experience who represents the second ad agency. **C** is a managing partner with eleven years of experience and he represents the third ad agency. Interviewee **D** is a Business Development Manager with over three years of experience and he represents the fourth ad agency.

Ten client organisations were interviewed; five each from private and public sector organisations. The clients from the private sector have been assigned codes **P1**, **P2**, **P3**, **P4** and **P5** while those from the public sector have been assigned codes **G1**, **G2**, **G3**, **G4** and **G5**. These organisations were drawn from the telecommunication/Communications, food and beverages, Petroleum, banking and finance, health sector and the home appliance industries. Table 1 below presents the details of the client-side interviewees:

**Table 2: Details of Client Interviewees**

Assigned Code	Respondent's Position	Type of organisation
<i>Clients from the Private Sector</i>		
<b>P1</b>	Brand coordinator	Telecommunications company
<b>P2</b>	Brand manager	Fast Moving Consumer Goods company
<b>P3</b>	Marketing manager	Financial institution
<b>P4</b>	Marketing and Public Relations Manager	International Home Appliance company
<b>P5</b>	Sales and Marketing Manager	Petroleum company
<i>Clients from the Public Sector</i>		
<b>G1</b>	Deputy Head for Corporate affairs	Financial institution
<b>G2</b>	Deputy Director (Procurement)	Institution within the health sector
<b>G3</b>	Member of the communications team, Consumer Corporate Affairs Division	Institution within the communications sector
<b>G4</b>	Brands and Communications Executive	Institution within the gaming sector
<b>G5</b>	Head of the Public Relations Department	Institution within the licensing sector

## **4.1 The nature of agency-client relationship in Ghana**

### **4.1.1 Relationship models**

Generally, three main advertising agency-client relationships have been identified in the literature. These are the multi-agency, single agency and the dedicated agency models (Tena, 2014). This study finds that, one main model is common in Ghana – multi-agency model. With this model, clients employ the services of more than one advertising agency to handle different communication activities including traditional and digital advertising and media buying. For instance, client-side respondent P2 indicated that they work with four to 10 agencies within a year based on their communication needs:

In marketing we have different agencies for what we do...we have a media agency that handles TV, radio, billboard; we have a digital agency that handles our social media, online media and what have you; we also have creative agency that designs the art work, produces TV ads and so on. We have what we call BTL agency doing the experiential so the activations and so on, so we have like four agencies generally. For creatives we have different agencies for the various products. So maybe within a year we could work with 10 agencies but not all at one point because of how our activities are phased over the year. (P2)

However, one client worked with a dedicated team across a network and even though it still falls within the multi-agency model, it can also be linked to the third model. Evidence of this can be seen below:

The advertising agency has a team dedicated to solely do the organisation's work (name withheld) and they are on retainer. The same agency has affiliation with the media agency and the digital, those who handle the social media aspect of the brand, so they are all under the ad agency. (P1)

Four main reasons were given for adopting the multi-agency model and these were the cost effectiveness (procurement wise), specialty benefits, adherence to procurement regulations and risk diversification. Evidence of this comes from P2, G1 and G2:

I will give a good example; you know banks collapsed in Ghana recently? So, what if this full-service agency collapses all of a sudden, what happens? And you have some critical project you are working on, you can imagine. So, it's better to diversify your risk so if something bad happens, you know that you wouldn't be totally messed up, there are advantages and disadvantages (P2).

I believe in speciality, you can't do everything...about ten years ago this social media thing was not that active so others have come in with that speciality so why would I be using an agency who is still on traditional media or all they know is buying? (G1)

Our sourcing procedures don't allow us work with one; what we do is that we have a fixed contract with them, once the contract term expires we can't engage you again unless we open another competition so it can be two years and over then we are done with you...if we want you again for a specific thing then we select again (G2).

#### **4.1.2 Agency-client relationship contract models**

Generally, the agencies interviewed work with clients on a project by project basis as in the case of P2:

For the creative agencies we usually do project basis, so we have a project, they work on it and deliver the product; when they deliver, we are done with them until another project and even that we might not necessarily use the same agency.

However, there are instances of retainer arrangements where they had an agreement to work with them for a period (long-term contract) with a fixed regular payment system as stated above for P1 under the types of agency-client relationship models. This retainer arrangement applied to P2 as well where they had one agency on retainer. The retainer model is always done alongside the project to project basis under the multi-agency model.

#### 4.1.3 Tone of Agency-client Relationships

From findings, both agencies and clients admitted that their working relationship was more of a partnership rather than mere employer versus service supplier/vendor relationship. Differences however exist in the degree of involvement from both parties. Some client organisations do not really have codified rules as to how far the relationship can go while others are guided by organisational policies that do not allow them to move beyond a certain limit.

Generally, there seems to be some flexibility in how the relationships are managed. Some of the relationships moved beyond the formal settings into the informal. Agencies generally bond with their clients outside the formal settings through parties, lunch invites, birthday wishes and celebrations and gift-giving. However, some clients seem to frown on making their relationships with agencies too informal. According to P3 and P5, their company's policies preclude them from engaging in activities outside the formal settings:

As a bank we have policies that bar us from that so you can't do that and if you have to do that you need to ask for permission; it can easily lead to bribery and stuff, assuming I am very influential in determining a certain decision on something and you took me out to lunch; maybe during the lunch you even gave me something in an envelope...what do you think I will be doing here? I will be pushing your interest, so we try to keep it like that but that's not to say you can't have an informal aspect like a funeral, wedding, birthday party...you can go. The bottom line is if you have an invitation from your agency and you are unsure of something, there's a procedure you follow. (P3)

Similar evidence comes from this public sector client:

No, those things are outlawed; you don't have to put yourself in a position where you have such relationships with your agency because it's assumed that when you become too close, it will cloud your judgement and compromise quality and cost...some of them will like to do that but because it's not allowed...no they don't. What they can do is invite you to one of their programmes like end of year programme because you are one of their clients, they can give you an official invitation and we also invite some of them to some of our programmes especially annual performance review as collaborators. (G2)

Client G3 clearly stated that even though it is not outlawed, they are not interested in such activities because they do not want to be influenced in any way:

It's strictly business...a former agency used to invite us for their programmes, but we never go because we don't have the time. In fact, if you send us a hamper during Christmas, we will attach a letter and send it back to you because we don't need it; we don't want you to be bribing us to continue working with you. Even though it's not a policy here, we don't do that in my division. (G3)

#### **4.2. Determinants of advertising agency-client relationship success**

Agency side respondents highlighted building trust as a key success factor in relationships with clients at the initial stage of the relationship and after. The main focus of the agency is to win the trust of the client and evidence from Agency A and C can be seen below:

Basically, you lay the foundation with your past works at the initial stage because clients will judge or select based on what you have done. When you are selected, and you start working, then consistency comes in, you need to be consistent. You also need to be transparent as well as honest. All these factors then contribute to building trust with clients. (Agency A)

So, at the initial stage every client wants results and they want it fast so an agency that can deliver quick effective results always does well when it comes to winning the hearts of clients at the initial stage. How fresh are your ideas in relation to existing ideas; how quick are your turnaround times and how effective are your solutions as far as my consumers are concerned so these factors are key when clients are selecting agencies to work with. At the initial stage you come in with all that and you win the heart of the client...it's like courting a lady...you win the heart, but you now have to earn the trust of the client. You earn the trust by being consistent with the kinds of things that you did that won the client. (Agency C)

For the client, they look at three main factors at the initial stage of the relationship, the portfolio of the agency, expertise, and affordability (e.g. the cost of service, the payment structure and prefinancing). In addition to these factors, some clients consider external affiliation as well. Evidence of these factors as provided by private sector clients are provided below:

We would want to look at their history; I don't think that an organisation like ours which is very old and has a solid brand, you'll just throw it into the hands of inexperienced people so you would want to partner with an advertising agency that has a track record otherwise you would end up messing up the brand that you've built over so many years. You can also look at even the key staff, you want to be very certain about their pedigree so I would be more interested in seeing award-winning creative directors, copywriters and so on because for a brand like ours that's what you would want to do; you don't go for it just because it is a big name but you are also interested in who is going to work on your account and how agile, creative and forward-looking they are, their ability to develop strategy. (P3)

There is a timeline to it and we are looking at how quickly and effectively the job can be done for us with little or no mistakes at all; doing a good job with minimal cash. One other thing is the payment plan, some agencies want you to pay upfront, but our payment structure is in such a way that the work has to be done or almost done before we can start processing. So, we will be able to build a very good relationship with an agency that's ready to do the work and come for the money later or in the middle of the project. Prefinancing is key... when they have the capacity to pre-finance then you know that you can trust them to finish the work for you. (P4)

As can be seen, these factors are shared across private and public sector clients as shown below:

First of all, we look at what we want the agency to do for us...is the agency an expert in that section? We can't go in for someone who doesn't know what needs to be done because there are a lot of agencies with different specialties; we also look at how good your plan is. (G3)

Mainly the reliability... sometimes we are not able to meet our payment demands on time so there are some that are okay with doing it for us and later we pay them so we are more comfortable with such companies because they understand you...sometimes the delays it's not because the funds are not there but because you have to go through elaborate procedures and if you are running out of time when the budget has been released you have to start work early. (G2)

Beyond these different perspectives though, success factors were found to be shared across agency and client sides in maintaining the relationship. Five major factors emerged: Credibility, Commitment, Partnership, Proactiveness and Communication. Credibility is the quality of being trustworthy and includes factors such as transparency, honesty, integrity and having the expertise to deliver. An agency that is credible is believable and has the potential to win the heart of the client.

Agency D believes that demonstrating mastery of the job and understanding the client's brand even more than the client play a vital role in establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship:

First of all because you are a consultant, you need to make them believe that you have mastery over what you say you're consulting in. You say that "I can manage your brand or I'm advertising I can create awareness; I can create affinity for your brand" ... that is the basic because that's the foundation on which the relationship is established; that's how you develop trust. One thing we always train people to understand is that, you should know the client's brand more than the client does...mostly through research.

To affirm the role of credibility in building the relationship, P2 clearly stated that he would want to work with an agency he can trust:

I will say we want an agency with integrity, an agency we can trust, an agency which is honest; when they bill you, you wouldn't have to go through the items one by one because you can know that this agency they are dodgy, we want an agency we can trust. Whenever they bill us, we go through the procurement alright, but we don't want an agency where the moment they bill, the first thing that comes to mind is that these guys you can't trust them so go through one by one. (P2)

Client G3 was also of the view that you should be able to trust the agency in terms of meeting the objectives of your campaign.

Closely related and drawing from trust is commitment which includes consistency in delivery, dedication to the partner's cause and reliability. The client loves an agency that is committed to promoting their brand and the agency also loves to work with a client that is ready to co-operate.

The issue of trust comes under professionalism whether you are able to keep the relationship confidential and you don't share our campaigns that we are planning with you for instance with our competitors...that will be very unprofessional. When I say professionalism, a whole lot comes under it including trust and commitment. (P5)

Partnership in this case includes having the interest of the client at heart, working as a team and moving beyond the formalities. The agency likes to be seen as a partner not just a supplier and the clients also want agencies to always give of their best in promoting their brand. For Agency D,

forming a partnership is not just about knowing the client's brand more than the client and offering solutions but also knowing what makes the client happy, befriending the client beyond work and even trying the service or product the client is offering:

You need to try as much as possible to know the client more as in what makes them happy etc because it's a relationship you are building so you need to try to know the person and move from the email, text messages and all the other formalities...that way you are able to meet over waakye and actually discuss the problems. (Agency D)

Agency C believes that any client that does not see the agency as a business partner is doing him/herself a disservice because the agency can provide support in various ways:

Constantly agency should be seen as being this kind of partner for the client so where the agency is not just a communications partner but a business partner, so they are always thinking of the client in such a way that they are always useful providing new ways of doing things by that you are helping the client to stay ahead of the business all the time. A client that does not see the agency as a business partner has started the relationship on the wrong premise because really the agency can do much more than just developing ideas for campaigns and advertising...in the areas of insight generation; finding out new trends in the market; finding out about new competition; new ways of marketing; new platforms for engaging consumers. (C)

Client G2 which is a government organisation believes keeping in touch always with his agency strengthens the bond between them and the agency is able to go the extra mile in their time of need because of the friendship that has been developed. Similarly, Client G4 also believes that the client has a greater advantage when some sort of rapport is established between the two:

We have a very cordial relationship...it's not always emails, sometimes you can just call them, and they will get things done for you and then you can send the email later; it's not strictly just business...just because they are providing a service for us doesn't mean you can't be friendly with them. I mean when there is something to do you have to get things done but it doesn't mean you have to be bossing them around because sometimes they might do favours for you and do stuff for you for free. If you are friendly with them, they go the extra mile to do things for you...for instance most of the time, the creatives that our current agency does for us we don't pay for it so when we have a public announcement or something we just call them and they will design it for us because we have that kind of

relationship with them. If you go all strict with them then you have to be paying everything too so it's important that you have that rapport with them. (G4)

For Client G1 (public) and P3 (private) which are both financial institutions, partnership also means having a business relationship with them as well. The agency staff or key staff is expected to try out bank services/products to experience it for themselves and not just produce the ads. This practice they believe, will help promote the products better because it will be based on the agency's experience using the product/service:

You should have a business relationship with the bank; you should have an account with my bank (name withheld). I cannot give you businesses and then you hold your business account in other banks because I am paying money to you. (G1)

I think it's just a practical thing that if for example, you work on a (name withheld) bank account and you don't have a bank account with (name withheld) bank, I personally have an issue and I am talking about the key people especially. I am happy with working with an ad agency where the key persons especially those who work on my account at least on very regular basis have a taste of services we are offering so they understand, and they can also know what the sentiments are. (P3)

Proactiveness which is a way of showing commitment towards building the client's brand involves going beyond just achieving advertising campaign goals by doing some research as well to generate new ideas on behalf of the client. A proactive agency is forward-looking. Both agency and client-side respondents allude to this as seen below:

The client should see the agency as thinking about their business every time so how do you show the client that you are thinking about their business all the time? You are constantly feeding the client with new information about the changes in the industry; about what competitors are doing; about new ways that they can market their products effectively and trends that are occurring in the lives of consumers that will be useful for the client in either developing new products or new and effective ways of marketing. (Agency C)

We are always expecting new things, sometimes I give them the leeway to come up with new creative ideas. Research is fantastic. Sometimes they bring proposals and you see that as for this one it is genuine, you are for it...others will also sit down for you to say that look for A, B, C; I can't think for you, you are a business man, how do you get the business? So, you will not even get the business for you to sign the contract; naturally, you'll go dead! (G1)

We like an agency that is always reading around coming up with ideas; even if we don't have a particular idea to promote, they come up and tell you that they think a particular idea will promote our brand; yes everyone will want an agency that will lessen your burden so that you wouldn't have to be doing the thinking all by yourself; it's good to have an agency like that. (G4)

Proactivity is one of the things we look out for. They need to be bringing us creative proposals, keep tabs on our competition. I will give a good example from my former company on how one agency really helped. We have our product (which is an alcoholic beverage – name withheld) and their biggest competition is another alcoholic beverage (name withheld); one of the agencies got information the competitor was going to launch a lighter version of their alcoholic beverage so we got that information and it was passed on to my company; after getting that information, we moved fast and launched ahead of them and because of us they didn't launch theirs. (P2)

Although most of the clients encourage proactivity from agencies, client G3 attached a caveat to that expectation:

We however do not really encourage proactivity up to some level i.e. is researching and bringing new ideas when it's not really needed. For us proactivity is about knowing exactly what to do and how to do it not waiting for us to teach you what to do. (G3)

Then we have communication which basically involves exchange of information and regular updates. Communication in this case is a two-way affair even though the agency does about 70% of the communication, the client must communicate when the need arises and on time. Both agency and client must also be accessible and available for easy flow of information. Agency D stressed on the need for consistent communication in maintaining a successful agency-client relationship.

In terms of communication and some other factors, those things are basic if you claim you are a communication agency... because you can't claim to have a relationship with client when there is no effective communication. (Agency D)

Client P3 asserts that success depends on your ability to communicate:

Communication is very important; you should have time for yourself with agency and communicate your thoughts. I have done this for over ten years now and I can tell you success depends a lot on your ability to communicate whether verbally or written, you should be very much on top of your game. (P3)

P2 considers communication a major factor in maintaining a good relationship because they believe some changes need to be made from time to time and these changes need to be communicated as soon as possible. Additionally, the agency should not be the only one communicating all the time; the client must also communicate when the need arises:

Communication; we know we live in a fast-moving world, things change and this is one of the very key things actually. I will make it the number one because we can brief an agency, we want to do ABC but along the line our situation changes and now we wanna do EFG so we have to constantly communicate with them when our situation changes. (P2)

In Client G3's opinion, the other two relationship success factors, trust and commitment, thrive when there's good communication:

So first of all, you have to build these basic things with them (trust and commitment) and communication will help you build these things with them. There is an agency where even if you call at midnight, whatever you want will be delivered with or without financial commitment from us, so you can always fall on them. (G3)

Aside from the factors above, some minor factors such as size of project can influence the relationship either positively or negatively. Agency respondents admitted that even though ideally, as an ad agency, every client should be your priority, there is that tendency to give some sort of preferential treatment to clients with the bigger projects which then threatens the quality of relationships with clients of smaller accounts. Evidence from Agency D can be seen below:

The goose that lays the golden eggs is treated well, right? So definitely a client that is a cash cow may be given preferential treatment...they call you on Saturday to work and you will come and work...but there is no way that we will sign you on and we have contracts binding us and we have to work for you and then we would say, no we won't work for you, you understand. So once we sign a contract with you and we know this is what we're supposed to give, we would do that but all I am saying is that a client that is paying much we have more dedicated people, when I say dedicated I mean people sitting down and waiting for you to call...once you call we are at your beck and call...they tell us to jump and we ask, "how high?"; they tell us to lie and we ask "which way?" so that is also to firm up the relationship. (Agency D)

This was evident in P4's testimony when he complained that he had to terminate the contract with an agency because they totally neglected their project:

Our very first billboard agency, anytime we give him the board to flight; you give him the location and materials to flight, they keep giving excuses because it was a big agency and they have lots of work doing and since ours is small, they keep it away for like a week or two and they have not flighted and they don't let private contractors flight on their billboards so your materials are still there; so if you are supposed to start a campaign for instance for the cup of nations which was supposed to be like two weeks ago and people find out quite late, it's going to affect our sales ... we take that seriously and it can affect the contract...so we are no longer using the agency. (P4)

### **4.3 Relationship Stressors**

The advertising agency-client relationship like any other relationship comes with its own challenges and whilst some are major, others are minor. A number of factors within the industry are considered relationship stressors and this could come from either side, which is the agency or client. For the most part, these factors lie at the reverse side of the relationship success factors. These factors — unreliability, disrespect, mediocrity and poor communication — may not only affect the relationship negatively but can also lead to termination of contracts.

