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Media Experience and Contemporary Public Relations Practice. Experiential Accounts of Selected Practitioners

BY:

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MEDIA EXPERIENCE AND CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE.
EXPERIENTAL ACCOUNTS OF SELECTED PRACTITIONERS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

PR   PUBLIC RELATIONS

IPR   INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

HR   HUMAN RESOURCES

CAAZ   CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY OF ZIMBABWE

ZAS   ZIMBABWE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

ZETDC   ZIMBABWE ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION AND DISTRIBUTION
                COMPANY

ZTA   ZIMBABWE TOURISM AUTHORITY

ZIMPARKS   ZIMBABWE NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE AUTHORITY

UZ   UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

MSU   MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

NUST   NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I, Tatenda Mutetwa (R144448N), hereby sincerely declare that this dissertation is my original work that has not been previously submitted to any other university. Equally, I also declare that proper citations and acknowledgements in accordance with copyright law and ethical requirements have been strictly adhered to writing the dissertation.

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CERTIFICATE OF SUPERVISION

I hereby certify that, I personally supervised this dissertation in accordance with departmental regulations and the university's General Regulation. On that basis, I confirm that the dissertation is examinable.

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Abstract

This research is about media experience and contemporary Public Relations (PR) practice. It entails how media experience preferably as a journalist aids to the works of a PR practitioner. In the practice of contemporary PR there are skills that are therefore expected to package an ideal PR practitioner of today, this study then comes in to unveil them. There have been current developments in the practice of PR due to the advent of technology thus one has to keep abreast on the expectations of the industry.The research based on the publicity and stakeholder theory. A qualitative approach was used through a multiple case study. Interviews were used by the researcher to source out this information form various commendable contemporary PR practitioners in corporate organizations that have a well established reputation. The practitioners highlighted on the importance of media experience in contemporary PR practice, essential skills in PR and the internet revolution as a development in the practice of modern public relations. Through the study, the researcher recommends skills of success in PR which include good communication skills, writing and some technical aptitude.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The study seeks to find the attributes of an 'ideal' public relations practitioner. The analysis stems from establishing the skills sets of those currently engaged in PR practice. The study, in so-doing, revisits traditional public relations models that cast an ideal PR practitioner as one that has actively participated in mainstream journalism. Contemporary realities, however, seem to call for a different or diverse set of skill, as PR is no longer strictly about press agentry but also about many other hard and soft skills, particularly with the advent of new media. The study therefore complements existing knowledge on the role of PR practitioners in corporate organizations as well as the nature of the PR profession itself.

Background to the study

One of the traditional assumptions is that "journalism was the route to public relations" (Franklin et al 2009). In the history of PR and today it is believed emphasis is placed on publicity stance of the organization in the media (Rowson 2005; Jefkins and Yadin 1998). Lloyd and Toogood (2015) suggest that, "PR still needs journalism." Public relations is assumed to be quite vexing if you are not so sure of the key areas to concentrate on in order to bring success to the organization at the end of the day. This study builds on media experience and the practice of modern day public relations. A closer look is also given to those public relations practitioners without the media background and how they are tackling contemporary public relations. This is because public relations is not basically about the media as Macnamara (2001) suggests that the majority of PR activities are not related to the media.

The study then comes in to examine the nexus between media experience and contemporary public relations practice since it is now believed that it is not always the case to have a journalistic background (Franklin et al 2009). Since back then and even today there is an interface between news and PR. It is of great importance to take note that there is an 'interface between news and public relations practice' (Black 1999). News editors and journalists to an extent are influenced by stories from the PR office. PR practitioners and journalists are quite dependent on each other (Bardhan and Sriramesh 2006) thus, media experience assists public relations practitioners not to fall victim of journalists. Media experience especially in the

broadcast sector helps to groom authoritative spokespersons of organizations as they will be able to provide information that is accurate, prompt, and satisfactory (Rowson 2005).

That means organizations need that kind of public relations personnel who will be able to make sure that the image of the organization is intact by the way it is represented to the publics. An organization's image influences the stakeholders' willingness to support and this depends on the image that the publics have about the organization. Image is conceived through communication patterns as Brad Hughes' famous quote says, "*when reporters call they want answers, those who are not around to answer and who respond, 'no comment' are going to be portrayed differently than those who provide as much information as is feasible and appropriate.*" This reflects how this research has been overdue in terms of enlightening the intricacy of media experience and contemporary public relations practice.

Due to the changing times, the internet and technology has revolutionized PR practice. Contemporary public relations practice does not only center on journalism as the internet and technology has intervened in the current practices of PR (Lloyd and Toogood 2015; DUHE 2007; Potter et al 2001). Thus, contemporary PR practitioners ought to resort to the two way symmetric model which generates a balanced engagement with the publics and stakeholders. There is no doubt the internet has brought developments to business, the media and to PR (Franklin et al 2009; Skinner et al 2010). Online conversational skills between stakeholders and PR practitioners are being developed daily, whilst skipping journalists in between. There is now direct communication with key stakeholders and publics without journalists in between (Franklin et al 2009). Thus the two way asymmetrical models of communication are being override by two way symmetric replicas.

This study then comes in to unveil other skills that need to be acquired to become a full package in the practice of contemporary practice. (Beard 2000) proposes that, "although an organization must have a consistent approach to communication and reputation management, the overall process can be divided into a number of areas that is financial and corporate communication, government affairs, community relations, marketing and internal communication." Other PR functions include events management, fundraising, public affairs, research and advertising Macnamara (2001). This means there is need to be flexible whilst having that exceptional communication skill.

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Significance of the Study

The background of this study has been reflecting that key debates in the past centered on just media and public relations. This context of research ought to scrutinize the importance of media experience in contemporary public relations practice. It is worthwhile to further investigate how the experience in media, be it practical or academic wise aids to all the work in contemporary public relations practice.

The modern world is developing especially with the advent of technology and the internet, so is contemporary public relations practice. This study then aims to articulate the qualities or rather skills to be attained by an ideal public relations practitioner in Zimbabwe and even beyond since it is becoming one global world. Thus the major purpose of this research is to improve and prepare PR practitioners on current expectations of the industry in order to avoid or lessen confusion to those who want to be experts, so that focus on what is important.

Statement of the problem

This research comes in to articulate the relationship between some media background and public relations practice. Since times are changing, there is need to know the skills required to package an ideal contemporary public relations practitioner. Due to the increasing use of the internet and advancing technology it means the public relations practitioners must acquire certain skills to keep up in the contemporary world. Public relations practitioners can end up being intimidated in their career by the pressures of the globalized world that is becoming more and more modern each day.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- Identify and recommend the skills set required of an 'ideal' contemporary public relations practitioner.
- Determine the contemporary challenges and prospects to the practice of public relations.
- Explain the importance of media experience in contemporary public relations practice.

Research Questions

- What are the skills set required of an 'ideal' contemporary public relations practitioner?
- What are the challenges and prospects of practicing PR in contemporary times?
- What is the importance of media experience in contemporary public relations practice?

