

Perception of Public Relations Practice Among Selected Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) In Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The study's goal was to find out what some of Ghana's top executives thought about public relations. The goals were to determine the Chief Executive Officers' (CEOs') understanding of public relations, as well as their perceptions of public relations' role in strategic management and the restrictions of public relations' role in corporate strategy. Through an in-depth interview with five (5) CEOs of chosen agencies within Ghana's Ministry of Transport, the study gathered data using a qualitative research technique. This data was then evaluated using theme analysis, which demonstrated that the public impression of public relations practice in Ghana is positive, implying that the technique is effective. Public relations were deemed to be an important role in strategic management, particularly if it was part of top management. It also limited its contribution to business strategy owing to a variety of problems experienced in the chosen firms, including financial limits, a lack of deep understanding of CEOs in public relations, and others. According to the conclusions of the research, Ghanaian CEOs and business leaders should identify and promote public relations practice. The Institute of Public Relations Ghana should speed up its attempts to enact a statute making public relations a regulated profession.

KEYWORDS

Public Relations; Chief Executive Officer; Strategic Management; and Corporate Strategy

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk mengetahui apa yang dipikirkan oleh beberapa eksekutif top Ghana tentang Hubungan Masyarakat. Tujuannya adalah untuk menentukan pemahaman kepala eksekutif kepala eksekutif '(CEO)', serta persepsi mereka tentang peran hubungan masyarakat dalam manajemen strategis dan pembatasan peran hubungan masyarakat dalam strategi perusahaan. Melalui wawancara mendalam dengan lima (5) CEO lembaga terpilih di dalam Kementerian Transportasi Ghana, penelitian menggunakan teknik penelitian kualitatif. Data ini kemudian dievaluasi dengan menggunakan analisis tema, yang menunjukkan bahwa kesan publik praktik hubungan masyarakat di Ghana positif, menyiratkan bahwa teknik ini efektif. Public Relations dianggap sebagai peran penting dalam manajemen strategis, terutama jika itu adalah bagian dari manajemen puncak. Ini juga membatasi kontribusinya terhadap strategi bisnis karena berbagai masalah yang dialami di perusahaan yang dipilih, termasuk batasan keuangan, kurangnya pemahaman yang mendalam tentang CEO dalam hubungan masyarakat, dan lainnya. Menurut kesimpulan penelitian, CEO Ghana dan pemimpin bisnis harus mengidentifikasi dan mempromosikan praktik hubungan masyarakat. Institut Humas Ghana harus mempercepat upayanya untuk memberlakukan undang-undang yang membuat hubungan masyarakat menjadi profesi yang diatur.

KATA KUNCI

Hubungan Masyarakat; Pejabat tertinggi Eksklusif; Manajemen strategis; dan strategi perusahaan

INTRODUCTION

CEOs must distinguish between public relations (PR), the message deliverable, and PR, the multifaceted, mission-critical brand stewardship aspect, whose stewards deserve a place at the table and acknowledgement for their roles as advisers (Gehrt, 2011). As the CEO of a company, big or small, you're unavoidably worried about several difficulties, from customer loyalty to sales growth patterns and resource coordination to recruiting, creativity, defining direction, and external changes, to mention a few (Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig, 2013). During all of this, according to Heath (2013), it's easy to lose sight of PR and its strategic significance in supporting the organization in reaching its business objectives. In many businesses, the CEO is critical to the success of a company's public relations operations (Gehrt, 2011). Some argue, however, that CEOs' errors are due to a lack of understanding of PR's basic role. Regardless, Ngonyo (2018) says that knowing why Sterne (2008) believes that the CEO's comprehension of PR practice is critical to the company's and the practice's overall growth is vital to properly analyzing the investigation. In addition to allocating resources and money for PR, the CEO should identify the overall effectiveness of the organization's PR efforts (Issah, 2017). He or she considers top-level performance measures, such as how PR influences sales. Clearly, Dozier et al. (2013) point out that it is tough to establish that public relations plays a direct part in motivating people to purchase specific firms, but there should be some clear data indicating the good impact PR has on his or her company and brand (Gehrt, 2011). CEOs are also enticed to promote results from public relations campaigns (Kyeremeh, 2018) to raise awareness about their company's operations. A prominent editorial placement, for example, may be highlighted by the CEO at a business meeting to excite employee interest in a certain endeavor.

