

Public relations as a marketing communications tool: Evidence from selected multinational companies in Ghana

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ABSTRACT: Advertising has been a dominantly used discipline for the company's external communication for almost one century. Largely marketing communications has been described by most organisation as advertsing. However, times have changed dramatically, and markets have evolved rapidly. Customers are more educated, research-oriented and keen to be communicated to more on a more « personal » basis than on « mass » level. Within these changes, advertising functionality got lost and a new dominant communication discipline, Public Relations arose. This research explored the role of PR as a marketing communication tool to build building initiatives of the selected companies.

This study used a case study approach with the target population being the staff of the three selected multinational companies. With the aid of the purposive sampling techniques, respondents were selected from the three organizations and the main research instrument was a questionnaire and an interview schedule aided by secondary data from renowned writers. The most significant outcome of the literature review was that brand equity can remarkably be enhanced by creating brand awareness using Public Relations. The qualitative data also depicted through the interaction of the three companies that, all use public relations for building their brand and these have been well represented in the form of tables and charts for easy understanding. It's being established that all three companies viewed public relations as an important factor in building their brands and acknowledged the power that PR has on customer awareness.

The study recommended brand development and building of the consumer interests and trusts as foundations of an efficient brand that will enhance the capabilities of PR professionals within the Multinational environment in Ghana.

KEYWORDS: Public relations, marketing, communications, companies, Ghana.

1 INTRODUCTION

Today, in both the public and private sectors, accountability and, therefore, measurability are key principles of management. Increasingly, measurement and evaluation need to be more than anecdotal and informal. Objective and rigorous methods that deliver credible proof of results and Return on Investment (ROI) to management, shareholders and other key stakeholders are required (Abdusamad & LeBlanc, 2010).

The problem is that few studies are focusing on the increasing preference of public relations practice in corporate Ghana. Most researchers think of public relations as an ordinary way of marketing and ignore the real importance of it. The fact that many Ghanaian Multinational companies have a problem in implementing a brand strategy in Ghana indicates there is a need for an introduction of the functions of public relations and the use of public relations together with the implementation of an advertising strategy.

Public relations and marketing often operate as separate functions in large organizations, this can lead to a lack of coordination and missed opportunities. PR and marketing perform much better when they work together. Coordination helps them do together what they cannot do separately and improve the bottom line for the entire organization (Comcowich, 2019). Currently, the number of people who use the services of public relations is growing. PR is applied both in the marketing mix to promote brands as well for corporate communication. Public relations have acquired great importance for the management of companies worldwide, and that has helped these organizations to communicate better with its publics. "The harder an

advertisement tries to force its way into the mind, the less likely it will accomplish its objective.” That’s just one reason advertising is destined to be replaced by public relations as the lead brand-building discipline, according to the authors, who also have fun lampooning what passes for creativity in the advertising industry, and lambasting companies that spend billions of dollars on ad campaigns for little or no tangible result (Holmes, 2002).

The fall of advertising and the rise of Public Relations (PR) is about the role of public relations versus the role of advertising in brand marketing. PR is needed to launch a brand and establish its identity; advertising is for maintaining an existing brand’s position. The reason is that advertising has no credibility, so it can only remind people of what they already believe. Advertisement is to inform and influence those, which favour, applies for and support their purchase decision. The role of PR is to create and maintain the relationships with relevant segments of society to create goodwill and reputation of the enterprise. Advertising and public relations costs belong to the important sectors of marketing costs, in the practice of enterprises. It is a natural need for enterprises to identify the effectiveness and efficiency of the expended costs. It fully applies to the cost of advertising, although quantification of this task is difficult.

Integration of advertising and public relations is a topic of interest to practitioners and educators. According to Rose and Miller (1993), the merger of advertising and public relations is “one of the most debated and controversial topics” in mass communication. The concept of integration was originally raised when advertising agencies went on the merger and acquisition trail in the 1970s and 1980s to avoid losing profit (Duncan & Caywood, 1996). Since then, the two fields have increasingly embraced an integrated approach to better serve the complex needs of clients. Educators also have discussed the ideal mix of advertising, public relations, and marketing communication in their programs (Kerr, 2009). Although no commonly accepted definitions of integrated marketing communications (IMC) or integrated communications (IC) exist (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997), IMC and IC are generally referred to as the use of various strategies and tactics to convey an effective message in a variety of communication disciplines such as advertising, direct marketing, public relations, and sales promotion (Griffin & Pasadeos, 1998; Rose & Miller, 1994; Wilcox, Cameron, & Reber, 2015). Practitioners claimed that they need both the skills of advertising and public relations and, hence, integrated communication or IMC is an ideal concept (Rose & Miller, 1994).

One of the most common travails of any public relations firm or PR practitioner is that many people tend to be unsure of what exactly it is that they do. From the inevitable queries at dinner parties about “so what does a PR actually do?” to the grumblings of clients who are unsure as to how to assess their Return on Investments (ROI) in their services, a common problem of PR is that many people seem to wrongly conflate the profession with advertising, a profession, that thanks to its more obvious ubiquity and television shows, does not suffer from the same kind of confusion.