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Scope of the study

The research is based in Zimbabwe. Its focus is on different public relations practitioners with reputable media experience and who directly ventured into the industry without the journalistic experience. A human resources practitioners' angle is sought to help and identify skills that package an ideal PR practitioner in order to meet expectations of requirements. Experiential accounts are drawn from practitioners that represent reputable corporate organization in Harare where there are the headquarter branches that derive a successful positive image and reputation. The organizations include Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe (CAAZ), Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, Zimbabwe Power Company (ZPC), Econet, Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management, Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC) and Zimbabwe Agricultural Society (ZAS).

Limitations of the study

Face to face interviews may not be successful to an extent due to work related pressures in terms of their schedules, hence resorting to telephone or online interviews. There has also been few Zimbabwean literature to link to this study as it is first of its own kind based on the scrutiny made so far between media experience and contemporary public relations practice.The study of public relations practice is being tackled largely from a media centered approach which therefore limits the validity of other elements' in PR line of view.

Assumptions of the study

Public relations practitioners with media experience ought to have more advantages in terms of PR job expertise.

There are other areas of expertise that can outweigh media experience in the practice of contemporary public relations.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the interests of the research. It has also highlighted the main concerns which the researcher ought to address in the following chapters. The following chapter is Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter interacts with the authoritative literature from various scholars in relation to attributes of public relations practice. Scholarly perceptions and theories in relation to this research are put into consideration. The chapter also covers the theoretical framework of the study.

Public Relations and the Media

Public Relations is "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (Grunig and Hunt's 1984). The Institute of Public Relations in UK appreciates PR as "synonymous with reputation that is, what you do, what you say and what others say about you." The Institute of Public Relations goes on to define PR practice as "the discipline which looks after reputation with the aim of earning understanding, support and influencing opinion and behavior" (Beard 2000). Media channels such as the radio, television, newspapers and magazines are normally used in public relations to communicate with stakeholders in order to build long lasting relationships through reputation and image management. This study builds upon the knowledge of public relations and the media to explain the importance of media experience and contemporary public relations practice.

The technician and manager are two roles that frequently emerge in PR practice. Broom and Dozier (1986) highlight that, "two basic roles of a PR practitioner firstly as the communications technician, who focuses on tactical matters such as writing, event and media management, secondly as the communications manager, who has a more strategic communication perspective and will normally create overall strategy, take and analyses client briefings and deal with issues and crises." The role of a technician is the craft side of PR practice which involves the capturing of photos, editing, making calls to the media, handling of communication production, writing and running special events. The technician's duties implement the management's communication strategies. The PR manager's role focuses on activities that identify and solve public relations problems. Public relations managers advise senior managers on communication needs and are responsible for comprehensive organizational results.

If PR managers are in a position to carry out the duties of a technician and a manager, they achieve a higher status in the decision making process of the organization. They must deliver

the role of a PR manager in a way which convinces top management to understand the value and demand of the public relations function. In relation to the study, media experience then gives the ability to handle well the media reports about the organization that would have been discovered through media watch and skills to handle journalists better during media engagement so as to avoid a negative image through publicity as most stakeholders believe in the media.

Communication and the media play a pivotal role in the practice of Public Relations. Penrose (2015) says, "the main PR functions are media relations; corporate communication, reputation and crisis management; measurement, monitoring and participation on social media, executive communication and managing corporate external website." Thus, the research suggests that expertise in the media field for instance a former journalist who experienced on communication daily, would make life easier in the practice of PR. A good example is that a former journalist practicing public relations has a social capital base already when it comes to media relations and has the potential to manipulate the media through those networks by influencing favorable content production for corporate reputation and crisis management.

Traditionally, an ideal PR practitioner was believed to be that person who had some journalistic experience. Franklin et al (2009) says for years the primary route in PR was to work first as a journalist and move to public relations in mid-career. That means for the most part the entry point was the newsroom to reach the final destination of being a PR practitioner, however is it always the case in today's practice? Nowadays it is believed journalism background can be foregone for other qualities, as Franklin et al (2009) contends. The contribution of this study is to understand whether PR practitioners are still being sourced from newsrooms by corporate companies and was it a dream come true in terms of career progression from being a journalist to PR practitioners under study. Thus exploring the link between media experience and contemporary public relations practice.

PR practitioners who pay more attention to the media business have a journalistic background. Macnamara (2001) suggests that, "those public relations practitioners involved in media relations, are mostly former journalists themselves." Much of their time is involved in assisting the media gain access and stories. However, Black (1999) notes that it is the duty of the public relations staff to do everything possible to facilitate the flow of news from the organization. He adds that the initiating of articles is a very useful means of bringing the organization and its activities to the notice of a wide public. The argument advanced by this research is that strategic

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PR is about the reputation of the organization through journalistic experience as the media are powerful in image and reputation construction.

Journalists usually have the idea that the PR office is one of the most credible sources when reporting about a certain organization (Macnamara 2001). PR practitioners with media background are then not intimidated by journalists as they have a glimpse of how to be on the authoritative position when dealing with the media. Macnamara (2001) further contends that this includes 'educating' management on the needs of the media, their need for quick response and encouraging the management to talk to the media. This is because most managers hide behind the words 'no comment.' This relates to the study media experience and contemporary public relations practice to add as well as maintaining the flavor of PR practitioners to remain that tried and tested eligible sound.

The image and reputation of an organization can always be improved through positive news delivered to the publics. Macnamara (2001) says public relations executives play an 'information broker' role, by identifying potential news and facilitating the release of information through statements or interviews. Rowson (2005) notes that "sustained media coverage can raise the credibility of your organization." This research comes in to recognize the need to develop a journalistic eye to enhance the image and reputation of your organization through the media.

The best means of building the image of an organization or protect it is through the media so as to create favorable interests and perceptions of your publics. Rashid (2014) highlights that "public relations practitioners are hired to protect, enhance or build their relationships through media, in which if there is a positive media story or when the news is bad they will formulate the best response and mitigate the damage." A PR practitioner must therefore develop news sense and the ability to identify and sell what is newsworthy (Rashid 2014). The study aims to break the silence on the importance of media experience in PR practice as they will be having a certain critical and analytical eye that observes more than just the ordinary.

Macnamara (2001) is of the view that much time of many PR executives is occupied by answering journalists' questions and providing information at the media's request or invitation. Public Relations staff provide an information service on a daily basis to the media thus the need of excellent communication skills as with the telephone, your body language and posture will affect how your voice sounds (Rowson 2005). It is always best to have correct information on your fingertips as a PR practitioner. This helps to be confident with what you disclose and you

will be a reliable source for the media as there are high chances of never being off the record with journalists (Beard 2000). The contribution of this research is to groom PR practitioners on the basis of broadcast type of journalism that does not entertain stammering whether on the record, on air, over the telephone and face to face conversations as you need to have the ability to know what to say correctly and fluently.

Jefkins and Yadin (1998) says, "The PR practitioner deals with journalists, media editors and broadcasting producers which makes the use of media vital part of a PR practitioner's professional life." That means there is need to understand the urgency of the media and the pressure under which media editors work under. This study proposes the argument that applies in the sense that PR personnel with media experience get to appreciate that there are deadlines to be met and that there are particular pages or columns that are allocated for PR stories due to the scarcity of space.