According to Abdullah (2011), managers' unfavorable impressions of PR may be attributable to a lack of properly acknowledged PR professionals inside the business. According to Tandoh (2020), the management position and the notion of professionalism are closely intertwined. Despite both management and practitioners considering PR as a management component in their businesses, Wu and Baah-Boakye (2014) discovered that PR practitioners' places in the organizational hierarchy are quite low. This is because, according to Chin et al. (2017), most practitioners are active in technical jobs rather than those with management responsibilities. CEOs are crucial in PR since the business spokesman in certain firms is the highest-ranking corporate executive (Ofori, S-Darko and Nyuur, 2014). Journalists look to this individual for insight and comments because he or she represents the organization (Chentiba, Faisal, and Mumuni, 2017). Obviously, the CEO is not obligated to act as the corporation's spokesperson. He or she may appoint someone to handle this, but most journalists reporting on corporate stories hope to be able to speak with the CEO for comment.

The importance of this study may be seen in how it contributes to both the PR and communication literature as well as the research resources on the issue from African

countries. Again, the phenomena under investigation aids in understanding why various firms approach PR in different ways. This research once again suggests strategies for businesses to rethink or enhance their perceptions of public relations, as well as how to use the practice's value to their benefit. Furthermore, PR practitioners will get insight into how diverse CEOs' perceptions of PR practice may help or hinder their efforts, allowing negative impacts to be reduced while favorable ones are promoted. This research is important because it informs the Institute of Public Relations Ghana's (IPR) strategic plan, which includes the vision "to promote a forward-looking PR body for enhanced stakeholder value" as part of its mission to "consolidate and establish IPR as a distinctive, respectable, and proactive professional body, giving direction to PR practitioners and students in Ghana."

This research, like White and Park's (2010) work on perception, is unusual among PR studies in that it relies on public perception rather than PR practitioners' opinions. The bulk of contemporary PR perception studies concentrate on PR practitioners (Heyman, 2005; Sele, 2006); senior management executives (Sterne, 2008); students, graduates, and academics (Paskin, 2010); and recruiting managers (Heyman, 2005; Sele, 2006). (Heyman, 2005; Sele, 2006). 2017 (Chin, Kho, Tey, Wong, and Yew). Because supervisors of PR specialists, both in-house and as consultants, and opinion shapers tend to be members of an organization's main coalitions, senior executives are essential decision makers. With so many responsibilities, it's simple for the CEO to assign PR to employees. The CEO's involvement in public relations, on the other hand, is always vital to success. The goal of this research is to find out how CEOs feel about the practice of public relations in Ghana.

In the face of contradictory ideas or actions, the theory attempts to explain how humans avoid psychological distress and establish emotional balance (Anderton, Pender, and Asner-Self, 2011). It is based on the idea that individuals want to be reasonable and consistent in their thinking and actions. Therefore, they intentionally select how they react to facts or behaviors that contradict their beliefs. It's been used to figure out why individuals fall for scam artists, make unsafe financial choices, and rationalize harmful behaviors. Though initially contentious, Cognitive Dissonance Theory is currently one of the most studied and accepted ideas in both psychology and communication, according to Kim (2011). According to Metin and Camgoz (2011), the theory has two main assumptions. According to McGrath (2017), people who suffer psychological discomfort because of cognitive conflict may try to alleviate the pain by achieving consonance, or inner harmony. Humans may achieve this in three ways, according to Festinger: by reducing the relevance of the discordant concept; outweighing the dissonant notion with harmonious thoughts; or assimilation of the dissonant thought into one's present belief system (Telci, Maden, and Kantur, 2011). Consider a college student who drives while inebriated on a regular basis.