Although defining the complex and wonderful art of public relations is something that could make for several thousand-word theses, in short, public relations is about the maintenance of a positive public image or reputation. The main way in which PR professionals and firms maintain this positive reputation is with media relations. Media relations essentially involve liaising with the media to inform the public of their client’s practices, achievements, mission, policies, and sometimes their very existence. Advertising, on the other hand, means disseminating an organisation or individual’s message through paying for a slot or advertising space.

PR can tend to be more powerful and more effective in spreading a message specifically because it is free. While a journalist will not write a story about your client unless the message behind the story is strong, a newspaper will accept an advertisement from your client as long as you meet their price for advertising space, regardless of the strength of the message. Part of the confusion between the two practices is because a lot of the work that goes into public relations lies behind the scenes. The nonprofessional is almost completely unaware of the work that PRs do behind the shadows, pitching stories to journalists, building and maintaining long-term relationships with media outlets and clarifying and strengthening messages before a story reaches their newspaper or television set. On the other hand, when we read or watch an advertisement, we can assess exactly what we are seeing, and understand that an advertising agency has been involved from the copywriters who were the creative force behind the advert, to the purchase of advertising space.

A company’s marketing strategy is often the key to whether a product succeeds or fails in every market and especially in Ghana. There are plethoras of reasons why western marketing strategies fail to reach Ghanaian consumers. Many companies believe that the same marketing campaigns that have been used elsewhere will also translate to the Ghanaian market, but this is often not the case. Ghanaian preferences, tastes, and interpretations are different from those of other cultures. Even within Ghana, with over 70 ethnic groups and people with vastly varying levels of affluence, market demands differ across regions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Public relations can be defined as a field that is concerned with maintaining and improving an organization's public image. Public relations can also be defined as an intermediary between the organization that a public relation professional represents

and the public. Doug Newson, Allan Scott, and Judy Vanslyke Turk (1993) defined public relations as an intermediary between the organization that he or she represents and all that organization's publics."

Public relations provide services to an organization by helping them promote the major purpose of their existence. Public relations persons explain to the public their organization's social objective and what their organization provides or seeks to provide to the public. This then gives the public a better understanding of the day-day operations of the organization, which then creates trust. In other words, public relation also deals with the organizations need to be recognized in the public eye. Should there be bad news or rumours about the organization, the public relations department is mandated to speak to the issues and set the records straight. They also create awareness and likeable images of an organization with stories and articles found in relevant media outlets. This happens by either rating or commentary made by the media representatives or from articles and stories given by public relations professional to the media themselves. Good commentary in the newspapers and magazines can boost up the organizations' name in the public eyes (Hutton, 1996).

Public relation is about reputation. The rise and shine of an organization's name depend on how good and skilful their public relations professional deals with rumours, problems as well as their strategies adopted in promoting the organization. Public relations is also public-orientated. Programs and policies made by public relations professionals are based on what the public want. To get public attention, public relations work a lot with the media. Any press release, programs, and latest agenda of the organization are constantly sent to the media. The media then helps promotes the organization through feature articles among others. Besides that, public relations professionals also use mediums such as social networks and blogs to convey messages to the public directly and to monitor consumer's satisfaction of using their product and services (Hutton, 1996).

Public relations is a comprehensive and marginal application science. Theoretically, it covers different subjects as management science, marketing and mass-communication etc. In practice, it is applied by all social organizations. Many scholars have advocated their opinions about public relations and made definitions of it. They all define public relations differently or slightly different.

Cutlip, Center & Broom (1999) define public relations in the following way: Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends. Hutton (2001) proposes public relations be defined as "managing a strategic relationship." He argues public relations as (1) Persuader, (2) Advocate, (3) Educator or dispenser of information, (4) Crusader, (5) Image-maker or reputation manager, (6) Relationship, builder.

Gruning (1984) defines public relations as the "management of communication between an organization and its publics." Ledingham and Gruning (1998) argue public relations as "relationship management." This implies that the focus of public relations is the management of an organization's relationship with the public through a four-step management process of analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The most representative and authoritative definition is the one proposed in the meeting of the World Public Relations Association held in August 1978 in Mexico. The concept of public relations in this definition holds that public relations are art and sociology. To implement public relations is to analyze the tendencies, to observe the consequences, to provide advice to the leaders of the organizations and to carry out a series of planned activities to serve for the organizations and public's benefits" (cited by Dong Newsom, Alan Scott, & Judy V. Turk, 1993).

Some Chinese scholars have also conducted researches in the field of public relations. Ming (1986) defines public relations as "the so-called public relations is, to gain trust and support inside and of the public and to create the best social environment for its business development, a series of scientific means of spreading and policy activities taken by an enterprise or organization in analyzing and handling all kinds of internal or external relations it faces."

THE FUNCTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

From the developmental history of public relations, it's clear that the function is evolving. Overall, the function of public relations is expanding. Nowadays, public relations have attracted extensive attention to organizations. Cutlip, Center & Broom (1999) argue that public relations include the following activities and specialities: publicity,

advertising, press agency, public affairs, issues management, lobbying, investor relations, and development. Hutton (1996) supposes public relations primary functions are: research, image, making, counselling, managing, early warning, interpreting and communicating.