When an agency is unreliable, it simply means the client cannot depend on them to deliver quality service when needed. Clients always want to work with an agency that they can depend on and can provide solutions that always work. Evidence from Agency B, G1 and G3 follows:

Also, when we constantly miss deadlines, that is like a no-go area; don't mess with a client's deadlines because that's what runs their company; it's like you are making them suffer. You keep missing deadlines; I mean, you could miss one deadline, and they are done with you, you keep doing that over and over again and they don't want anything to do with you. (Agency B)

When you don't deliver on time and I am supposed to report to my management... for instance if I have an AGM, AGM is the highest decision-making platform of the bank, you know we are a listed company and our AGM is coming on, let's say Friday, today is

Wednesday, you are supposed to deliver whatever it is to me today and you don't deliver that is stress for me; I cannot sleep...you see where I am coming from? Delivery is very important. Also, if you produce shoddy work, there will be disappointment... at that last minute, what will I do? Will I change the company? (G1)

Currently, one of the agencies we are working with is not good. We contracted them to mount some billboards and we keep receiving calls that some of the billboards are broken .... he didn't even meet the deadlines he stated in the contract, we go for inspection and the billboards are not there or you get there and it's broken. For such an agency even if they bid for a new project, we won't even look at it; we don't even want to see them. Our name was even in one of the local newspapers for having a broken billboard in one of the regions. (G3)

G4 even went a step further to give an example in relation to missing deadlines:

Last two years, we produced some souvenirs with our agency, I don't know what happened but their goods got locked up at the port and they were not able to deliver on time...they were so many months behind time...we were not able to deliver our calendars and diaries on time so last year, we didn't produce with that same agency; contract was somehow terminated because we no longer worked with them.

Disrespect in this case is usually from the client towards the agency because they feel they are the employer and the agency is the employee. Evidence from Agency D and B can be seen below:

I will say that disrespect from the client because some clients see you as a vendor as opposed to a consultant...now the difference between the two is that the consultant first of all is able to diagnose the problem and offer solutions to the problem and also able to measure extent of deviation from plan and make recommendations...but the vendor just produces without being given the opportunity to identify the problem because the client already thinks it's all been figured out already. So, when the client sees the agency as a vendor, the respect is not really there meanwhile you were probably in the same class with the client but he went to the client side after school while you worked with the agency. (Agency D)

Also, some clients are tyrants, no I'm serious, like you meet people who are out to get you, like they just want to, I don't know what word to use but they feel like they own you so they can call you and say anything to you, treat you like trash and if you are not careful you would retaliate and that can end the relationship. They can call you and shout on the phone; sometimes they call you and they are like, are you mad...I asked you to send this blah blah blah ... what's wrong with you, didn't you go to school! I mean sometimes you just have to be calm and let them rant, at the end of the day, just get the work done; but of course, there's a limit, if a client should physically abuse me, I would probably take action...I wouldn't take it lightly. (Agency B)

Mediocrity in service delivery from agency is also an issue because it is not only about delivering on time; an agency should also not compromise on quality and innovativeness. Client P3 gave his definition with some illustrations for better understanding:

When they keep making mistakes, grammatical, spelling errors etc...I correct them and send it back, it comes back and a lot of them are still there, then in the end you go and publish with errors; when that happens we force them to publish another one at their cost but that's not enough because I have a brand to protect and it's embarrassing...if I have an agency that also comes to add to my troubles, it will not be a nice conversation. (P3)

Relationships thrive on good and effective communication. In the case of agency-client relationships, communication is key and should be both ways and it should be clear enough for both parties to understand. One of the factors that negatively impacts the agency-client relationship is poor communication and this was evident in the responses from the interviewees.

Agency B who strongly believes in the power of communication gave an example from his experience working with clients:

We had this client, she was French and lived in Morocco and mainly because of the language barrier, we had a very hard time dealing with her. We will send her mails. Have conference calls and then we might make a decision during that period and after that she comes back, and she was like she didn't really understand what happened and so it was back and forth; I say, she says and that really stressed the relationship. (B)

Aside from these major factors, exorbitant cost was also a negative factor based on P1 and Agency B's report as shown below:

Cost, exorbitant cost. Let's say if there's a production going to take place and you know that maybe a photographer will typically charge a 1500 and your agency is charging you 3000; you will feel like they are trying to take advantage of the relationship so cost that's the most important. (P1)

Yes, we have lost clients mainly because of cost; sometimes we are too expensive they can't afford, we try to negotiate, and we still don't reach a level ground. Also, there's a lot of competition on the market and people know people so we can all go pitch for a project

yet someone else will win (favouritism). We've lost clients from both sectors but mostly from the private sector, for public, it's a bit easy on that side. Most public sector companies have huge budgets so if your work is good enough, they will let you work. (Agency B)

As would be expected, it is often clients that will initiate the effort leading to relationship termination. While agency-side respondents are clear about relationship stressors, it appears they try to cope as articulated by Agency C:

Normally agencies don't fire clients in this part of the world because agencies need the money and relationship and because of how information spreads in this country, you don't want a situation where you create a reputation for yourself as someone who fires clients, so it doesn't happen often, we have fired a client just once. In all my years in advertising, there's been only one instance (private) where a client was fired because they didn't keep to their end of the bargain in terms of the contract but apart from that it has always been the other way around ... clients fire agencies.

#### **4.4 Variations in agency-client relationships depending on client type**

This section discusses some of the differences that exist when dealing with clients from the public sector and clients from the private sector. Findings in this section are from both the agencies and clients but mainly from the agencies. The differences that exist were found in the following areas; understanding the process; approval; payment for service rendered; and the role of politics.