According to the notion, when a person's actions contradict his or her views and beliefs, an underlying psychological tension is created (Wicklund and Brehm, 2013). Because of the underlying conflict, a person's attitude must be adjusted to establish consistency in their ideas and actions. According to Thompson, Schaefer, and Menzel (2012), when a person participates in actions that contradict his or her attitude or belief, a change in attitude happens that is consistent with his or her behavior. This process of thinking or attitude alteration is the same one that contributes to depression and other mental diseases by causing changes in negative, illogical beliefs.

The term "public relations" was coined in the early twentieth century to describe the formal practice of what is now known as "public relations" (Public Relations Society of America [PRSA], 2021). Since then, public relations have been defined in several ways, with the definition often moving in line with changing responsibilities and technical improvements in the field. Early definitions emphasized publicity and press agency, while more contemporary definitions incorporate terms like "engagement" and "relationship development" (Seitel, 2017). The following definition was endorsed by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in 1982: "Public relations helps an organization and its constituents adapt to one another." Several decades later, a more current definition of public relations was created, and it is still in use today: Public relations is a strategic communication technique that helps corporations and their audiences form mutually beneficial partnerships (PRSA, 2021).

Advising management at all levels of the organization on policy choices, courses of action, and communications—including crisis communications—while bearing in mind the public consequences and the firm's social and civic duties is also part of the job description (Botan and Hazleton, 2010). Continuously studying, conducting, and assessing action and communication programs to achieve the educated public awareness needed to achieve an organization's objectives. These efforts include marketing, financial, fundraising, employee, community, or government relations, and others (Stacks, 2016). Planning and executing the organization's attempts to influence or alter public policy, as well as defining goals, planning, budgeting, recruiting and training workers, and developing facilities, are just a few of the other tasks.

The process of choosing, organizing, and interpreting information is known as perception (Standifer, Evans, and Dong, 2010). Selected inputs pass through our perceptual filters, are organized into our existing structures and patterns, and then interpreted based on prior experiences. Perception is largely a cognitive and psychological activity, but it has an influence on how we interact with the people and things in our environment. Hanadi and Aruna (2013) claim that when we see something or someone we like, we respond differently than when we see something or someone we don't like. Selection, organization, and interpretation are the three steps of the perception process. Humans turn ambient inputs into meaningful experiences at the selection stage of perception. According to Era, Belás, and Strnad (2019), we are constantly bombarded with such a

diverse range of information in our everyday lives that we may encounter these stimuli in the blink of an eye: the words we are hearing, a witness to an accident, and the ticking of a clock, to name a few. Because our world contains everything, our sensory organs are bombarded with a profusion of signals waiting to be processed (Needle and Burns, 2010). Culture provides us with a perceptual lens that profoundly influences how we interpret and assess what we receive from the outside world, resulting in such interpretation variations (Schroll-Machl, 2016).

Requests for stakeholder communication and media reporting usually target an entire organization, such as a single firm or brand (Zerfass and Viertmann, 2017). To enact their contexts, organizations must comprehend markets and stakeholder circumstances, as well as develop visions and business models. Therefore, the boardroom oversees communication as well as all other strategic and operational decisions. According to Garca (2015), CEOs should be in control of both the overall public relations strategy and the delivery of a consistent message to stakeholders. CEOs meet with important stakeholders and make choices regarding communication basics, objectives, and vital structures and resources. Because of their competence in business administration, many senior executives conceive of corporate communication in the conventional sense of information transfer (Zerfaß, 2009). Companies use media to communicate objective information to key stakeholders; this stimulation results in the transmission of meaning and is intended to elicit desired responses such as knowledge, attitude change, and behavior. On the other hand, Zerfass and Sherzada (2015) argue that there are opposing viewpoints that emphasize reality construction, meaning that communication is a two-sided process, an interaction in which perceptions and orientations are shaped subjectively but meaning and reality are socially constructed.