Public relations persons are believed to be a strategic part of organizations' strategic management (Wilson, 2000). She thinks that strategy is the way to reaching an overall goal. It is a coordinated effort by elements such as public relations in long-

range planning to achieve organizational goals. Public relations is strategic when it aids in formulating the organization's approach to accomplishing overall goals and then supports that effort in a coordinated and consistent manner. Grunig (1992) proposes that four dimensions can check the best practice of corporate communication: Micro-level, Managerial level, Macro level, and effects of excellent public relations. Oliver (1991) points out public relations as an important operational communication for a corporate.

BRANDING AND PR STRATEGY

Brand strategy is an important part of enterprises' strategy and its purpose is to enhance brand equity, and finally to achieve a better general strategy. In modern society, implementing brand strategy demands the cooperation of many factors. Zeng (2000) argues that there are two basic factors. One is equipment's and high-qualified employees that are the fundamental conditions for modern enterprises to create name brands. The second factor is the application of public relations. Public relations can help enterprises improve employees' quality, activate employees' feeling of enterprise belonging, make employees in high-pointed manage the high-modernized technological equipment's, and thus create name brands for enterprises. Public relations are the prerequisite for enterprises' brand strategy, without which, even having the most advanced technological equipment's, brand strategy cannot be carried out efficiently.

Previous studies have disclosed the importance of public relations in brand strategy. Public relations efforts offer low-cost exposure with enhanced credibility (Aaker, 1997). Advertising, promotion, event marketing sponsorship, public relations, and personal selling are ways of marketing communication (Keller, 1997).

The implementation of the brand strategy needs public relations to propagate it. The ultimate purpose of brand strategy is to make consumers accept and recognize the brand and to improve consumers' consuming desire and purchasing power, to increase enterprises' selling income and interests and brand equity. To achieve this goal, enterprises have to release information to consumers in time so that consumers can know and accept the brand. The characteristic of third party authenticating the brands makes public relations the best vehicle for propagating and spreading information to consumers. Of course, for public relations, this propagation should be based on perseverant and sincere efforts to serve the society and the public. It is this "the public go first" thinking of public relations that can create the conditions necessary for the increase of brands' intangible value.

Furthermore, the implementation of a brand strategy needs public relations. Brand strategy is systematical engineering that influences the overall situation, the implementation of which calls for the support of six conditions as talents, equipment, capital, information, management, and markets. Public relations management function plays an important role in brand strategy. Public relations management builds up a bridge for a brand strategy for enterprises' communicating with the publics and ensures the smooth spreading of information; and by strengthening enterprises' inner public relations management, makes closer the relation between enterprises and their staff and digs enterprises' resources.

BRAND-BUILDING THROUGH PR

In building brands, advertising no longer has a legitimate role to play, while media messages are becoming more important. The more messages about the brand, the more favourable the

messages become, which results in a stronger brand. Nevertheless, if your product or service has no publicity potential it will be difficult to launch it with the help of public relations.

The media is the battleground if you cannot win the media battle; you will not win the marketing battle either. (Ries & Ries, 2002) Advertising is great when it comes to reinforcing a brand, but when it comes to building brand affinity; PR is the most important player. PR gives a brand substance by telling its story and information that people will remember and relate to.

BRANDING AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

In this competitive business era, companies are aware of the treatment and as a result, are working hard to build and develop strong brands that will stand the test of time. In recent years the scientists' interest in branding is increased, but the theoretical and methodical researches are not enough. There is a lack of a unified conceptual approach to the branding process. Additionally, branding has become a major theme in marketing studies. Its diverse aspects are researched in the studies of the specialists as Keller (2008). From the empirical literature, these writers have underscored the need to pay enormous attention to the human nature of the brand. In an environment like Ghana where there are about 125 RCBs and many other Universal banks operating in the same market, Keller's arguments about branding need a lot of attention and concentration by the

organizations in their efforts to sustain their advantage. Branding will have a major role to play in marketing communications [Keller, K., 2008].

This makes meaningful of De Chernatony's assertions that "branding is examined as one of the trends of the market strategy of business structures, which is playing an important role for providing its competitiveness" (De Chernatony, L., 2010).

Unfortunately, the experience in brand building is not enough generalized and formalized, which impedes its wide distribution. In this scenario, the practice is ahead of the theory. On the present markets, the competition between trademarks is intensifying, the contest between their advertising images for a place in consumer's consciousness is deepening.

Largely, the perceptions of customers are greatly influenced by the brand image and equity of the particular institution. A brand can be evaluated by the value and influence it has on the public how are potential customers. A strong brand should be able to command brand loyalty. Brands ought to show the desire of customers in the financial public to choose one company for the other in a very competitive environment. They show the willingness of how much the consumer is ready to pay in a competitive industry. Total brand of an institution should portray feelings, specific features, benefits, services and experiences and are designed as contracts which consumers relate to the delivery of value and satisfaction. (Kotler, *et al.*, 2008).