##### **4.4.1 Understanding the advertising process**

The study finds that a key differentiator between private and public sector clients is the extent of understanding they have about the advertising process. Generally, private sector clients appear to be seen by agencies to have a better understanding of the process than public sector clients. Agency B clearly stated that it can be frustrating working with clients from the public sector because of this lack of understanding of the advertising process:

The reason why it's stressful with the public sector is that because they don't understand the processes, you have to keep reporting, writing monthly reports; we have monthly

meetings so there's a whole lot that goes into it because they don't understand. Now on the private side even though they understand, they expect you to write reports and explain to them everything you are doing so to me it's the same. They expect to be part of the process from beginning to end.

#### **4.4.2 Getting approval**

Findings also revealed that bureaucracy is another key difference of public sector and private sector clients. Due to this it takes a longer time to get approval when working for them because it may have to go through other departments up to top management for approval.

With public because approval takes a longer time sometimes something that would take a day or two in the private world will take a longer time with public. You find that the agency is jittery because you want things to be done and it's taking a long time. With the private, the agency is rather under pressure because things are running, there's competition (Agency C).

An interviewee from the public sector client-side corroborates this claim:

We have internal approval and there is a cut-off point so if it exceeds that amount then the Director General will also have to refer it to the board and that will take time but if it's within budget, approval is quite fast (G3).

#### **4.4.3 Payment for services rendered**

Another major difference that was identified was the delay in payment when working with the public sector and this is a challenge that cuts across almost all the sectors in the public sector. The main reason for this is the procedure for making payments in the public sector which is usually based on the public procurement policy. According to Agency C, sometimes the money even loses its value by the time it hits your account:

Public (sector) is different because it has a model, the leadership, the payment structure and all that is completely different from the private sector. With the private sector, you find that you tend to have more freedom and room to operate than public; public sector has entrenched ways of doing things, it's more structured. So, the problem with the public is

that it takes a longer time and when the money is finally paid it is as if there's a loss in value for the money because we are thinking if we had done other stuff within that period we would have been paid quick and the value of the money would have been maintained.

Client G3 confirmed this fact:

Sometimes if you are lucky, payment is fast but sometimes too, it's slow. An agency did some work for us and six months down the line they've still not been paid. Delays are usually caused by procurement processes and account errors; sometimes the agencies present accounts for individuals for payments and as a government agency we do not pay into accounts of individuals and the finance department also takes time in correcting these errors. Sometimes people do not also present the VAT invoice at the initial stage because they are just bidding so going back to change it also causes delays. (G3)

#### **4.4.4 The role of politics**

In Ghana, politics plays a major role in almost every institution under the public sector because every government comes with a new crop of people to work with. This is no different with agencies working for clients from the public sector and as an agency, your contract with the institution is not really secured should there be a change of government. In this case, an agency's contract with the client may not end due to non-performance but rather for political reasons. Client G3 confirmed this:

Initially, we were working with one communications agency that was taking care of all our communication needs and doing it very well but that changed when a new government took over. Now we are working with different agencies. (G3)

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

On the whole, the chapter discussed into details, the findings from the study, focusing on the main themes first of all and breaking it further down into details. The chapter highlighted the factors that contribute to agency-client relationships in Ghana as well as the nature of these

relationships. Discussions also touched on the dominant agency-client relationship models in Ghana and types of contracts as well.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses findings of the study, acquired through the methods described in chapter three, and in relation to the research questions and objectives. It further examines the findings in line with the theoretical framework for the study and literature discussed in chapter two. Finally, the chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and some recommendations for further studies.

#### 5.1 Characteristics of Agency-client Relationships in Ghana

Drawing on the marriage theory, one may conclude that the current era in which the study is being carried out is characterised by polygamous marriages between clients and their agencies as discussed by Wright and Tully (1974). Tena (2014), affirms this by describing the multi-agency model as the first model and the model mostly used by big companies as compared to the single agency and dedicated agency models. Lastly, it has been established through this study that organisations tend to rely on more than one ad agency to take care of their communication needs.

In the literature, Haytko (2004), identified two main relationship combinations i.e. interfirm and interpersonal as follows: partner/ business friends and partner/ personal. Evidence from the findings presented in Chapter Four shows that the most dominant combination is the partner/ business friends. This is because there seems to be some flexibility in how the relationships are managed. The agency-client relationships observed do not take on the master-servant or vendor/strictly business tone. That said, there are still limitations in the form of policies that need

to be observed. It should also be noted that clients tend to apply some level of caution in order not to be influenced by the agency. It is also clear that the relationship boundaries are defined by the client and are not necessarily influenced by the type of sector (public/private).

Although generally, the relationships have moved beyond the employer versus service supplier level, all four agency respondents revealed that an agency's role is to never go against a client's requirement. According to respondents, they would always give their expert suggestions, but the final decision always lies with the client. This can also be identified in the literature where Zolkiewski et al. (2008) makes mention of compliance and compromise as part of agency's responses to disagreements. Drawing on the theoretical framework for this study, it is clear that even though most of the criteria for the open marriage as suggested by Wright and Tully (1974) are reflected in the nature of the relationships identified for the study, traces of the closed marriage can still be found. Focusing on the word "agree", it is clear that both the agency and the client have come to a point where it has been accepted that the final decision is with the one paying for the service and the agency's influence lies in providing professional advice. This can also be linked to Zolkiewski et al. (2008) study on power balance.

The findings suggest that agencies and clients are sometimes free to move beyond the formal settings to the informal which include invitations to birthday parties and lunch. This was, however, determined by the policies that existed within the organisations and the clients' self-imposed boundaries. Triki et al. (2007) established the internal policy of the client as a factor that can influence agency-client relationships as discussed in the literature.

## **5.2 Determinants of agency-client relationship success**

When a client wants to promote a service or a product, they usually outsource to the appropriate agency that can take care of their communication needs and help them achieve their goal. However, a number of factors need to be considered before the final decision is made i.e. selection of the agency. All respondents gave some key points they believe need to be considered before selecting an ad agency. Out of the lot, track record cut across i.e. what the agency has accomplished so far. This clearly shows that at this stage, most clients want to know what the agency has to offer first by looking at what they have done in the past before making their final decision. The people in the agency with the expertise are responsible for producing quality work and this supports earlier studies by Fam & Waller (2008) where findings revealed that at the agency selection stage, the people factor is the most important. A good/proven track record covers several other factors such as expertise, creative ability, innovativeness and experienced staff amongst others. Some clients also look out for an agency that really understands their business so with a client like P4, an agency that has a track record of working with a company that sells similar products has an advantage over other agencies at the selection stage.