Pitching is an important element of presenting communications programme. Franklin et al (2009) advances pitching as a core skill of the PR practitioner. It includes audience analysis and message formation. This research endeavors to contribute some knowledge that, a PR practitioner has to be a strong presenter and have persuasive communication skills basing on journalistic understanding be it academic or practical wise.

Most publics respect the name of a famous former media personnel who represents an organization as a PR practitioner. Franklin et al (2009) define celebrity as a person who is widely recognized in a society and commands public and media attention. Newscasters can be identified as celebrities. The study comes in to clarify that, it is therefore advantageous to create a name in the media field as it will add value in terms of brand identity on behalf of an organization as a PR practitioner as your name will be attached to positive image and identity you have.

Building relationships with the media is certainly a core channel of communication with all publics but there is a wide range of other activities that PR practitioners are involved in.

Other key PR elements beyond the media

There are other key elements of public relations practice beyond the media. Black (1999) highlights that PR practice focuses on a long term responsibility and achieve mutual understanding by securing the willing acceptance of attitudes and ideas. Which means there

are other important areas of PR practice that one should not forego as they are key in shaping mutual understanding with key stakeholders. However, the other purpose of this research is to prove that even the other elements of PR can be handled better or managed by a practitioner with media experience as journalists get to engage with those elements somewhere or somehow in their news production processes.

Public relations practice can be divided into a number of areas. These are financial and corporate communication, government affairs, community relations, marketing and internal communication (Beard 2000). Events management, fundraising, public affairs, research and advertising are other elements of PR practice Macnamara (2001).

Issues management is an important PR element. In the context of corporate organization management an issue is when there is a controversial inconsistency between the expectations of an organization and its publics, thus issues management facilitates communication leadership (Dougall 2008). It is therefore, a forward-thinking way of solving problems at managerial level by identifying problems, industry changes, and any other potential issues that can either way impact the organization. It requires a knowledge of research, environmental monitoring, the organization's business model, and management strategy. This study then reflects how a PR practitioner with media experience can tackle these issues using some expert knowledge on how some corporate organizations managed their issues from some business reports coverage and will be able to apply the communication process diligently.

Community relations as a PR element is responsible for forming and maintaining relationships with an organization's communities. Community relationships are an essential communication activity undertaken by organizations as they expect to communicate with various publics that include government agencies, creditors, shareholders, consumers, employees, the media and general public, hence the need to implement an effective communication plan (Rutzou 2018). This function works hand in clove with philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It includes the strategic donation of funds and sponsoring community events. When engaging in community relations program, it is vital to have a relationship with journalists from local media outlets in order to establish connection with them which can assist in times of crisis (Rutzou 2018). This research then adds on to the relevance of media experience in PR practice as the community relations revolves around communication strategies and media relations which are an area of expertise with former journalists as it becomes easier to fit such environments, thus delivering duties diligently.

Financial and Investor Relations is another important PR function. According to Laskin (2008), "It is a strategic management responsibility that integrates finance, communication marketing and law compliance to enable the most effective two way communication between an organization, the financial community and other constituencies that contribute to a company's securities achieving fair valuation." This study acknowledges that this PR function is responsible for writing an organization's annual general meeting report, the quarterly earnings statements of the company and communicating with investors and market analysts. Thus, this type of public relations practice adds on the knowledge that it normally requires media experience from business and financial reporting.

Marketing communications is an essential element in the practice of public relations. It includes "advertising, direct marketing, branding, packaging, your online presence, printed materials, PR activities, sales presentations, sponsorships, trade show appearances and more," (Wiefels 2002). Publicity and product promotion are the aims of marketing communication. This study builds on the notion that public relations strategies and tactics are used through a press agentry model that is meant to increase awareness and persuade consumers to buy a certain product. Which acknowledges the need of a PR practitioner with media experience and knows how to apply these strategies diligently for the benefit of the organization.

Government Relations, Lobbying and Public Affairs are other key elements of PR practice. Hendricks (2018) notes that government relations focus on how an organization interacts with the government and its officials. This is the part whereby public relations practice develops relationships and interactions that are positive between an organization and government officials. Government relations maintain relationships with regulatory agencies and appointed as well as elected officials. The study adds on that, an articulate skill of diplomacy is essential for this PR element as it can be aligned to the experience in political communication reporting attained from a newsroom background in this line of research.

PR in the era of social media

Public relations practice has made current developments due to the advent of technology. Rashid (2014) says the internet has clearly revolutionized the industry in a short amount of time. This reveals how PR practitioners have to adjust to contemporary online social media practices. Strategic communication is essentially necessitated by the digital communication revolution. This research points out that there is need to take note of media convergence in contemporary public relations practice.

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Computer literacy and active online social media practices are the order of the day in contemporary public relations practice. There is no doubt the internet has brought developments to business, the media and public relations (Franklin et al 2009; Skinner et al 2010). There is now direct communication with key stakeholders and publics without journalists in between (Franklin et al 2009). All kinds of digital devices enable contemporary PR practitioners to stay on top of the latest events in the external communication environment (Skinner et al 2010). Lloyd and Toogood (2015) further support that with the rise of the Internet, a vast new area has opened for PR, which made its practices far less dependent on journalism. Thus, this research comes in to add on that those PR practitioners with or without media experience got to master journalistic skills as they need to be applied on online social media platforms like twitter, Facebook, Skype and instagram when engaging in communication practices directly with the publics without journalists in between.

The internet facilitates two-way communication in public relations. It is important to continuously develop online conversational skills. Duke (2009) says for the future PR practitioner, "online conversational skills" may become just as important as the ability to write a news release. Bhargava (2010) suggests that PR practitioners need to break away from the more traditional information dissemination and two way asymmetrical model of public relations and increasingly adopt the two way symmetric model that emphasize the importance of balanced engagement to build long lasting relationships with the target publics. In support of these line of arguments this study adds on that, a PR practitioner to grow in this industry there is need to be more active on online social media whilst building upon media experience.

The internet has increased productivity, efficiency and effectiveness in the practice of PR today. PR practitioners need to prepare material faster than ever before as stakeholders expect instant updates online when something happens thus practitioners may be under more pressure to produce this instant content (Rashid 2014). This research then brings it on that in this era where there is social media presence, PR practitioners may attain a higher profile by having an active twitter account or content where their name appears online more and avoid the risk of lacking in personality. Thus, new media constitutes a huge opportunity for media relations.

Blogs are alternative sources of news and information. They offer both opportunities and threats to public relations practitioners. Blogs can spread positive information to benefit an organization or spread negative information that can destroy a reputation and cost an organization from a PR perspective. Duke (2009) says, blogs are a powerful new medium that

create new audiences as a media outlet and have changed how PR professionals work. Traditional journalists now look for story ideas on blogs. This study comes in to enlighten that a favorable blog post can become a favorable story in a mainstream media thus PR practitioners should gain more experience on online social media practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Publicity Theory

The press agentry model is the earliest manifestation of the publicity theory which has been refined with the development of time. Publicity emanates from a French word 'publicite' meaning the flow of information from the media to the public. It was called press agentry because information was generated with little regard of the truth (Grunig and Hunt 1984). It was followed by the public information model (Grunig and Hunt 1984). The public information model was used when a former journalist began to work as a writer on behalf of clients, writing news releases to media outlets using the journalistic style of writing. Ivy Ledbetter Lee is known to be the pioneer of being a public information counsellor and came with the idea practicing PR with an element of truth.