As consumers yearning for more noteworthy consumer loyalty, there is a need to dole out attributes of offerings which go past the utilitarian qualities of an item. Brand equity reflects situating in the psyches of consumers, (Hawkins, Mothersbaug and Best, 2007).

This assertion was established in a study by Tandoh (2015) in his assessment of the value of brand image on customer loyalty in Ghana; a case study of Sinapi Aba. The study collected data from both primary and secondary sources. Findings of his study revealed that brand awareness creation through marketing communication initiative in Ghana is a critical factor in the savings and loans industry in Ghana. He argued that in a situation where customers are given a choice, they will prefer to patronize a financial institution with a strong brand that the one with no brand value and recognition.

The brand ensures interaction between itself and the consumers via practical proof for mark position and value and persuasion the consumers in its advantages. Its communication strategy has an important role in this.

CONSTRAINTS FACING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

PR has many advantages compared to advertising, but there are still some disadvantages of public relations over advertising. Uncontrollability is the most problematic disadvantage PR faces. Advertising gives the advertiser total control of how, when and what is being said, while the control of PR is totally in the hands of the media. PR cannot guarantee that the media will adopt the story in a wishful way and the outcome might be, at worst, no coverage at all or patchy coverage that will not reach the desired target publics. Another risk PR must take is the possibility of distortion of the story (Brassington & Pettitt 2003)

It is difficult to measure public relations' results because PR is often used with other promotion tools, which makes its impact often indirect and difficult to measure. It would be ideal for the company to measure the change in product awareness, knowledge, and attitude resulting from the publicity campaign. To do so, the company should measure these changes through before-and-after-the-campaign levels. The best measure of public relations effort is sales and profit impact, if obtainable (Kotler et al. 2005). The effectiveness of public relations can still be measured in several other ways, including internal assessments, brand preference research and media coverage (Okonkwo 2007).

THE FUTURE OF THE PR INDUSTRY

In the words of Ries and Ries (2002), Public Relations is not dying, it is evolving! In any profession, there should be a hunger to learn more and become a specialist, but now, there is a focus on PR. The scope is changing, and it is getting harder to make an impact.

Like many business and industries, digital is driving public relations. The most important trends that are affecting public relations are all digitally focused. Online visibility is key. PR officers are now able to listen and market to audiences in real-time, as there are always new digital platforms to communicate through, and much more. Digital is certainly improving the quality of public relations. The old ways and tools still apply, and access to media and influencers is still vital. However, there are improvements to be made, and PR Officers should always be looking to make life easier. PR has evolved, and countless tools have become available to help marketers make the most out of PR and run campaigns more effectively. There are better ways of finding journalists and influencers, and media opportunities. Now PR Officers can send out pitches more targeted, and more

efficiently. They can do more comprehensive competitor research and identify opportunities that they were not aware of 5 years ago.

Ries and Ries believed that disciplines in PR have always been wide-ranging, and PR professionals must be flexible and on top of current trends. This could include content creation, corporate communications, crisis management, events, internal communications, media relations, social media, reputation management and much more. The days of writing and distributing news releases, then pitching media are in decline. While this process is important and still relevant, incorporating creative visuals in the delivery greatly increases the success rates of placements. The focus has shifted and the assets are changing: where it used to be written content, it is now infographics and visualising data. More recently, PRs are charged with developing content that engages consumers directly; this can even include 'viral' content. This requires new storytelling skills, represents an enormous mindset shift, and has required new and fresh talent (Ries & Ries, 2002).

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theory is a prediction of how events and actions are related. There are theories about many actions and events in public relations. Some theories serve us well because we test them regularly and observe the same relationships over time. Other theories are dynamic and evolving and need more testing and refinement so that they will have better predictive value.

As a researcher, this study understands that public relations officers and managers need to have sufficient knowledge of different model theories so that they can make the right decisions for the organisation's public relations plans and programs. The study thus adopts the systems theory as a means to conceptualize the entire function and roles of PR within an organisation.

Systems theory is useful in public relations because it provides a way to think about relationships. Generally, systems theory looks at organizations as made up of interrelated parts, adapting and adjusting to changes in the political, economic, and social environments in

which they operate. Organizations have recognizable boundaries, within which there must be a communication structure that guides the parts of the organization to achieve organizational goals.

The leaders of the organization create and maintain these internal structures. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier state that the systems perspective emphasizes the interdependence of organizations with their environments, both internal and external to the organization. According to the systems perspective, organizations depend on resources from their environments, such as "raw materials, a source of employees, and clients or customers for the services or products they produce. The environment needs the organization for its products and services." Organizations with open systems use public relations persons to bring back information on how productive their relationships are with clients, customers, and other stakeholders over time. Organizations with closed systems do not seek new information. The decision-makers operate on what happened in the past or on their personal preferences.