For a successful open marriage, Wright & Tully (1974) propose a thorough check on a proposed mate's track record even before making a proposal or accepting a marriage proposal. This suggestion is reflected in the findings. Another major factor clients consider according to study is the cost in terms of affordability and payment structure. Most clients want rates and payment plans that align with their budget and payment structure. An agency that does not have the "financial muscle" is likely to be at a disadvantage at this stage because most clients prefer working with an agency that can do the work now and take the money later. For instance, in the case of P3 and P4,

their payment structure does not allow them to pay until the work is done or almost done. Additionally, clients also consider how much an agency charges for its services because even though they do not like to compromise on quality, they want quality at an affordable price; exorbitant costs can be a turn-off because they feel the agency is just taking advantage. A minor factor considered by some big multinationals such as P1 and P3 is having external affiliation because they believe it is something they can tap into. Generally, at this stage, clients are looking for agencies that can provide the best solutions to their communication needs at a reasonable price.

For the agency, however, their main aim from the onset after they are selected is to earn the trust of the client with excellent results and consistency through various means such as consistent communication, delivery and so on. At this stage, agency is even ready to take risks for the client and even go as far as pre-financing. Agencies will like to assume the partnership role at this stage where they come in as consultants with solutions to promote the client's brand. To do this, they put in extra efforts to make the client comfortable enough to trust them to produce results that will promote their business. On the whole, the main aim of agencies at this stage is to establish a partner/business friends relationship with clients as discussed in the literature by Haytko (2004) which will eventually develop into an open marriage as proposed by Wright and Tully (1974). The factors above set the tone for relationship success or failure in the future as they form the basis for establishing a relationship.

Wright & Tully (1974) identified mutual trust and honesty as part of the criteria for successful/long-lived agency-client relationships. Clients generally look out for agencies that they can trust to solve their communication needs and responses from the study confirmed this fact.

Findings provide evidence that clients want to work with agencies that have integrity, are honest and can be trusted. To buttress this point, Topin (2011), describes trust as “the glue that holds agencies and clients together”. Additionally, findings also revealed that, clients want to work with agencies that are reliable and can be trusted to deliver quality work on time as clients work with timelines.

Fam & Waller (2008) from their study on the agency-client life cycle also allude to the fact that clients value trust, honesty, and commitment in sustaining the relationship. Commitment is one of the elements necessary in sustaining the agency-client relationship. From the findings of this study, it can be inferred that clients want to work with an agency that is dedicated to promoting their business and all the agencies have shown through their responses that they are more than interested in promoting the client’s brand when given the opportunity as strategic partners/consultants. Findings also revealed that the size (financial interest) of the project could determine the level of commitment by an agency. Sometimes the agencies tend to neglect or pay very little attention to projects that do not bring in much revenue as was reported by client P4. Rensburg (2010) proposes mutual commitment as one of the key elements in assessing the overall satisfaction of clients. For a successful open marriage, the agency-client relationship should be considered as a marriage and not a passing affair i.e. both partners should have thoughts of permanency even at the initial stage (Wright & Tully, 1974). Having this mindset ensures a higher level of commitment from both parties.

The need for cooperation where both parties combined their strengths as well as share responsibilities are also highlighted as part of the criteria for successful agency-client relationships

under the open marriage (Wright and Tully, 1974). The findings indicate that both parties (agency and client) believe that forming partnerships is essential in sustaining the relationship and also makes room for some flexibility. This is also an indication that the open marriage agency-client relationship by Wright and Tully (1974) is being practiced. This also agrees with Turnbull and Wheeler (2016)'s advertiser's expectations of ad agencies.

Beverland et al. (2007) assessing the different dimensions of proactivity as reviewed in the literature, emphasised the need for agencies to be proactive to ensure client satisfaction and agency-client relationship longevity. This was reflected in the findings where it was discovered that clients liked to work with agencies that are forward-looking. However, findings revealed that there are different dimensions to proactivity in that, clients that have competitors and have products to market expect a higher level of proactivity from their agencies than those that are not in any form of competition. For instance, for a client like G2, proactivity is not crucial in maintaining relationships because they work based on current health needs that receive funding, so when that is done, the agency is no longer needed until something else comes up. On the other hand, clients such as G1, P2 and P3 that have competitors and products to sell expect a high level of proactivity from their agencies.

Additionally, Wright & Tully (1974) encourage proactivity as one of the requirements in an open marriage where ad agencies do not go to sleep after initiating a campaign but should be engaged in continuous research and testing of new creative possibilities, amongst others. A client like G3 (public sector) however perceives proactivity as knowing exactly what to do when given a task, nothing more and nothing less. The G3 scenario can be likened to the vendor interfirm relationship

as discussed in Haytko (2004). Even though all four agencies believe that an agency needs to be proactive, each expressed it in a different way. Whilst Agencies A, B and C consider proactivity in terms of researching and presenting new ideas as very important for most clients, Agency D considers it unnecessary to some extent for project-based contracts that have ended considering existing workload from other clients but believes it is relevant with clients using the retainer system. Existing literature has established that communication is a key factor and can be considered as the basis for the other factors. As already discussed in the literature, Martin et al. (2007) consider it the main solution to sustaining successful agency-client relationships.

Communication is also one of the six elements proposed by Rensburg (2010) for assessing client's overall satisfaction and according to findings, respondents from both the agency and client side agree that communication is an important relationship success factor. Respondents such as Agency B, Agency D, Client P2 and P3 stressed the need to communicate effectively. Communication involves regular updates on campaign progress, exchange of information between the two sides and accessibility. According to Wright & Tully (1974), there needs to be open and frank communication to achieve a successful open marriage.