The purpose of public relations is to help a corporation achieve its commercial goals (Austin and Pinkleton, 2015). By getting a thorough understanding of an organization's business goals, public relations operations may set quantitative communication program objectives. If public relations managers do not understand the company's goals, they will be unable to achieve the company's effectiveness (Grunig, 2020). Because public relations professionals do not participate in establishing business goals, it is difficult to attach public relations to corporate strategy (Veri and Grunig, 2000). Another barrier to assessing public relations and, therefore, relating it to a company's business strategy is the intangibility of its benefits. As a result, it should be considered a measurement myth (Delahaye, 2003), with additional causes including a lack of expertise in conducting advanced public relations research (Sriramesh, 2004) and a lack of a public relations budget, among others.

Finally, to put together a successful business strategy, it is necessary to relate public relations results to the organization's overall goals, objectives, and outcomes. To support this assertion, Coombs and Holladay (2019) state that it is vital to relate public relations outcomes to specific business and organizational objectives such as improved market

penetration, market share, sales, and profitability. This is because public relations contribute to organizational success when it allows the organization's goals and key constituents' expectations to be reconciled (Grunig, 2011).

Even though White and Park's (2010) work on perception relied on public perception rather than PR practitioners' perspectives, according to Paskin (2013), most current PR perception studies are focused on PR practitioners, senior management executives (Sterne, 2008), students, graduates, and academics, and recruitment managers (Chin, Kho, Tey, Wong, and Yew, 2017). Because supervisors of PR specialists, both in-house and as consultants, and opinion shapers tend to be members of an organization's main coalitions, senior executives are essential decision makers. For example, in Murphy (2003)'s *Perceptions of PR Report*, it was noted that the function of public relations had shifted from being a tool for influencing media coverage to being a strategic approach to engaging many stakeholders. Murphy (2003) also discovered that the development of communication channels has resulted in a need for more corporate openness. The study's results support the study's purpose of providing a foundation for directing initiatives to enhance PR's competitiveness and overall performance.

Murray and White's (2005) study of CEOs' perspectives on reputation management took a similar approach, finding that public relations had become mission critical for business, that CEOs took personal responsibility for corporate reputation management, and that high-caliber PR professionals were highly valued by CEOs. These results are worth investigating in the context of New Zealand. Since corporations are large systems made up of several departments, which are referred to as subsystems (Hiscock, 2019). Each department, such as marketing and finance, has a specific duty to perform in ensuring that the organization's operations function efficiently (Mehta and Xavier, 2009). However, since many firms prefer to blend PR with other departments, the role of PR has been overlooked. According to DeSanto and Moss (2011), this might be attributable to organizational misunderstandings about the responsibilities of PR efforts in organizational endeavors. This suggests that these executives are underestimating the value of public relations in the workplace. Because of PR's narrow area of operation, Chin et al. (2017) argue that it is often supplanted or encroached upon by other departments. Again, Abdullah and Antony (2012) point out that negative perceptions of managers towards the practice of PR could be attributed to the lack of formally recognized professionalism in PR within the organization. This is so because Wu and Taylor (2003) indicate that the managerial role and the concept of professionalism are closely related to each other. This is further elaborated by Wu and Baah-Boakye's (2014) findings that PR practitioners' positions on the organizational chart are very low, although both management and practitioners viewed PR as a management function in their organizations. This is so because Chin et al. (2017) indicate that most of the practitioners are involved in the technician roles instead of the managerial roles.

METHOD

The descriptive approach was used to evaluate public relations from the perspective of the CEO of selected public sector agencies. Researchers that use qualitative methods try to explain phenomena in terms of the meanings that humans assign to them, which, according to Abbaszadeh (2012), proves positivism's essential assumptions by demonstrating that empirical data may be acquired that is not influenced by interpretation. The study population was comprised of CEOs of public sector agencies. The non-probability sampling approach was used in this study, where the respondents will be intentionally sampled. To come up with the sample for the study, the purposive sampling approach was also adopted. The study therefore proceeded to collect data from four (4) CEOs of agencies under the Ministry of Transport of Ghana and the Chief Director of the ministry as well. These include the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA), Metro Mass Transit Limited, Ghana Maritime Authority, and Intercity STC Limited. Interviews were conducted to acquire primary data from study respondents, allowing follow-up questions to be asked in response to the responses provided. The gathered data was analyzed using the thematic analysis technique, in which the researcher used study transcripts of qualitative data to discover common themes, subjects, ideas, and situational tendencies that appear regularly.