Organizations are part of a greater environment made up of many systems. This study recognizes that the systems theory not only examines relationships with external stakeholders but also to look at the internal functions and stakeholders of the organizations. Organizations structure their employees by specific jobs and functions. Many different departments, such as accounting, legal, and public relations, make up the managerial function. The production function of an organization might include skilled and unskilled employees who make the product or provide the service to customers.

The marketing function is made up of sales staff. All of these different employees are interdependent. The monitoring of relationships is a major one for public relations people. Through systems theory, we think of public relations people as boundary spanners, straddling the edge of an organization—looking inside and outside of an organization. Public relations

practitioners are the go-betweens, explaining the organization policies, products and activities to its stakeholders and interpreting the environment to the organization. Public relations persons advise the dominant coalition: the primary decision-makers of the organization, about problems and opportunities in the environment and help these decision-makers respond to these changes.

The environment imposes constraints on organizations. For example, customers can boycott an organization's products. The courts can make business pay damage to people who are injured by its products. Banks can choose not to lend money to an organization. Because we use systems theory, we can identify an organization's stakeholders, and by spanning organizational boundaries, we can anticipate each side's relationship needs. If decision-makers keep their systems open, they allow for the two-way flow of resources and information between the organization and its environment. They can use that information for adapting to the environment, or they may use the incoming information to try to control the environment.

3 METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The case study approach was adopted because of its ability to facilitate an in-depth study of the problem under study. Case studies are often seen as prime examples of qualitative research. This study's population included all the employees of the three selected organisations partaking in the research study; MTN Ghana, Guinness Ghana Brewery Ltd and Ecobank Ghana. These three organisations were selected based on their relevance and importance within Ghana's economy. Thus, the study found it expedient to extract their assertions and opinions on the growing role of PR over marketing, as a multinational.

This research made use of the non-probability sampling techniques in identifying respondents from the three organisations. Within this technique, the study adopted the purposive sampling method in the selection of the respondents. The Purposive sample was adopted due to the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study. This type of sampling is very useful in situations when the researcher needs to reach a targeted sample quickly, and where sampling for proportionality is not the main concern. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. Unlike random sampling, non-probability methods such as purposive sampling are not free from bias. Respondents may be chosen out of convenience or from recommendations of knowledgeable people.

The study made use of 120 individuals as respondents for the study. The sample selection was based on the following criteria:

- a. The staff that were directly involved in the PR departments as well as the Sales / Marketing units, within each of the three organisations.
- b. Management Staff, Heads of Departments / Units and other employees directly involved in decision making within their respective companies.

Table 1. Number of Respondents

Organisation	Department		No of Respondents
	PR	Marketing	
MTN	20	20	40
ECOBANK	20	20	40
GGBL	20	20	40
Total			120

Source: Field Work, 2019

The major limitation of this sampling technique was the subjective nature of the choice of respondents. Additionally, for a study of this nature, the number of identified subjects could have been higher. However, since this study was limited specifically to PR and advertising, the relatively small number of 120 participants (40 from each organisation) was considered adequate, as in investigating a specific group of people, a large sample is not necessarily required to generalize the findings to the larger group.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher also formally sought the consent of all respondents and observed all the necessary protocol. The researcher knew modern companies or organisations operates in a competitive environment. Because of this, the researcher, therefore, ensured that information received from respondents was treated with a high level of care and confidentiality. The identities of key informants were not disclosed in the report since the research is to evaluate what pertains in the organization and not to use the personal opinions of individuals.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

ROLE OF PR IN BRAND DEVELOPMENT

All respondents in this study identified that when talking about building a successful brand, perception is everything. By making the perceptions and building up the image customers have of the brand, PR has been an important factor in building all three brands. They explained that for an existing brand, such as where they currently work, public relations is an important tool to further their reach and reformulate their aims and targets of a new product or service. The respondents underscored that, when done successfully, good PR will help their companies generate and earned media placements, which will assist in constructing their brand identity and industry equity. Importantly, this can and should increase industry presence, new accounts, and sales. According to Kotler et al. (2005), public relations professionals create or find favourable news about the company or its products, to attract attention. Furthermore, Kotler asserted that high brand equity provides a company with many competitive advantages. To preserve brand equity, marketers need to manage their brands carefully.

At MTN, the respondents attributed that; the development of brand identity should focus on the key characteristics and unique selling points of MTN. PR at MTN have identified three key important questions: What is the product or service being provided? What difference it makes in the lives of their customers and why their customers should continuously patronise their services.

Responses to these questions have shaped their public relations strategy and helped define the profile of their target audience and determined the key media they have to contact as part of their plan. This they do by sourcing and cultivating relationships with journalists to obtain earned media placements, while also using social media and digital marketing channels to contact customers directly. This approach has helped to develop the values of the MTN brand and the positioning of their products or services throughout the industry. Charles a PR officer at MTN agreed that PR is a more effective and a believable way of building brands, as well as cost-efficient. Tawiah also of MTN PR adds that advertising is media coverage that is paid for while PR is earned media coverage, which makes PR much more effective and reliable than advertising. He thinks advertising agencies are doing worse than before because the digital and PR part of marketing is increasing. However, Tawiah still considered that advertising is also an important part of marketing a brand. The various assertions by the respondents are relatively like that of the PR Journal of 2009 which stipulated that the objective of branding is to communicate who the organization is and requires a story that is usually told by the product or service itself. Its told better by the customers word-of-mouth or by a credible third party. The result has been "brand storytelling- that is, blending the branding value of advertising, the credibility of public relations and the measurability and ROI of online tactics".