The findings further indicate that a break in communication from time to time may be overlooked, but when it persists, it could result in the termination of the contract. Based on the marriage analogy by Wright & Tully, (1974), characteristics of an open marriage include honest and open relationships as well as mutual trust. In view of these, when there is a long break in communication, it puts a strain on the relationship in these areas because the client/agency is left hanging. It is not surprising then to have a contract terminated due to long unjustified breaks in communication.

Aside from the above factors, pre-financing seems to be one of the success factors the literature has been quite silent about. Agency respondents gave the impression that they are ready to pre-finance advertising campaigns with clients they wish to establish lasting relationships with and with clients they can trust. Findings suggest that when an agency realises that they could establish fruitful agency-client relationships with clients, they are ready to pre-finance even when clients cannot pay immediately. With the old clients however, agencies do not have a problem pre-financing. On the other hand, some clients also consider pre-financing an important factor or even a requirement. For instance, P3 considers pre-financing a prerequisite because they usually pay for services after delivery. Agency C also gave an example where they had to pre-finance an advertising campaign to help a new client that was in financial crisis but had the capacity to pay later.

The findings imply that when clients are happy or satisfied with their agencies' performance, it results in agency-client relationship success as established in the literature. Findings also revealed that even though clients expect the best from their agencies all the time, a few errors here and there are accommodated so far as agencies waste no time in resolving these issues when they are reported. Wright & Tully (1974), asserts that to achieve successful open marriages, both partners must understand as well as accept the strengths and limitations of their equal halves.

### **5.3 Determinants of agency-client relationship failure**

Generally, the factors that put a strain on agency-client relationships are the reverse of the factors that contribute towards relationship success. When a client hires an ad agency to take care of their communication needs, they expect them to lessen their burden by doing what is expected of them without delay. Unreliability on the part of agency is a key determinant of relationship failure.

Turnbull & Wheeler (2016) stressed on the client's expectations of their agencies for the present and the future. Their findings imply that clients look out for agencies they can rely on to take care of their communication needs for the present and the future based on the themes discussed in the literature. Reliability is also found within integrity, one of the core elements proposed by Rensburg (2010). Unreliability which includes missing deadlines consistently and poor quality service delivery was identified by both agencies and clients as a key determinant of relationship failure. An agency that is consistently unreliable cannot help the client in promoting the brand and this will eventually lead to the termination of the contract.

Disrespect towards the agency can also put a strain on the relationship and this factor run through responses from all agencies. Responses from agencies implied that disrespect from clients could not be tolerated because agencies want to be seen and treated as consultants with the expertise, not merely as vendors. Disrespect is a characteristic of the closed marriage (Wright & Tully, 1974), where one party is in control and does not consider the opinions of the other party as relevant.

Poor communication has been identified in the literature by Martin et al. (2007) as the critical factor leading to the failure of agency-client relationships. Both agencies and clients allude to the fact that communication is essential and has the potential to strain relationships when done wrong or when it is lacking.

With emphasis on proactivity by Rensburg (2010) and Beverly et al. (2007) as a key factor for sustaining agency-client relationships, findings revealed mediocrity as a factor that could lead to relationship failure. Based on findings, both agencies and clients agree that it is a competitive

world out there and each organisation must be seen to be on top of their game. As a result of these developments, mediocrity is considered a hindrance to progress and a dent in the client's brand.

Aside from the above factors, findings also revealed that exorbitant costs on the part of agency is also perceived as a factor that could lead to the collapse of the agency-client relationship and some agencies confessed to losing clients because of their high rates. Ammani (2012) identified that change of management was the main reason why clients switched agencies in India. One interesting finding within the periphery of the main goal of the study identified change of management as a factor that can lead to the collapse of relationships. One of the clients made mention of the fact that they terminated the contract with their former agency because there was a change in top management and because of the partnership that had already been formed, the account was moved to the new agency established by the top management official that had been dismissed. This was not one of the main findings and was said in passing by the client. It is however worth noting and emphasizes the role of the people factor and interpersonal relationships discussed in the literature.

All the relationship success/failure factors identified in the findings confirmed the importance of the people factor in establishing relationships as discussed in the literature. The factors are linked to the efforts the people involved are ready to put in to make the relationship successful.

#### **5.4 Variations in agency-client relationships based on the client type**

The study also sought to examine whether any differences exist in agency-client relationships depending on whether the client is a private or public sector organisation. A number of differences

were identified. First, the relationship can vary in terms of remuneration systems. Findings revealed that with the public sector, payment for services rendered took a longer time as compared to the private sector. The Public Procurement Act (Act 663) of Ghana provides guidelines for procedures that all public sector organisations must go through before acquiring goods and services above a certain amount (Frempong et al., 2013). This study finds that adherence to the Act makes the remuneration process slower than with private sector clients and Frempong et al. (2013) allude to this as one of the difficulties identified in applying and implementing the Act.

Secondly, the findings suggest that public sector clients' understanding of the advertising process is quite limited compared to the private sector. This makes working with them more difficult for ad agencies. Although respondents from the agency attest that it can be frustrating working with these clients sometimes, they are quite accommodating because all clients are not the same. Wright & Tully (1974) consider understanding between both parties as important in open marriages and the lack of it can reduce the quality of the marriage as is being inferred in this case.

Thirdly, the bureaucratic system in the public sector makes approval processes cumbersome and slow. Whilst with the private sector there is always pressure to deliver on time, there is a lot of free time working with the public sector slowing down the process as well. Kotler & Armstrong (2012, p. 434) points out that "because their spending decisions are subject to public review, government organisations require considerable paperwork from suppliers, who often complain about excessive paperwork, bureaucracy, regulations, decision-making delays, and frequent shifts in procurement personnel".

Finally, in Ghana, politics permeates every area of the public sector, including procurement of advertising services. One can have their contract with a public sector agency terminated once there is a change of government and the quality of service being offered prior to the termination of a contract is very insignificant in this case. Thus, it can be concluded that ad agencies are most of the time selected based on “whom you know” not just what you have to offer. This implies that poor service providers could still win a contract with a government agency just because they have links, as was the case of G3. This is not only a problem for the ad agency involved but also a challenge for the people on the client side because they need to keep changing agencies against their will. Kotler et al. (2005, p. 322) establish that with the government institutions, “the level of bureaucracy and political sensitivities are high, and marketers must cut through this red tape”.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This research set out to explore the factors that shape advertising agency-client relationships in Ghana focusing on two client types — public sector and private sector clients. Specifically, it sought to document 1) the nature of advertising agency-client relationships in Ghana 2) factors that contribute to the success or failure of agency-client relationships in Ghana 3) variations in agency-client relationships depending on the type of client (private sector or public sector). The study has established that the working relationship between agencies and clients in Ghana is more of a partnership within the partner/business friends context proposed by Haytko (2004) and the open marriage by Wright and Tully (1974). Although agencies often acquiesce to the power of the client, it is done in an environment where the agency is deemed a knowledgeable partner supporting the interest of clients. The relationship tone is often formal but with a lot of flexibility that accommodates informal arrangements too.

