

The Role of Public Relations on Reputation Management: A Case Study of Orange Mobile Company Sierra Leone Limited

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Abstract

A case study of Orange Mobile Company in Sierra Leone was used in the study to assess the impact of public relations on reputation management. The study's goals were to understand the roles that public relations play in managing Orange Sierra Leone's reputation, identify the problems with public relations that arise when managing Orange Sierra Leone's reputation, identify the best solutions to these problems, and look into the relationship between public relations and Orange Sierra Leone's reputation management. The study used an informal research design to reflect various aspects of study respondents' perceptions, feelings, experiences, facts, and emotional reactions to the study issue. This was a study of a problem or subject that looked at how one factor or variable affected another. This was due to the fact that the resulting research questions need explanatory, descriptive, and analytical components of the research to be observed. The study used a 60-person sample that was taken from a 600-person population. The top administrators of Orange Sierra Leone participated in key informant interviews, which the researcher coordinated and which enriched the study's findings. Data was as well gathered through self-administered questionnaires, which were given to representatives of the Public Relations department so they may respond. The majority of respondents generally felt that representing the company or individual to the media is one of the most well-known functions, which is proof that the concept of public relations is very important to the brand image of the organization. The study comes to the conclusion that creating written and oral documentation is another role of public relations. The study suggests that public relations training should be established in order to provide managers and practitioners with the necessary information and abilities. It is important to arrange seminars and conferences so that staff employees and practitioners with less experience can pick the brains of more knowledgeable individuals. This tactic should reduce dial errors brought on by limited experience.

Keywords: public relations, reputation, corporate, management

1. Introduction

According to material in the literature, public relations dates back to the beginning of human history. Public relations are the art of managing communication between a company and its external audiences to create, direct, and maintain a favorable image (Berkman, 2014). For a company to develop its standing and reputation for its target market, it is a crucial distinction. In order to assert that reputation around the world, public relations perform a variety of important tasks, such as building, preserving, and increasing an organization's reputation (Amin, 2015). A public relations officer's duties include managing and preserving reputation as well as promoting the organization's personnel, goods, services, or solutions (Bavies, 2014). The idea of reputation management nowadays focuses on the importance of a positive reputation as well as the risk of a damaged or lost reputation. Therefore, reputation management is defined as a strategy for establishing and maintaining an organization's reputation while garnering favorable feedback from stakeholders and its target audiences that will enable it to achieve its strategic and financial goals (Bernays &

Edward, 2015).

The importance of public relations has increased in Africa in the current business environment for a number of reasons, the most significant of which is that managers now recognize that corporate reputation truly does affect an organization's success (Black, 2016). The old proverb, "It is cheaper to keep old customers than to recruit new ones" (Berkman, 2014) is an example of how businesses understand that customers are more loyal to organizations with which they have a relationship or connection. Businesses with a poor reputation, however, risk being destroyed during difficult times. For these reasons, public relations are a crucial component of how businesses affect the public and how businesses affect how the public perceives businesses (Botan & Hazleton, 2016).

Many businesses and public institutions in Sierra Leone now employ public relations specialists, and some have even created entire departments for the purpose (Bah, 2023). The firm management will be able to manage its employees and labor with the aid of organizational functions of public relations including employee relations, human resource management, and media relations, as well as a building of confidence among them for the organization and its practices & policies (Black, 2016). This is the world's reality. Government and the corporate sector both understand that a successful PR campaign must go hand in hand with advertising. This can contribute to meeting the needs and expectations of the customer, as well as building a positive reputation—something that advertising can sometimes fail to do (Broom 2016). The company's standing and reputation among its employees are deteriorating. This issue is having significant societal ramifications in addition to corporate ones (Broom, 2016). With the news and information being spread about the company and the number of lawsuits brought against it, its customers are developing a bad impression of it in their minds. Overall, it is having a detrimental effect on its clients and customers (Dozier & Broom, 2015).

The above literature review provides a detailed account of the role and significance of public relations in shaping a company's reputation, drawing on various studies such as those by Berkman (2014), Amin (2015), Davies (2014), Bernays & Edward (2015), Black (2016), Botan & Hazleton (2016), and Bah (2023). These studies offer valuable insights into the functions of public relations, the concept of reputation management, and the increasing importance of public relations in Africa's business environment. For instance, while Berkman (2014) and Amin (2015) both discuss the role of public relations in creating and maintaining a company's image, they approach it from different angles - the former focusing on the art of managing communication, and the latter on the tasks performed by public relations to build and enhance an organization's reputation.

However, the tools used to measure public relations effectiveness and reputation management in the studies did not capture the unique challenges and opportunities in the telecommunications industry or in Sierra Leone's business environment. There is a need for more tailored measurement tools. Furthermore, the studies did not account for potential biases inherent in public relations and reputation management research, such as social desirability bias or response bias, so their findings did not present an overly positive view of the effectiveness of certain public relations strategies. Above all, the studies used data analysis techniques that are not well-suited to capturing the complexities of public relations and reputation management in a rapidly changing industry like telecommunications in Sierra Leone.