At Ecobank a financial institution, PR is aimed at building customer interests and trust. The PR team plays a key role in a strategy that generates consumer interest. They raise awareness and, when executed correctly, the strategy drives consumers to patronize their services. Ecobank's public relations campaign also aims at setting a narrative, creating brand buzz and assists with creating a brand following. As a bank, Public relations play a critical role in driving greater valuations with investors. Looking for a return on investment, investors want to place their money in brands that are credible and expansive and have a positive image. For the Ecobank brand, they must constantly engage with interested parties, demonstrating the core values of their company and projections for future performance. Positive press mentions and exposure is a key factor in determining the Ecobank brand image and the ability to demonstrate a strong record of accomplishment, industry interest, popular product placement and respect from consumers do play a vital role in determining a value for the company at both the investment and sale stages. Their assertions are further corroborated by Clifton & Simons (2003) who stated that the brand affects consumer attitude and perceptions toward the product and, especially applicable to public relations, toward the organization that produces the product.

Guinness Ghana Brewery Ltd PR team also had a divergent view of PR relevance in brand positioning due to their product categorisation. At GGBL both PR and Marketing, identified that excessive alcohol intake is not productive and rather destructive. "Getting a product placed in a publication - while valuable - is only one small element of what it takes to truly represent a brand. It is less about getting your message out and more about getting consumers to engage with the brand and turning decision-makers (both in the media and outside of it) into brand ambassadors themselves. Traditional public relations methods will not cut it. Rather, they highlight the need for elements such as social media, speaking opportunities, consumer engagement plans, events and competitions, as well as the full mix of marketing activities, all of which are aligned to the brand objectives. What is evident is that the GGBL brand is now looking to educate the public on the messages and personality of their brand. With this they hope will build and cement a positive reputation in the minds of the consumers, which will last longer rather than just taking a spray and pray approach, through traditional advertising campaigns. All companies agree that PR has an impact on sales and customer awareness, but Sarah at GGBL pointed out that even though attention in the media

helps to achieve customer awareness it does not mean that everyone wants to buy the products instantly. The most important thing is that people know the brand and can talk about it, and PR enables this.

The GGBL respondents' feedback is further aided by the literature, where, Mikáčová and Gavlaková (2014) states that a brand's value can be judged by an organization's performance and that depends on interconnections. Recognizing and reinforcing a brand's interconnections with an organization's culture and performance through a communications campaign focused on employee alignment with business results and reputation can have powerful effects.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COMPANY'S BRAND IMAGE WITHIN THE GHANAIAN MULTINATIONAL ENVIRONMENT?

All the respondents attributed good measures in terms of the place of their brands within the Ghanaian multinational environments. Staying afloat within the challenging and difficult business environment has posed many problems to many organisations.

In terms of product, consistency and brand appeal MTN Ghana made-known that they are the market leader with the widest and most dependable network in Ghana for Voice, Data, / Internet and Mobile Money services, offering subscribers a range of exciting options under both Consumer and Enterprise segments. According to the respondents, MTN Ghana has committed itself to deliver reliable and innovative services that provide value for consumers and companies in Ghana's telecommunications market. MTN has continuously invested in expanding and modernizing its network since its entry into Ghana in 2006. The company has built three modern switch and data centres to deliver stable, reliable, efficient, and robust data and voice services to customers. MTN's technology investments in Ghana from 2006 to 2014 a total of approximately \$2.4 billion. Respondents claim to buttress the assertion by Aaker (1996) who asserts that, a brand position is part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands.

Ecobank's brand presence in Ghana is well identified in its mission and vision as well as, how Ghanaians positively screwed to the brand because it is an African Bank. In the words of the respondents, Ecobank's pan-African presence allows them to deliver the very best value to stakeholders. Because they have created a standard level of customer service, they can develop synergies and economies of scale across the network. This, in turn, enables the bank to drive the most efficient and largest platform in Africa, to deliver transformation. With the right PR strategies, uniform excellent practices and proprietary technologies, the bank has influenced the entire country by ensuring customers transact their business and unlock opportunities with ease. Their assertions fall in line with Aaker and Joachimsthaler, (2000), who asserted that to be effective, a brand identity needs to resonate with customers, differentiate the brand from competitors, and represent what the organization can and will do over time. Aaker (1996) also identified that one key to successful brand-building is to understand how to develop a brand identity – to know what the brand stands for and to effectively express that identity.