Bickman and Rog (2008), who believe that ethical considerations might arise in the research process. The researcher informed the respondents of the study's goals and got their consent before presenting the data using pseudonyms. Again, precautionary steps recommended by the Health Services considering the COVID-19 pandemic were upheld, for which reason innovative means of collecting data such as video calls or conferences were adopted. Also, all secondary materials used in this study were duly acknowledged and cited as well.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the researcher's keen interest in enforcing respondents' anonymity, for the analysis, the respondents are represented by pseudonyms: Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, Respondent 4, and Respondent 5. Using the thematic analysis technique, the data obtained was analyzed where the researcher reviewed the transcripts of the in-depth data to identify common themes, subjects, ideas, and contextual trends that repeatedly emerge. The themes emerged for this exploration are seen below in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Themes

THEMES	CODES
1. CEOs Knowledge of PR practice	Knowledge of PR Significance of PR Placement of PR

2. Contribution to strategic management	PR in top management PR and strategic management PR effect on strategic management
3. PR constraints to corporate strategy	PR and corporate strategy PR constraints PR effect on corporate strategy

Source: Researcher's field data 2021

Demographic Data

It was interesting to find that, of all the respondents sampled, there was no female CEO. What these findings highlight is the gender disparity gap in Ghana's corporate leadership. Again, it was found that in terms of educational qualifications, all the respondents were highly placed as the minimum qualification was a master's degree. This suggests that CEOs are continuously shifting towards personal development. Regarding work experience, it was revealed that the respondents had either risen through the ranks of an organization or explored several industries over a minimum of 15 years. This, therefore, has made them well exposed to the market or industry so that they come to the position with a lot of experience. Furthermore, the quality of the respondent's academic qualifications and work experience in the positions they held could not be said to be outweighed.

Knowledge of Public Relations

Considering the understanding of public relations, R1 was of the view that "PR is the mouthpiece of every organization that disseminates information that keeps the organization in a positive light." This view was also supported by R4's explanation describing public relations as "the department concerned with how the organization deals with stakeholders and information management." Though varying in their understanding of public relations, a recurring view pointed to the view that public relations involves communicating on behalf of an organization with and among stakeholders in hopes of maintaining a favorable image for the organization.

Significance of Public Relations

This query, with an overview given on what public relations is about, gathered the respondents' views on the significance of public relations to an organization. While R2 elaborates on the significance, "PR is significant because it has its tentacles in almost all departments." For instance, managing internal and external stakeholders, which has something to do with the HR outfit, among other things, This extends to covering addressing and working on feedback as well as crises." R3 was concise in noting that the significance was centered on the fact that "... it helps in the achievement of strategic goals of an organization." R1 as well noted that: "... the initial task is to sell or market the organization to the public properly, and this makes it important to every organization. This is because he/she is supposed to be well vested in the operations of the organization to move ahead with policies.

Placement of Public Relations

On the placement of public relations affecting its practice, the respondents were quite divided in their view. As R2, for instance, sided with this school of thought, "... most organizations have it placed at the management level, making it possible to make effective decisions that affect the image and reputation of an organization." However, R1 however, shared a divergent opinion that "... it does not matter because once the management understands the role of the PR, there will not be any clashes. While maintaining functional relationships with other departmental heads, the PR basically must report to the head of the organization. That gives him/her more power because there is no red-tape and bureaucracy." R5 as well was torn in between as the view was "Yes and no, depending on the organization". While the popular sentiment was that public relations should be placed favorably in the organization, a caveat given was that the placement of public relations within the organization is influenced by factors such as organizational size, type, and even industry.