Both the press agentry and public information models of public relations are based on effective media relations, writing and technical skills. These concepts are however based on a one-way dissemination of information. The two models are not management based as they do not focus on research. Research under strategic management involves two way communication. Grunig and Hunt (1984) termed the two management models asymmetrical and symmetrical.

Edward Bernays pioneered the asymmetrical model between 1920 and 1950. It was however, imbalanced in favour of the communicator as it focuses on persuading the publics on an issue or topic that is why it is called asymmetrical. Between 1960 and 1980, Edward Bernays and PR practitioners of that time propounded the symmetrical model. This model builds mutual understanding between the publics and the organization. This communication model is not perfectly balanced but moves the equilibrium of the communication process to have an input and change to an issue.

The practice of public relations went through different stages. Turney (1998) says, "Maximizing awareness were the first manifestations of PR, making news then became critical and thirdly creating a mutual understanding." However the publicity phase has not disappeared. The previous stages of PR practice were not totally phased out but we often see a mix up of

these models in one public relations campaign. Thus the application of the publicity theory under the study due to these developments.

Media relations are very valuable as most publics believe in the media. Bernays (1953) described the actions of early practitioners as their work was of obtaining favorable mention in the press for their employers. Turney (1998) highlights that "To know us is to love us" could be considered the rallying cry of the practitioners and clients who believed in this approach to public relations. This study aids that the mass media has an endorsing effect when it comes to the publicity of an organization. Thus media experience assists in creating excellent media relations in the practice of contemporary due to the social network capital.

Publicity is about being known preferably for the good to build the image of an organization. Bernays (1953) notes publicity as "gaining public visibility or awareness for a product, service or your company via the media." Public relations practitioners focused their efforts on "making the news" and they measured their success in terms of how many newspaper and magazine column-inches were devoted to the organizations they represented. Other common measures of success became press release placement rates, the percentage of their news releases that were "picked up" and run as news by the media, and the number of media who used each release. This research builds on this line of argument as PR is the strategic management function that helps an organization communicate, establishing and maintaining communication with the public thus the need for media experience in contemporary PR practice to deliver publicity diligently.

PR practitioners ought to have excellent internal relations in order to manipulate publicity. Frederick et al. (1959) says "customer service managers can be trained to identify service issues which have real potential to cause negative publicity. It usually takes time for issues to make their way from the originating department to the newspapers." A trusted whistleblowing process is also a valuable part of this early warning system, because the line management system is imperfect and will sometimes block an issue being escalated. Similarly, for positive publicity, line managers are an excellent source of publicity ideas (Frederick et al. 1959). Expert knowledge of products and customers is vested in the line managers of an organization, and tapping in to this expertise is an excellent way of generating publicity ideas. The relevance of media experience in PR practice is quick identification on how powerful publicity is in reputation construction.

Publicity has advantages of credibility and low costs. Media convergence has changed the cost structure as well through the posting of pictures and videos to websites via a smart phone. However, the disadvantages are lack of control over how your releases will be used, and frustration over the low percentage of releases that are taken up by the media. Publicity is often referred to as the result of public relations in terms of providing favourable information to media and any third party outlets; these may include bloggers, mainstream media, as well as new media forms such as podcasts. A message is conveyed to the publics without deliberately paying for air time or space. This in return creates awareness and carries out more credibility as well. Thus the research brings in the need for media experience in contemporary PR practice to manage publicity with effective communication skills that make up preferred readings for the good of your organization.

Publicity phase has not disappeared even though public relations is growing and changing. It is because publicity and media coverage are important aspects of PR no matter what stage of development it is in. Practitioners in all phases of public relations have to be concerned about the media coverage their publics and stakeholders get.

STAKEHOLDER THEORY

The stakeholder theory is a concept on organizational management and business ethics that addresses morals and values in managing an organization. It was propounded by Edward Freeman in the California Management Review in late 1983 (Freeman 2010). In the traditional view of a company, only the owners or shareholders of the company are important. Stakeholder theory instead argues that there are other parties involved, including employees, customers, suppliers, financiers, communities, governmental bodies, political groups, trade associations, and trade unions. Even competitors are sometimes counted as stakeholders, their status being derived from their capacity to affect the firm and its stakeholders. The nature of what constitutes a stakeholder is highly contested (Miles, 2012). In the public relations field, there is need for various skills to engage different stakeholders as they are key to the success of an organization. In this research, this is the part of acknowledging other elements of public relations practice not merely concentrating on the media as indicated in the above mentioned themes or rather the inclusion of the media in stakeholder engagement programmes.

Stakeholder theory is used as one of the frameworks in corporate social responsibility (CSR) methods. Since CSR is one of the PR roles there is need for that ability to engage with local stakeholders. Mitchell, et al. (1997) derives a typology of stakeholders based on the attributes

of power that is the extent a party has means to impose its will in a relationship, legitimacy in terms of socially accepted and expected structures or behaviors, and urgency to stakeholder's claims. CSR involves strategically donating funds and sponsoring community events. This research comes in to articulate that since different communities support organizations one way or the other, there is the need for them to feel valued in order to keep up the image of the organization and publicize its good investment in stakeholders through the media, which may suggest a need for journalistic experience in contemporary PR practice to know when to critically engage the media.

Weiss (2014) illustrates how stakeholder analysis can be complemented with issues management approaches to examine societal, organizational, and individual dilemmas. Friedman and Miles (2002) explore the implications of contentious relationships between stakeholders and organizations by introducing compatible/incompatible interests and necessary/contingent connections as additional attributes with which to examine the configuration of these relationships. This research then comes in to hint the necessity of forward thinking skills required on PR practitioners when handling issues with various stakeholders like the employees and customers.

Government and business stakeholders are categorized with different levels of importance and with caution in the practice of strategic PR depending on the environment or season. Robert Allen Phillips (2003) respectively distinguishes between normatively legitimate stakeholders (those to whom an organization holds a moral obligation) and derivatively legitimate stakeholders (those whose stakeholder status is derived from their ability to affect the organization or its normatively legitimate stakeholders). Under the research, there is need for quick analytical skills probably out of media experience and quickly advice the organization in supporting relevant stakeholders at the right time for the good of the organization. In order to succeed and be sustainable over time, executives must keep the interests of customers, suppliers, employees, communities and shareholders aligned and going in the same direction.

Craig McDonald, Professor Emeritus of Informatics at the University of Canberra in Australia, has written extensively on stakeholder theory on how it can shape the future success of a company. McDonald says "Publics" is the term used for stakeholders in the public relations literature. This is because the public relations profession evolved from journalism. These publics become segmented into more homogenous subsets that help communicators choose appropriate channels for reaching them. For example, publics can be employees, shareholders,

political leaders and consumers. However, research in public relations has recently turned to the value of the relationships these publics have with organizations. This emphasis has encouraged adaptation of the term "stakeholder".