For the relationship's success, five key factors were identified: trust, commitment, partnership, proactiveness and communication. Other factors such as transparency, expertise, consistency and reliability were encompassed in these major factors. Both parties, that is, agencies and clients agreed that these factors were important for sustaining the relationship and it was mostly from the agency towards the client. For the relationship stressors that can lead to failed agency-client relationships, four factors were discovered. These are unreliability, disrespect, mediocrity and poor communication. These were mainly the reverse of the relationship success factors.

Variations in agency-client relationships depending on the type of client were found in four main areas. First the relationship differs based on the extent of understanding public versus private sector clients have of the advertising process. The relationship can also differ in terms of remuneration and approval processes as well as the extent of political influence exerted on it.

On the whole however, findings from the study revealed that aside from the four main areas identified which differentiated the public sector clients from the private sector clients, most of the other factors cut across and differences sometimes existed based on other factors such as internal policies and nature of client amongst others. Additionally, the relationships that are established are quite accommodating of each other's differences and minor failures.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

The study revealed that the agency-client relationships that have been established are more of partnerships and can be likened to the open marriage, but snippets of the closed marriage still exist. The findings indicate that agencies try as much as possible to give their clients maximum respect

obeying their every wish. Respect, however, is not always reciprocal as clients tend to disrespect their agencies sometimes even to the extent of verbal abuse and disrespect from the client does not sit well with the agency. In view of this, mutual respect should be a key factor for improved agency-client relationships and this is possible when both sides learn to respect each other's views as well as accommodate each other's differences.

The study also revealed that trust, transparency, communication and commitment from both sides are essential elements in establishing healthy agency-client relationships. Clients and agencies need to focus on these key elements in order to improve their relationships. To achieve this, both parties will need to be open, be ready to share information when needed and be patient with each other taking into consideration the fact that agency/client relationships take time to build into successful marriages as affirmed by Topin (2011).

Based on findings, it is clear that government institutions need to fully understand how agencies function as well as the advertising process. If possible, government institutions need to cut down on their bureaucratic processes to ensure the smooth running of advertising campaigns.

### **5.7 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

This study focused mainly on the factors that shape advertising relationship success in Ghana taking into consideration the views of some agencies and clients from both the public sector and the private sector. The major limitation to this study was accessing the clients of specific agencies. Although the study began as a dyadic study where agencies and their clients would be interviewed, the researcher had to abort that plan in order to collect enough data. Agencies were not ready to

link researcher to their clients because they considered it inappropriate and a bother. The researcher tried to contact the clients on her own but that did not yield any positive result. In the end, the researcher had to rely on her contacts to interview other clients that fell within the criteria for the study but were not working with the agencies interviewed.

Considering the large number of advertising agencies in Ghana, further research based on findings for this study can be conducted using mixed methods with a bigger sample to be able to generalise. Additionally, one of the issues that emerged during the study was the possibility that there could be variations depending on the type of industry the client was coming from. In view of this, it will be interesting to carry out a study focusing mainly on the differences that exist when working with clients from different industries.

Regarding the difficulty in accessing agency and client dyads, future researchers may need to give enough time to collect preliminary data on agencies behind specific campaigns to be able to match them to the brand owners.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDES**

### **Exploring factors that shape advertising agency-client relationship success in Ghana**

#### **Interview Guide (Agency)**

This research is being conducted as a requirement for the award of Master of Arts in Communications from the University of Ghana. The main aim of this study is to identify the factors (from both sides i.e. the advertising agency and the advertiser) that shape advertising agency-client relationships in Ghana including the differences that exist. The interview will last for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. A set of questions have been provided below to guide the process. Thank you.

1. What does your clientele generally look like as an advertising agency?
2. What goes into building relationships with clients at the initial stage?
3. What factors do you consider to be key in building a successful relationship with your client?
4. Can you please give an example of a campaign you worked on recently and how the relationship was managed successfully?
5. What factors can serve as relationship stressors even to the point of account loss? a. Can you please share an experience in relation to that?
6. As an agency, what has been your experience working with clients from both the public sector and the private sector?

a. How do your relationships vary based on which client type you are dealing with (public or private)?

7. How can you tell if a client is happy or satisfied with your services?

8. In what way does the size of the project shape your relationship management strategies and efforts?

9. Under what circumstances would you sever relations with a client?

10. What would cause you to go against a client's wish?

11. What are your expectations of the client in building a successful relationship?

## **Exploring factors that shape advertising agency-client relationship success in Ghana**

### **Interview Guide (Clients)**

This research is being conducted as a requirement for the award of Master of Arts in Communications from the University of Ghana. The main aim of this study is to identify the factors (from both sides i.e. the advertising agency and the advertiser) that shape advertising agency-client relationships in Ghana including the differences that exist. The interview will last for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. A set of questions have been provided below to guide the process.

Thank you.

1. What factors do you consider before hiring an ad agency?
2. What factors do you consider before renewing a contract with an advertising agency?
3. What factors do you consider to be key in building successful relationships with your advertising agency?
4. How long have you been working with your current agency/agencies and why?
5. What are your expectations of the agency?
6. Kindly describe the nature of the relationship with your current agency
7. In your opinion, what should a perfect working relationship with an agency look like?
8. In what ways do you evaluate the performance of your agency?
9. What factors can serve as relationship stressors even to the point of terminating the contract?  
Can you please give an example of such a situation?

10. Could you please give an example of a recent campaign where the relationship was managed successfully?

a. What worked (did not work), from a relationship standpoint?

11. What are your expectations of the agency in building a successful relationship?

12. How do you feel when your agency goes against your wish?