Public Relations and Top Management

When asked if the respondents shared the view that public relations should be in top management, all the respondents subscribed to the view. R1 elaborated by indicating that "I share this view because, other than that, how will the PR know what is going on? While organizational structure differs according to organizational objectives and industry, PR should be differentiated from the protocol because the role of PR goes far beyond that. In the end, it boils down to the understanding of PR by the organizational heads." R2 as well noted that: "... yes, it has to because the only way communication can leave the organization is through PR. Due to the sophistication of the communication space, it has to be done by a professional. This is because the organizational public is different, requiring that the communication should also be different." While R3 was brief in their word of support, "Yes, it should" as R5 did, However, there is a superseding view that says "it can be placed under another department, but it should be given an explicit role".

Expectations of Public Relations in Management

While the view has been shared and supported that public relations should be in top management, there were some expectations made of the public relations practitioner in the position. As a prerequisite, R1 indicated that: "... every PR should be skilled in the art of communication, emotional intelligence, good counseling and public speaking skills, as well as good persuasive skills." At the root of all this is academic qualification." This view was also buttressed by R5, who noted that the practitioner had to have: "... a good understanding of issues discussed and to be communicated, attention to detail, a good listener, and must have a balanced view on issues." Even though succinct, R3 expected that practitioner to be "... circumspect in speaking, maturity and expertise".

Public Relations effect on Strategic Management

In relation to strategic management, the respondents indicated that public relations could have an effect as well. R2 justified this assertion by indicating that: "... because

strategic management is about information, getting the right one out is significant. This therefore means that the PR must be privy to and part of the strategic management because they are at the helm of pushing the organizational objectives to the public." R1 as well described the effect as: "...because strategic management involves developing the management of the organization and how well is positioned so that it is able to reach future objectives. This means that, because information is relevant to this task, the PR cannot be neglected." This view was also emphasized by R3 by explaining that: "Yes, in any strategic decision/action of the company, PR plays a vital role in terms of communication." Once the PR understands the purpose of a policy, it is his/her responsibility to communicate accordingly. What these assertions echo is that, outside of the perception held about public relations, the premium placed on the practice in relation to strategic management is high. Another side of this argument points out that, based on the expectations of the CEOs, it is possible to suggest that they do not view public relations as a communication technician role much more.

Constraints of Public Relations

As public relations continually develop within the corporate environment, there still are constraints which persists. When asked about such constraints which hamper public relations practice, R5 asserted that the practitioners "... are most often than not relegated to the background until there is an issue with the media that needs solving." Also, R3 points out the hiccups having to do with "... logistics, lack of continuous training, and lack of recognition of their role." R2 also posited that: "... there is this organizational block where most organizations do not see PR as an effective tool, especially in the public services. There has to be a reorientation because there is this notion that PR is all about journalism, even though PR has evolved to be more sophisticated." R1 as well espoused the view that: "... PR is seen by some individuals as an informant because of a lack of trust and understanding. This therefore results in preventing the PR from attending management meetings and constantly leaving him/her in the dark. Also, due to organizational culture, some organizations do not see PR as a part of management, which is why PR is sometimes deprived of the pertinent needs for it to operate effectively. Judging from the specificity with which the respondents were able to pinpoint the constraints, these are common challenges the practice faces. This therefore means that in the organizations where the respondents find themselves, they would have found these roadblocks and worked towards mitigating their effect on public relations practice.

Importance of Corporate Strategy

At this stage, corporate strategy was introduced into the discussion. The objective was to find out the importance of corporate strategy to an organization. Considering this, R2 highlighted that: "... corporate strategy is the basis of the organization. This is because the corporate atmosphere keeps changing which is why corporate strategy is important because directs the future of an organization." This then presupposes that an organization that does not have a good corporate strategy is lost because R3 was insistent on the point that "... it gives a sense of direction to the company. Who the target audience

are, what is to be communicated etc.". As alluded to earlier, R1 came into the argument with the opinion that "corporate strategy is the heart of strategic management. This makes it a vital concept to underestimate. This is because it is like the roadmap that guides the organization to its prospects. From the data, the prevalent view is that corporate strategy is at the heart of every organization's existence. Because of this, every organization which did not have one or had an ineffective one cannot thrive in the corporate environment.