The stakeholder theory suggests that a company's real success lies in satisfying all its stakeholders. These groups would include customers, employees, suppliers, political action groups, environmental groups, local communities, the media, financial institutions, governmental groups, and more. This view paints the corporate environment as an ecosystem of related groups, all of whom need to be considered and satisfied to keep the company healthy and successful in the long-term. In light of this theory, the study seeks to find out the key skills that a PR practitioner should have in order to provide excellent service to stakeholders through CRS projects, media engagement, issues and events management.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter covers research approach, design, sampling techniques, data collection techniques and data presentation methods. The chapter discusses and justifies the selected instruments which are the interview and archival research explaining how each of them is used in the research.

Research Paradigm

The researcher uses qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a methodology used for investigating and aiming to understand the meaning individuals and groups attribute to a social or human problem (Creswell; 2009).

> The process of research involves the emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis from participants to general themes and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data' (Creswell; 2009:3).

This research centers on how media experience aids on the skills that package an ideal public relations person. Stake (2010) stipulates that qualitative research relies more on human understanding or perception.

Research design

The research design used is a multiple case study. It makes use of different PR practitioners' from different organizations depending on their various experiences.

Research population

Population is defined as the entire group a researcher is interested in, the group about which the researcher wishes to draw conclusion. That is unit of analysis is the subject of study about which an analysis can be generalized from (Michael et al: 2004). In this research the target population includes public relations and human resources (HR) practitioners that have a media background and those without any media experience. The study selected five PR practitioners and two HR personnel of people practicing recommendable contemporary PR in Zimbabwe from commended corporate companies.

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Sampling

Sampling is the idea of selecting a few units from a bigger group to become the basis for estimating or predicting a fact, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group. In this study Purposive and Snowball Sampling are utilized.

Purposive Sampling is whereby the researcher chooses the sample based on who they think would be appropriate for the study. For example, experiential accounts of different public relations practitioners who are making it in the PR industry. Five PR practitioners and two Human Resources practitioners is the sample that will execute the skills that package an ideal modern PR practitioner. Two HR personnel are good enough for the researcher since the study is concentrating more on PR practitioners and the two can represent the larger population of employers who look at the skills and qualifications when recruiting. Snowball sampling will then be used when referred by other public relations practitioners to some of their industry colleagues to assist in the study. This sample is drawn from corporates whose headquarters are in Harare, Zimbabwe representing a reputable image managed by them as it reflects expertise. These include Econet, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), Zimbabwe Power Company (ZPC), Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe (CAAZ), ZETDC, Zimbabwe Agricultural Society (ZAS) and Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management (ZIMPARKS).

Methods of data gathering

This research aims on executing the need of media experience as a skill in the practice of modern day PR. Qualitative researchers find data that can represent personal experiences situations (Stake 2010). Interviews are used in this study.

Interviews

Interviews are used to get information from different contemporary PR practitioners in corporate organizations that are performing well in headquarter branches in Harare. Selected interviewees include Prisca Utete from ZETDC and Roberta Katunga from ZAS who are practicing commendable PR with media experience. These two then referred the interviewer to other practitioners from reputable organizations that are practicing creditable PR. The ones referred to are Nunurai Ndawana under CAAZ, Walter Chakuzira from ZTA and Dumisani Chihoto from ZIMPARKS. An HR point of view was sought to aid the knowledge on the skills and qualifications that package an ideal PR Practitioner from Denis Nyabadza who is under Econet and Lionell Marimo from ZPC. Interviews exchange information and obtain immediate response which allows one to deal with questions and objectives immediately (Wood; 2001).

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The interview questions dwelled on media experience in contemporary PR practice, the current developments in the practice of PR and the skills and qualifications required of an 'ideal' contemporary PR practitioner (see appendix for questions). Face to face interviews were used in this study to get the requisite information on Media experience and contemporary PR practice there and then.

The use of interviews helps the experts to share their vast knowledge and current developments in the PR field. Gunter (2000) says interviews encourage interviewees or sources to express their opinions at length and they can disclose more about their opinions, attitudes and conduct. Views and opinions can also be expressed in the form of writing, thus the researcher also resorts to online interviews via email due to the limited resource of time and expenses such as transport on both the interviewer and interviewee. Gunter (2000:26) also says in interviews, "the interviewer generally works from a questionnaire or interview schedule in which questions are asked in a predetermined order" and the respondent gives out answers.

Methods of data analysis

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a process of working with raw data to identify and interpret key ideas or themes. Matthews and Ross (2010) say, thematic analysis is 'a process of segmentation, categorization and relinking of aspects to the data prior to final interpretation.' In this study the researcher starts with each respondent's words and put them alongside the words of other respondents, so as to describe the data; get to the meaning of the data from the interviewee and analyze it.

Data presentation methods

Since it is a qualitative research, qualitative data analysis will be used as a way of presenting information. Qualitative thematic approach will be used to present all my findings. Therefore my findings will be presented thematically, explaining the findings on my research.

Ethical considerations

Gray (2014) observes that "ethics are like the golden rule and a code of conduct that one should be able to distinguish between right and wrong." Therefore to avoid ethical dilemmas the researcher reassures that interviewees have an informed consent that the research questions are for academic purposes. The researcher also submits detailed research plan for approval to the

participants so that they are well prepared in order to give accurate responses that are relevant to the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter all the methods which are used to gather information are presented. The collection and data analysis that the researcher uses is also highlighted in this chapter, together with the ethical considerations. Qualitative research methods are administered in the study. The next chapter focuses on the political economy of the PR industry.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE PR INDUSTRY IN ZIMBABWE

Introduction

This chapter lays out the funding mechanism of the public relations industry which is of great significance to its political economy. Various themes like control, origins and current developments of the PR industry and the regulatory framework are discussed. Which helps us to understand how PR practitioners under study work to deliver their daily duties.

Origins of Public Relations

A discussion of the history of PR is important because it has been used by theorists to explain how PR is practiced and to produce theories. Practice develops theory and theory helps develop practice, so theory and practice are intricately linked. The practice of public relations on the continent goes all the way back to ancient times. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) appreciate the beginnings of public relations in the influence from Iraq (farm bulletins), India (King's spies), Greece (vox populi, vox dei), England (Lord Chancellors) and the Catholic Church (Congregatio de Propaganda Fide).

Ivy Lee is suggested as one of those who started the PR profession in the 20th century. Litwin (2000:2) says:

> Public relations became a profession in 1903 when Ivy Lee professionalized public relations introducing principles of telling the truth, providing accurate facts and being able to influence the decision making of top management. Lee defined public relations, saying: 'Public relations means the actual relationship of the company to the people and that relationship involves more than talk.' The company must do so by performing good deeds.

Letwin (2000) also says, "Public relations took the next step toward professionalism in 1918 as Edward Bernays advised the President of the new country of Czechoslovakia to announce independence on a Monday, rather than on a Sunday to get maximum press coverage." Edward Bernays may be called the father of public relations and Ivy Lee the first public relations counsellor.

PR practice went through three different stages to where it is today. Turney (2003) says, "public relations practice began with the publicity phase which was known through press agentry, then followed by the explanatory stage emphasizing on the provision of more information on its actions and policies." Now organizations focus less on traditional efforts but to make an engagement and outreach with the media to be more organic (Turney 2003).