At GGBL, goodwill was their hallmark and being recommended by their clients to others remained their notable strength. GGBL's promotional activities are focused on driving the organization's overall strategy relentlessly, developing internal consistency and prepare it to confront any radical changes that may arise. PR Officers asserted that to maintain their market share within the Ghanaian economy, they tend to organize events of grandeur nature, introducing new or re-enforcing the old products onto the market. At this, we intend to invite potential customers, public figures, entertainers and other stakeholders to keep their hold on the market. Furthermore, PR also ensures that GGBL place news stories and features in magazines and newspapers to keep stakeholders updated on the latest developments and to increase awareness.

HOW HAS PR HELPED TO ESTABLISH THIS BRAND IMAGE?

Maintaining an image is a very tedious task, notwithstanding the bad days of any business entity. Each of the businesses had ways and means by which PR has helped shaped the brand and this was evident in diverse ways. According to all three companies, PR is extremely important for their brands. If you have not heard of the brand, you will not be interested in it either. When talking about building a successful brand, perception is everything. By controlling the creation of the perceptions and building up the image customers have of the brand, PR has been an important factor in building all three brands.

Per the feedback from the respondents, (33%) asserted that PR has generally created credibility for their brands. PR has created a level of transparency for the various brands, by addressing client and customer demand for greater openness, accessibility, flexibility, and customised service, thereby helping to build trust and confidence in key audiences. Also, PR is increasing its role in developing core content that supports marketing and that has also helped to boost brand credibility by pulling together the authentic views, opinions and knowledge that sit within the various organisation and presenting them to the outside world. It is noticeable that consumers show greater purchase intention toward highly credible brands, which is

generally in line with prior results, such as Erdem and Swait (2004), who observed that brand credibility can increase the probability of inclusion of a brand in consumer consideration sets.

Secondly, (28%) of respondents suggested that PR has aided in focussing on the main vision and mission of the various organisations. In the words of the respondents, Public Relations describes the various methods each organisation uses to disseminate messages about its products, services, or overall image to its customers, employees, stockholders, suppliers, or other interested members of the community. The point of public relations is to make the public think favourably about the company and its offerings. Commonly used tools of public relations include news releases, press conferences, speaking engagements, and community service programs. Although advertising is closely related to public relations—as it too is concerned with promoting and gaining public acceptance for the company's products—the goal of advertising is generating sales, while the goal of public relations is generating goodwill. The effect of good public relations is to lessen the gap between how an organization sees itself and how others outside the organization perceive it.

Thirdly, PR helps to target the requisite audience so as not to eventually waste monies on unnecessary projects and catchment areas (21%) of respondents disclosed. The respondents attributed that PR is a tool for building relationships with the right people and organizations to further the goals of their respective organizations. The objective of PR is to get the word about the company, her products to potential customers through compelling storytelling that targets a specific audience. These campaigns educate their followers about the contributions of their organization to enhance their brand recognition and make their companies relevant by placing them right in front of their target audience.

PR activities sometimes are also used to promote public education activities on behalf of the various companies, says (19%) of respondents. This variety of programs are undertaken to educate consumers, building goodwill and helping avoid misunderstandings in the process. Opportunities for educating consumers might include sponsoring television and radio programs, producing manuals and other printed materials, producing materials for classroom use, and releasing the results of surveys. In addition to focusing on specific issues or industries, PR educational programs seek to inform consumers about economic matters and business in general.

Consistent with this line of reasoning, Winchel cautioned that brands are “being evangelized, dismissed, measured and documented in real-time” and admonished business to “join the conversation” on social media, “a mission perfectly suited for public relations professional” (Winchel, 2010). Also, because brands are as much an open invitation to complain as they are a promise to deliver (Anholt, 2003), the success of a place brand stands and falls with its perceived integrity, that is, the public sentiment of a brand’s proven and trusted ability to fulfil its brand promise (Campelo et al., 2011; Humlen, 2012).

PR STRATEGY

The study identified that PR strategy helps the organisation to structure her PR activities and make strategic decisions around the best way to communicate. It also helps them to use the stories in the business to draw in their target audience as well as increase their profile and build brand awareness.

All the respondents attributed that their strategy included practising a two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical model. This means that the PR officers try as much as possible to relate with stakeholders and know what they expect of them and try to let it shape policies and strategies. However, sometimes too they just inform and put the info out there. Furthermore, most respondent’s listed specialised functions of PR when asked what they thought were their corporate strategies of PR: lobbying, government relations, media relations, CSR (which they call foundation), and internal communication. Some other functions listed were writing of press releases, event planning, internal, and external communications and crisis management. PR practitioners interviewed explained that each practitioner in the department had specialised functions of which they were in charge. Although all practitioners do a bit of technical work such as writing, distributing promotional material and press releases, events management, among others, most of the technical work is left to the interns and the national service personnel. The respondents explained, “Our strategy also entails putting out honest and accurate information to avoid confusion or some form of misconception. And because we also don’t want PR to be associated with the telling of lies and spreading falsehood”.