Public Relations and Corporate Strategy

With the establishment that corporate strategy is the lifeline of every organization, this inquiry was focused on ascertaining the role public relations could play in the formulation of corporate strategy. It was found that: "... because PR has a hold of a vast amount of information about the organization, it makes it essential to the formulation process. Because of this, the PR has to have good relations with all facets of the organization so that there is that atmosphere of corporate harmony." A view asserted by R1. R3 also explained that: "... once there is a thorough understanding of the corporate strategy, it is incumbent on the PR to develop communication and other activities to contribute to the realization of the said strategy." This view also tied in to R5's position that: "... it all comes down to data because the PR undertakes customer surveys for the organization. "PR goes to fish out what the customers want and need so that the organization can put in place objectives that can help satisfy these findings. Once again, public relations were given credence for the role it could play in the formulation of corporate strategy. This again catapults the practice into one which is very salient to every organization that operates with corporate sustainability and longevity in mind.

Constraints to Corporate Strategy

Some of the traditional constraints of the practice were emphasized as some of the challenges public relations could face in its efforts to aid the formulation of corporate strategy. R4, for instance, indicated that "... opinions of PR people are not taken into consideration, rather, in some organizations, decisions are made and then forced on them to go through with them." R5 was also of the view that: "... while there are departments and managers who believe PR is just a communicator and sometimes even tell PR practitioners what to communicate, I do not share that view. This is serious because, in some instances, some managers and other departments think of themselves better than PR practitioners, which has led to a reduction in expected budgetary projects and logistics, among other things, and I think that is not proper...". R3 as well believed: "... even though I may not fall victim to this, there is the issue of recognition. If the top-level management does not recognize the PR-related activities, it becomes a complete failure for PR to be a part of the strategic direction. The other is the absence of the basic resources for the PR to function effectively. And, the calibre of the person functioning as the PR". While these views were linked to the challenges faced by the practice, R2, however, approached the argument from a different angle, arguing that: "... because data is important, if the PR airs in the data collection, it means that the corporate strategy will

be affected as well, and this makes it a herculean task." Also, a failure here affects the overall organizational growth."

Perception of CEO's on the Practice of Public Relations

Overall, it was found that the perception held of public relations was in a positive light. Even though there were constraints pointed out which hindered public relations practice, it was found that public relations were an essential part of the organization. In terms of strategic management, it was adjudged that public relations were vital, which was the same for corporate strategy formulation. While public relations placement was said to affect its practice with organizations, it is worthy of note that it was suggested that the size, kind, and industry of the organization have an influence on where it was placed. This gives Zerfaß's (2009) observation that many senior executives think of corporate communication in the traditional sense of information transmission in the sense of information transmission because of their expertise in business administration. That notwithstanding, the view was championed that public relations should be part of top management so that it could be more effective. This is because, as part of the dominant coalition, public relations is involved in every decision as their views are sought as well before decisions are made. In the ideal situation, where this is the case, the organization can work towards attaining its organizational objectives without much push-back from internal and external stakeholders.

Knowledge of CEO's on Public Relations Practitioners in the Various Organizations

The overwhelming view was that public relations had to do with information dissemination and management as well as stakeholder relations. To an extent, this ties into PRSA's (2021) assertion that public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the public. With these views being championed by all respondents, it can be concluded that the respondents had a fair idea of what public relations does. This is because there were certain expectations made of the public relations practitioner. For instance, if they must be part of the top management of an organization.

Again, these expectations were found to be justifiable because of the significance the respondents attributed to public relations for the organization. This is anchored on the fact that public relations play a vital role in affecting strategic management as well as the formulation of an organizational corporate strategy. The reason for this is that if the CEO does not realize the critical and diverse role of public relations, it is very probable that it is not only underutilized but also misunderstood (Frandsen and Johansen, 2018). CEOs and public relations experts must get along because successful collaborations necessitate mutual respect and an understanding of what public relations can and cannot do. It is for this reason that the suggestion that public relations be part of top management makes sense.