Institute of PR in UK (2012) says the Internet has changed communication dramatically. PR practitioners must keep up with the changes in transmission of information if they wants to retain their role as communicators between the public and organizations. Modern PR thus besides the traditional tools also implements online tools and tactics, including social media such as blogs, content publishing and podcasts.

In Zimbabwe PR practice borrows from these international standards of the profession as it now a one global village. PR is largely known by experienced journalists as positive publicity of an organisation to create a good name and reputation through the media.

Control of the PR Industry

Ownership and control is one of the major factors in political economy. Klaehn (2005) notes that elite media interlock with other institutional sectors in ownership, management, social circles and effectively circumventing their ability to remain analytically detached from the power structure of society of which they themselves are an integral part of. This means that the media do no operate as standalone but some organizations have a control of them. Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model propounds that, "the media are closely interlocked and share common interests with other dominant institutional sectors (corporations, state and banks)." It suggests that the media are then controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market profit oriented forces. Thus the symbiotic nature of the relationship reflects reciprocity of interests.

Klaehn (2005) notes the influence of advertising values on the process of news production. That is to remain financially viable in business, most media must sell markets (readers) to buyers (advertisers). This is because adverts from various individuals and organizations become the petrol tank of any media house. So the PR office is one of the branches that places adverts to media houses, thus having some control on how the content is produced in their favour.

Sources that include the PR office influence the type of content produced by the media. Klaehn (2005) highlights that "the elites facilitate the gathering process through press releases, advance copies of speeches, periodicals, photo opportunities and ready for news analysis." As the PR practitioners are involved in the news gathering process, they therefore have the ability to control on how their organizations are covered in the media through their pitch.

Influencing and manipulating journalists on how they should write stories that is favourable for one's self is called media interference. Interference comes in the form of legal, self-

censorship, interference by owners, political and corporate organizations (usually through PR) are common forms of interference (IMPI report 2014).

Funding of the PR Industry

The political economy of communications is to investigate how changes in the array of forces that exercise control over cultural production, distribution limit or liberate the public sphere (Curran and Gurevith 2000). Funding is one of the elements that affect production and distribution of services. Every PR personnel got to please their employer or organization because he who pays the piper detects the tune. There is need to defend, maintain and uphold the reputation of the organization to all stakeholders, publics and even the media.in whichever way it takes.

Funding mechanism affects the outcome of content production. Curran and Gurevith (2000) say that "communication researchers have commonly analyzed this process as one of agenda building, in which the state effectively gives subsidies to media organizations by reducing the effort required to discover and produce information for their audiences." In an increasing PR state the provisions of such subsidies can range from the entirely healthy distribution essential information with which to explain and facilitate public policy to the nefarious management of news in which being economical with the truth becomes an accessory of political life.

Doyle (2013) says that economic factors such as firms make their decisions in a rational manner and in pursuit of what are assumed to be their own individual goals (of respectively, profit and utility maximization). Which means the government needs to step in to control the abuse of such power.

Regulatory Framework of the PR Industry

Currently the PR industry does not have a regulatory body that monitors them but they operate by the guidelines of ethics. The ethics are usually grounded in journalism. These include reporting truthfully and considering facts in all reports produced.

Institutions that offer PR training

The Zimbabwe Institution of Public Relations offers technical training of PR especially those that are already in professional corporate world. Theoretical training is offered at University level at UZ, MSU, NUST and GZU under media and journalism departments. There seems to be no symbiotic link between the trainers, users of trained skills and industrial placements (IMPI report 2014).

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This current situation requires maximum attention from the Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting services to work hand in hand with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to monitor and review the national media and PR training curriculum.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The findings address the objectives and questions drafted in Chapter 1. The research questions are being responded to in this chapter are; what is the importance of media experience in contemporary public relations practice? What are the skills set required of an 'ideal' contemporary public relations practitioner? What are the current developments in the practice of public relations? This study was largely qualitative in nature hence data was obtained through thematic analysis and presented thematically.

Skills that make up an ideal PR practitioner

The research also found out that the key skills for an ideals PR practitioner are:

- Online publicity and conversational skills
- Marketing skills
- Excellent communication skills
- Writing skills
- Media and stakeholder engagement skills

Respondents in the study indicated that journalism practice was the most important of these skills. The study found out that there is more to public relations than commonly assumed. There is no one specific requirement of qualifications when it comes to PR practice as it is diverse.

Nunurai Ndawana a PR practitioner from Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe (CAAZ) highlighted that there is no fixed public relations qualifications. He says, "One can be employed in the public relations office with the following qualifications: Marketing, Journalism and Media studies, English and Communication, Sales and Consumer and PR itself" (interview). These qualifications give a reflection of what the PR Office is about. Qualifications in marketing give one the ability to perform well when it comes to exhibitions, creating budgets and executing the four Ps of marketing (Product, Place, Pricing and Promotion) which are important in PR practice. Media qualifications gives one a better position when it comes to press relations and writing skills. As for English and Communication one has the potential to become an authoritative spokesperson as well as the skill of right diction use for example in

meetings with stakeholders. This means that these qualifications give the reflection of being able to acknowledge the guidelines of both the stakeholder and publicity theory in contemporary PR practice. These practitioners are in the position to give much value to both the media and stakeholders from their study backgrounds as they know their worth to the organization and how they affect the goodwill of the business.

Ndawana further elaborates on the importance of work experience in public relations. "Three years working experience is ideal for starting position in a high speed organization," he said. Three years appears to be the average work experience required to qualify as a PR practitioner. Dennis Nyabadza a Human Resources Manager from Econet company advices "a minimum of two years' work experience for supervisory level and four years for managerial level." Thus work experience is considered in shaping an ideal PR practitioner as suggested by the popular saying "practice makes perfect". Ndawana says, "I feel like I have gained a lot from my experience. It ensures that I adapt to many different situations and developed various skills set (interview)." Thus, skills are gained through continuous training and practice. Which means you do not just wake up an ideal PR practitioner, you always start from somewhere. This work experience improves the skill of making some quick decisions and handling different situations even when you are not under supervision during stakeholder and media engagement times. It is after one observes that public relations has other elements that contribute to the success of the organization which include the management of the stakeholders expectations and being able to deliver under the guidelines of the stakeholder theory. Thus supporting the focal point of the research media experience and contemporary PR practice

Journalistic skills are essential to the practice of public relations. Walter Chakuzira, a PR practitioner from Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) suggests that "one should have worked in a media house." He proposes that the media experience gives one "the ability to write copies in a better manner" (interview). Roberta Katunga a former *Chronicle* journalist who is a current PR practitioner at Zimbabwe Agricultural Show Society suggests "the writing skills attained from newsrooms makes it easier when producing press releases and speeches in the public relations office" (interview). This supports the publicity theory by reputation management through ethical skills of reporting truthfully in all well-articulated writings both in journalism and PR (like press releases and speeches). Thus, creating a better image and reputation of an organization through media experience in the practice of PR.