In defining a PR strategy, the respondents identified planning as the key stage of every strategy. They identified that planning is key to the success of any venture. At MTN, the respondents believed that when they are creating a PR strategy for a particular year, they outline their goals and objectives in terms of what they want to achieve. At GGBL, the respondents also attributed that; the PR strategy planning should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (also known as SMART). Lastly, the Ecobank respondents attributed that, by determining their goals for the year, they can have a clear purpose for their PR strategy, and this maximise the success of their PR activities. Diverging from the norm and heavily schooled in strategy literature, Michael Etter and Peter Winkler argue that strategy should be a narrative and ongoing discourse, changing

moment to moment rather than as the goal-oriented states usually set out as a strategy. They view strategic communication as always an "emergent" practice.

To communicate and realise the impact of the message, the respondents believed the right public or audience must be selected. Their target audience is the individuals, groups, and communities that have influence and decision-making power over their products or services. They are the ones that the business is trying to attract and sell to. For example, GGBL PR activities do not promote their alcoholic drinks within schools and colleges so as not to imbibe alcohol drinks in them. They, however, do promote their non-alcoholic everywhere. Furthermore, MTN and Ecobank operate within all sectors of the economy, due to the nature of their activities. By defining their target audience, they can tailor communication to suit their behaviours and therefore increase the effectiveness of their PR strategy.

This researcher thinks that strategy-wise, online public relations can be the major challenge that confirms the development of this domain to another level of perception. In this case, the strategy of public relations is to promote an interactive communication between the organization and its publics in the online environment because, as Johnson noted, public relations strategies that use new technologies, such as the Web, can include two-way communication, feedback mechanisms as specific tactics (1997, pp.213-236).

HOW WELL ARE MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES IMPLEMENTING PR IN THEIR MARKETING STRATEGY?

This study identified that PR is one of the most cost-effective ways of marketing new business or service and can be incredibly valuable when a company has a limited budget to publicize and advertise their products or services. Less expensive than traditional advertising, PR marketing has numerous benefits for new businesses. The respondents identified that, when marketing a new business, it is important to include public relations in a company's growth strategy. Implementing a PR plan enables the company to establish her brand identity in a practical, cost-efficient manner, and helps to market the business in several important ways.

At MTN and Ecobank, PR marketing makes people aware that they exist, though they have been there for a long period through the raising of awareness. The respondents believed that when marketing a new business, a consistent public relations program helps build a general understanding of the product, service, or brand. The PR professionals were of the view that a PR strategy also supplements any direct marketing and advertising efforts and helps increase their website's rank in Google so people can more readily find your business.

Within GGBL, it was identified that another way that PR helps in marketing their business is to attract new customers. When their products or services receive press coverage, the brand gains credibility among customers. A positive news story about their business influences customers to choose their brand's product or service over competitors that get no media exposure.

Furthermore, the respondents attributed that, PR marketing tend to attract investors to their brands, which is especially beneficial when they are launching a new product or service. They contend that a carefully planned PR strategy can generate positive media coverage, giving the organisation a better negotiating position with potential investors. Additionally, well-executed PR makes the business appear larger and more established which help secure partnerships and funding for further projects and services.

USING PR FIRMS

All three companies occasionally use public relations firms to achieve awareness for their brand. All the companies, GGBL, MTN, and Ecobank have employed the PR agencies for the same reasons. The most important reasons are that PR professionals can promote particular products and services effectively to attract the press and get media attention, which then eventually creates brand awareness. This assertion is in line with Kotler et al. (2005) who earlier defined the importance of PR, stating that it can have a strong impact on public awareness at a much lower cost than advertising can. According to the respondents, Public relations are often described as a marketing stepchild, due to its scattered and limited use.

This is however about to change, PR today is recognized as a more powerful brand-building tool. Maxwell, one of the PR Heads at Ecobank stated that the value of PR finally has been noticed and companies are now starting to realize that PR is much more cost-efficient than advertising. PR agencies have many benefits for their customers, because of their good relations with important people in the media and their ability to bring the brand forward. He further adds the time-saving aspect to the benefits. When hiring a PR firm, the company can then use that time to do other important things. All three companies additionally agree that an important benefit of hiring a PR agency is solely the simplicity of using PR professionals instead of doing everything yourself. The study thus asserts that all three companies use public relations for the right reasons and that they understand how to get the most of value out of the PR professionals to promote their brands in the best way possible.

5 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The results showed that PR could contribute to the organisations brand immensely if it is practised strategically and seen as contributing to strategic planning. A total of 120 individuals were selected to be part of the study and they were selectively chosen from the three Multinational organisations namely: MTN Ghana, Guinness Ghana Brewery Ltd and Ecobank. The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection, and the primary data was sourced through an online questionnaire system. Secondary data was sourced from literary works of other scholars and academics on the research topic under study.

6 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

Limitations that can direct future research in this study ought to be noted. Relevant source materials were not enough, especially in the area of a brand strategy for Ghanaian researchers. Second, because of studying and writing in Ghana, collecting foreign enterprises' data was so inconvenient for the research. Furthermore, the time constraint limited the researcher to concentrate on the most famous researchers' theories and might neglect most other theories. That may have made the results to be too simple in a theoretical field.

Future studies should further investigate a more extensive list of factors and impact upon the Ghanaian public, for example, feedback mechanisms, types of communication on blogs, commenting, responding to comments, etc., among other variables.

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