CEO's View of Public Relations Contribution to Strategic Management

In strategic management, public relations were found to be a critical function, especially if it was part of top management. Due to this level of premium placed on public relations, certain expectations are made of the position holder. A worrying reality, however, is seen in how, instead of being perceived as strategic management, Grunig (2011) intimates that public relations has become institutionalized as a symbolic-interpretive activity that organizations engage in to assert dominance over the public and hide the consequences of their activities from the public, governments, and media. That notwithstanding, some of these expectations, as alluded to, include attention to detail and being circumspect, being open-minded, as well as harbouring a good amount of emotional intelligence. With these skillsets, public relations practitioners can then contribute effectively to issues relating to strategic management, as Oliver (2008) emphasizes, in that public relations should be planned, managed by objectives, assessed, and linked to organizational goals. This is because strategic management is about information. Getting the right one out is significant. This means that public relations must be privy to and part of the strategic management because they are at the helm of pushing the organizational objectives to the public.

Constraints of Public Relations Contribution to Corporate Strategy

While it was found that public relations were constrained in diverse ways in organizations, the narration of these constraints painted a gloomy picture for public relations practice as it was perceived to be widespread. This finding was found to be consistent with Wright et al.'s (2009) view that many scholars have acknowledged the need for public relations effectiveness evaluation and measurement, and many practitioners and academics agree that public relations plays a managerial role. This is because most of the constraints, such as organizational block or neglect, were among the most popular opinions on the issue. Aside from organizational culture, which results in a lack of logistics, lack of recognition of their role, and lack of continuous training on the part of the practitioners, was also found to be a contributing factor to the challenges faced by the practice. In relation to corporate strategy, it was found that because public relations have a hold of a vast amount of information about the organization, it makes it essential to the formulation process. Furthermore, it was observed that once there is a thorough understanding of the corporate strategy, it is incumbent on public relations to develop communication and other activities to contribute to the realization of the said strategy. Basing on Veri and Grunig's (2000) argument that the position of public relations managers in firms causes difficulties in tying public relations to corporate strategy because public relations managers do not participate in determining company objectives, it adds to the voice championing the practice of being a part of the dominant coalition.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions held by CEOs of public relations practices in Ghana and the USA. In doing so, the objectives set included finding out the CEOs' knowledge of public relations, ascertaining the CEOs' view of public relations' contribution to strategic management and learning the constraints of public relations' contribution to corporate strategy. Through a qualitative research approach, the study collected data from five (5) CEOs of selected agencies under the Ministry of Transport of Ghana through in-depth interviews. It was found that the perception held of public relations was in a positive light. Further, the findings suggest that public relations have to do with information dissemination and management as well as stakeholder relations. In strategic management, public relations were found to be a critical function, especially if it was part of top management. Also, due to the diverse constraints faced by public relations in organizations, it hampered their contribution to corporate strategy. CEOs must comprehend the difference between public relations as a communications deliverable and public relations as a multi-faceted, mission-critical brand stewardship functionality whose stewards deserve a seat at the table and respect for their obligations as advisors. This is because if the CEO does not appreciate the critical and diverse role of public relations, it is very probable that it will be neglected and even exploited. Because CEOs interact with key stakeholders and make decisions regarding basic communication understanding and goals, as well as critical structures and resources, the public relations role should be a complement to their efforts. This is because stakeholder relations, for instance, entail some technicalities. Again, while the goal of public relations is to assist a company in achieving its business objectives, a lack of recognition and support hinders their efforts. This means that managers of public relations will not be able to attain the company's effectiveness if they do not comprehend the company's aims. It is for this reason that there must be some level of rethinking so that public relations is given the necessary support so that it can contribute to salient issues such as strategic management and corporate strategy formulation.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that CEOs and corporate leadership in Ghana should recognize and support public relations practice. With regards to policy, the study recommends that the Institute of Public Relations Ghana speed up its efforts to pass a bill that will make public relations a regulated profession. This is because, after practitioners have received certification, they will have a solid understanding of the fundamentals of the discipline, making it a win-win situation for both organizations and the individuals that engage them. Finally, because the researcher limited the study to only two institutions, it is urged that any future research on this topic broaden the sample size and, if necessary, use additional approaches.

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