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Public Relations is all about managing and working with the publics. Katunga proposes that as a PR practitioner "you have to be a people person" (interview). The importance of this skill is supported by Nyabadza who says, "It is critical in stakeholder management both internal and external" (interview). Managing the publics is centered on the stakeholder theory which suggests that the purpose of a business is to create as much value as possible for stakeholders and in order to succeed and be sustainable over time, executives must keep the interests of customers, suppliers, employees, communities and shareholders usually through issues management. Masuku and Dube (2014) say "publics need to be carefully handled for they have implications on the organizational image and reputation." Thus, these long lasting relationships in business define public relations practice.

Another critical skill for a PR practitioner as suggested by Dumisani Chihoto who is a public relations and communications officer for the Zimbabwe Parks and wildlife Management Authority is that "Most of all is the ability to follow trends that impact your organization's image positively like new technology" (interview). Masuku and Dube (2014) suggest that "PR practitioners who utilize new technologies in corporate communication gain a huge market which results in massive capital inflow to the organization." Thus being able to withstand competition as the stakeholder theory suggests that even your business competitors are your stakeholders as they have an impact to the success of your organization. Therefore reflecting competence in contemporary PR practice especially with the advent of social media in the globalized world.

The importance of media experience in PR practice

This research found out that media experience is one of the crucial essentials when practicing PR. In line of the publicity theory, all PR practitioners interviewed in the study acknowledged the importance of journalism and media qualifications or experience.

Media experience and qualifications continue to recur as an essential in PR practice. Chihoto suggests that:

> One needs to possess a communications degree that incorporates media, journalism, communication and multi-modality. The experience a public relations personnel needs is creative writing, exposure with stakeholders that work hand and clove with the organization you represent (interview).

The importance of media and journalism as a qualification reflects its pivotal role in PR practice. This suggests that communication and writing patterns define contemporary public

relations practice. It also comes in support of the publicity theory which suggests that writing and technical skills remain important in all stages of PR (Grunig and Hunt 1984). Which proves that the media remain an important aspect of public relations no matter what stage of development.

Chakuzira proposes that having media experience when practicing public relations gives one the ability to dominate when it comes to content production. He says, "The past media relations from the newsroom help to manipulate stories, in terms of how you want the content produced for your organization" (interview). Back then, media people were just meant for the newsroom but now they can work at an added advantage in public relations and dominate their colleagues on stories they write about their organizations. This continuously reflects the relevance of the publicity theory as one of the duties of PR practitioners is obtaining favorable press reports for their employers (Bernays 1953). Thus journalism and PR practice remain intertwined.

PR practitioners with media experience have the ability of influencing readings when writing stories for their organizations. Chihoto recognizes the importance of journalism experience for every PR practitioner. He admits that, "my experience in journalism is not that vast but it is essential for any PR practitioner to learn or know how to write a story and have the reader view your objective positively" (interview). Thus, defining the situation of interpretation as PR practitioners endeavor the meaning making process of the publics and influence how they think about issues on their organization. This notion goes along with the publicity theory which proposes that when an organization releases information it clearly articulate the reasons for its actions and policies so its publics would understand, sympathize with, and patronize the organization (Turney 2003). Thus the need the need for having media experience when practicing PR.

Press relations are one of the crucial elements in the practice of public relations. Katunga adds on that journalistic experience assists in having "easy connections for press relations that are more stable" (interview). Relationships are much more preferred when they are stable and guaranteed to be long lasting. In business it is always easier to do business with people you are familiar with like how journalists and former journalists (in PR) relate in a positive friendly manner due to their established network. The publicity theory supports the idea of having strong media relations. Therefore, the social capital base that PR practitioners have who were former journalists benefits the organization at the end of the day when it comes to how their brand and reputation are handled by the media.

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PR practitioners with a journalistic background feel more prepared for impending media interviews. Katunga suggests that media experience "helps when doing media engagement when practicing public relations" (interview). One is not afraid when it comes to giving speeches and knowing what to say at the right time to the media since you will be familiar with their working traits. In relation to publicity theory, the PR office is one of the most credible sources when reporting about a certain organization (Macnamara 2001). Thus, PR practitioners with media background are therefore not intimidated by journalists as they have a glimpse of how to be on the authoritative position when dealing with the media.

Journalism experience assists one on how journalists think and behave. Prisca Utete who is a former reporter of ZBC and now a PR Manager at ZETDC spoke about the concept of pitching. "Pitching is one of the best ways to entice journalists to tell your business' story" (interview). This ability determines how much attention will be given to the story about your organization. For example if you communicate with newsroom editors you are well connected to and present well what you want to be covered about your organization, it will become an expected and well attended to diary at the end of the day. In the light of publicity theory PR practitioners work hand in hand with editors, journalists, television and radio producers (Jefkins and Yadin 1998). This gives higher chances of the story to be reported in a more positive light which will be a benefit to the organization's reputation. Thus the need to have media experience in PR practice as pitching will be quite easier to tackle from the newsroom background.

The concept of photo-journalism when capturing pictures and videos is crucial in today's PR practice. Ndawana proposes that "in contemporary PR practice any programme or event carried out like Corporate Social Responsibility projects, should be captured, text produced and posted on social media. Those journalistic skills come to pitch in as a public relations practitioner has to create content that attracts more views, likes and retweets online" (interview). This then helps to raise the organization's flag through public relations under the saying "when you do well, you communicate." This idea goes along the guidelines of both the stakeholder and publicity theory in the sense that one will be upholding the effigy of the organization through publicizing about the good investment in stakeholders through the media. There will also be the sense of urgency like reporting live as it happens, engaging the organization's stakeholders and publics to benefit all at the same time.

Some organizations get to hire PR practitioner from the name that they would have made in the newsroom. Prisca Utete says, "An established name is an added advantage in the PR

industry because the stakeholders or publics get to pay more attention to what you will be saying as a brand already" (interview). This supports the argument of Franklin et al (2009) that says "a person who is widely recognized in a society commands public and media attention." It comes in the same line of thought from publicity theory that promotes brand awareness through the media. Thus issues to do with reputation and image management can be associated to brands (of names) from the media industry.

There is the issue of publications that are produced by the public relations department for the organization that needs to be given a closer look to. Prisca Utete says that, "Public relations practitioners get to publish magazines usually when working for corporate organizations either annually or bi-annually. They should be equipped with article writing skills, editing and laying out the magazine" (interview). This helps in reducing costs for the organization in terms of finding external labour to do the editing and layout business of the publication. Thus, dwelling in the same light of publicity theory where former journalists in PR can implement their journalistic skills of writing PR publications. One can therefore observe the need for media experience in the practice of contemporary public relations.

Public Relations practitioners need to keep abreast on social media use
The study found out that internet has revolutionized the PR practice. This means that public relations practitioners have to adjust and keep abreast to modern PR as indicated by the respondents.

The internet has brought significant changes to the practice of public relations. Ndawana points out that, "Online developments have revolutionized the PR field. Blogging, Online PR, storytelling and search engine optimizers (SEOs)" (interview). Thus we are now living in a globalized world that is fast and one has to trend with the times to remain competent in the PR industry. One can note that even in the modern practice of PR there is still need for some media experience as blogging and online story telling are articulated better when one there are journalistic skills. The publicity theory has shifted to another level of being applicable in both traditional and online media in public relations practice.

PR centers on communicating and maintaining favourable relations with the publics. Ndawana entails that, "these tools have been aided by social media and create the quickest way to reach the public. They also provide a window in gaining insights and establishing the reach and tradability of the brand" (interview). Therefore, online social media has made communication to be that instant with the publics as well as stakeholders that they feel their contributions are

being valued in Public Relations practice as to the guiding principle of the stakeholder theory. Effective communication skills ae then supposed to be used on online media under the publicity theory which has moved to the digital era especially by those PR practitioners with media experience.

Networking is improving by the day with the publics in modern PR. Chihoto says, "with the in cooperation of social media PR practitioners are now more than ever to be associated with bloggers and individuals with a large following to represent their organizations in a positive light" (interview). Thus, linking is becoming easier in public relations as competent practitioners strategically position themselves for purposes of brand identity. The publicity theory endorses that traditional journalists look to blogs for story ideas, hence increasing the number of publics who get to know about your organization preferably in a positive light in both traditional and online social media.

Easy sharing of ideas on what is trending in the PR industry as well as updates. Chakuzira talks of "WhatsApp platforms of PR practitioners where they share ideas of proficiency" (interview). Porter et al (2001) predicted that, "PR practitioners will spend more time online." These online social media networks give the chance to receive breaking news about anything that affects your organization and other stakeholders faster through citizen journalism that is setting the pace for traditional media. When news is received, ways of responding for the good of the organization are then shared, thus reflecting the intricacy between media experience and contemporary public relations practice.

Green PR trend has grown rapidly over the past 3-5 years. "It entails the construction of green zones in public areas or use of smart energy. It places an organism in good footing as a keen environmental conscious company," says Ndawana. Public relations practitioners get to communicate about the organization's CSR and practices that are friendly to the environment with the aim of creating increased awareness of the brand as well as improving the reputation of the organization. One of the normally used strategies are placing news articles and distributing publications thus supporting the publicity theory which emphases of brand awareness through the media. The tactics used in the practice of Green PR entails that there is need for some media experience for communication purposes and the use of news articles.

Conclusion

In the practice of public relations there are skills of success. These include good communication skills, being able to think clearly and act fast, being calm in difficult situations and having that

technical aptitude. Public relations practitioners need to apply skills from the multimedia industry to successfully maintain and strengthen a positive reputation. This is because public relations practitioners use a wide range of media and communication channels to maintain understanding and goodwill between the organization and its publics. These include online social media, which has been trending in recent years. It is essential to have critical, creative and strategic thinking skills to design, implement and evaluate PR campaigns for various stakeholders. Public relations practitioners have to be excellent at media relations, relationship building, issues management, stakeholder liaison, crisis communication, lobbying, public affairs, and the integration of communications functions while developing essential skills in thinking, writing and speaking. There is need to understand the role of public relations reputation management though the various skills discussed above.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the research, its ultimate findings and the recommendations deemed necessary to give to the Public Relations practitioners in the making. The recommendations are structured in a way that suggests how they can improve or be ideal PR practitioners in today's world that is developing at a fast rate. The conclusion and recommendations in this chapter are largely influenced and shaped by the presented data findings in the previous chapter.

Summary of findings

The research sought to investigate and understand the relationship between some media experience and public relations practice. Since times are changing, it aimed at evaluating how the media experience in the print or broadcast sector aids the work of a contemporary public relations expert. This has been so to know the skills required packaging an ideal contemporary public relations practitioner. Experiential accounts of five PR practitioners (see chapter three) were used to articulate the intricacy of media experience in the practice of contemporary public relations with the aid of a Human Resources practitioner on skills that make up an ideal PR person in the modern world. Due to the increasing use of the internet and advancing technology, the researcher tried to analyze and observe that public relations practitioners must acquire certain skills to keep up in the contemporary world. Thus, helping Public relations practitioners avoid to end up being intimidated in their career by the pressures of the globalized world that is becoming more and more modern each day.

The researcher used interviews to solicit information from PR practitioners mentioned in chapter four in the quest for answers to meet the objectives of this research. The data collected was then analyzed and presented thematically. The presentation was more detailed hence it was a qualitative study.

The study noted that it is important to have some media experience in the practice of contemporary public relations. It is essential since one will develop creative writing skills as it is part of the daily activities in PR. A public relations practitioner with media experience will

also have some social network base with other journalists thus, practices excellent press relations as well as media engagement which gives the ability to influence content production that concern his/her organization. The framing and representation skills in articulating stories from the newsroom will assist in influencing and shaping perceptions of the publics and stakeholders in PR practice. Photo-journalism from the newsroom will develop the tactic of capturing items that concern your organization and assists in image building. It is an added advantage to venture into public relations with a brand name from the media industry it aids to the image and identity of the organization to publics and stakeholders. Therefore, it is advantageous to endeavor in PR with some media background.

The research further noted the skills that package an ideal contemporary public relations practitioner. Good English and communication skills aids in making up an authoritative spokesperson in PR. Marketing skills help one to be competent during events like exhibitions in public relations. Journalistic skills assists one assists one when it comes to writing articles, press relations and media engagement. One has to be a people person when practicing public relations because a positive image and reputation should be improved each time there is an encounter with them. In contemporary public relations practice one has to be technologically friendly due to the internet revolution. These skills assist in keeping up competence to contemporary PR practice.

It was established from the research that online developments such as blogging have to be articulated well preferably using journalistic skills. This is because traditional media journalists look for stories on blogs online so they need to be handled well. Business relationships with colleagues, publics and stakeholders should be maintained and created through the use of online social media thus one should develop conversational skills.

Conclusions

Being active on online social media platforms is now essential and critical in the practice of PR today so as to withstand the competition of the industry to tackle the needs of the stakeholders and the media.

Recommendations

In contemporary public relations there are skills of success. These include good communication skills, writing and some technical aptitude. Public relations practitioners need to apply skills from the multimedia industry to successfully maintain and strengthen a positive reputation. This is because public relations practitioners use a wide range of media and communication

channels to maintain understanding and goodwill between the organization and its publics. The researcher therefore recommends PR practitioners and those in the making to have some media experience either practically in newsrooms or academically as it is essential as proved by the study.

Areas of further study

Due to internet revolution in public relations, there is the need to survey how PR has improved brand identity and awareness of organizations through online social media. Also to keep on finding the impact of technological advances on Public Relations.

Conclusion

This chapter sums up the study of media experience and contemporary public relations. It has highlighted how media plays a pivotal role in PR practice, the skills that package an ideal public relations practitioner and the current developments that one has to be aware of in modern PR.

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MEDIA EXPERIENCE AND CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE.
EXPERIENTAL ACCOUNTS OF SELECTED PRACTITIONERS

Interview Questions to Public Relations practitioners:

1. May you briefly tell us about yourself and your career background up to today?

2. What are the qualifications and experience required for a PR practitioner?

3. Do you have any experience in journalism?

4. Do you feel like you gain or lack something from this experience?

5. What are the current developments in the PR industry since the time you started practicing?

Interview Questions to Human Resources practitioners:

1. In your spectacles, what kind of experience or qualifications do you inquire when hiring a PR practitioner?

2. Where do you get your PR practitioners from? (Is it from colleges, newsrooms?)

3. How important is the PR office in your organisation?