Moreover, while the existing literature provides a broad overview of the role of public relations in reputation management, there seems to be a lack of research specifically focusing on the telecommunications industry in Sierra Leone. Also, most of the studies mentioned seem to use a broad approach to understanding public relations and reputation management. There might be a gap in research specifically designed to explore these concepts within the telecommunications industry or within the specific cultural and economic context of Sierra Leone. Again, the studies primarily sampled large, multinational corporations and were based in Western contexts, as such their findings might not be fully applicable to a company operating in Sierra Leone. Research involving companies of similar size and market as Orange Mobile Company Sierra Leone Limited, or within the same industry and region, might be limited.

Addressing these research gaps could provide more nuanced and applicable insights for Orange Mobile Company Sierra Leone Limited and similar companies. It could also contribute to the broader academic discourse on public relations and reputation management.

Thus, the current study, titled "The Role of Public Relations on Reputation Management: A Case Study of Orange Mobile Company Sierra Leone Limited", aims to address this gap by examining the specific roles that public relations play in managing the reputation of Orange Sierra Leone, identifying the problems and solutions related to public relations in managing its reputation, and exploring the relationship between public relations and the company's reputation management.

2. Research Method

This aspect of the research focuses on the methodology and approach carried out for the conduct of the research. It includes the research design, study area, population targeted, sample size, sampling techniques, data analysis, research procedures, and ethical considerations.

2.1 Research Design

The study used a casual research design to represent characteristics of study respondents' perceptions, feelings, experiences, facts, and emotional reactions to the study issue. Casual research design was used to investigate the interactions between different variables (Ajala, 2013). Through this research design, it was possible to find how modifications to the study's independent variables affect dependent variables. This was due to the fact that the resulting research questions needed that explanatory, descriptive, and analytical components of the research observed. General information about the topic was gathered from the many study stakeholders using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies for data gathering and analysis. Officials from the Orange Sierra Leone Department of Public Relations were interviewed thoroughly as part of the qualitative design process. The top management of Orange Sierra Leone, on the other hand, were given closed-ended questionnaires to complete as it was easier for them to do so in their free time for the quantitative design.

2.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Freetown, the Capital and largest city of Sierra Leone. It is a significant port city on the Atlantic Ocean and is situated in the country's Western Region. As the seat of the government of Sierra Leone, Freetown serves as the country's principal urban, economic, financial, cultural, educational, and political center. 1,055,964 people called Freetown home as per the 2015 census. The city's economy is mostly centered on its harbor, which is one of the largest naturally deep-water harbors in the world and takes up a portion of the Sierra Leone River estuary (Sierra Leone National Census, 2015). Freetown is a business and educational hub that draws telecom companies, most notably Orange-Sierra Leone Ltd., because of its diverse customer base. With more than 1.5 million users and around 22% market share, Orange is currently the second-place competitor. Africell is the other significant player in Sierra Leone. As of the end of June 2017, Orange served more than 127 million consumers throughout the Middle East and 21 other African and Asian nations. During the second quarter of this year, the operator brought in €1.25 billion (\$1.5 billion) in revenue from the area (Maistre, 2017). Before the 2019 Corona epidemic in the nation, Orange-Sierra Leone Ltd. in Freetown had a sizable, engaged, and devoted public relations personnel, as well as a high reputation. This is why the researcher chose this specific study area.

2.3 Study Population and Sampling

Chimange (2022) defined the target population as a typical collection of research units from which the researcher had made generalizations. The targeted demographics for this study were individuals who were being watched, and the study used them to extrapolate its findings. A subject was picked from the population as a sample meant to reflect or represent the characteristics of that population (Kothari, 2009, QuestionPro Survey Software, 2020). In statistics, sampling is a technique for selecting a particular person or a small portion of the population in order to make generalizations and estimate the characteristics of the population. Non-probability and probability are the two main sample selection techniques used in this study (Babbie, 2004; QuestionPro Survey Software, 2020).

2.3.1 Population

The human resources manager of Orange Sierra Leone's Freetown headquarters stated that there are up to 1600 employees. However, Orange Sierra Leone Ltd. in Freetown has a population of 600 employees (Orange Sierra Leone Annual Report, 2017). Thus, 600 participants were in the study population, including top managers, public relations officials, and other Orange Sierra Leone personnel who were accessible.

2.3.2 Sample Size

A sample size of 60 people from a population of 600 formed the basis of the study. The majority of statisticians concur that a sample size of 100 is necessary to obtain any form of significant results. If your population is less than 100, you should definitely survey every single person. As long as it does not go over 1,000, 10% of the population serves as a decent maximum sample size. For instance, 500 people would make up 10% of a population of 5000. 10% of 200,000 people would equal 20,000 (Bullen, 2022). However, the required sample size for each sub-group was determined using a table, according to Krejcie & Morgan (1970), who also state that each sub-group should be treated as a population.

3. Data Findings and Analysis of Results

This aspect of the research focuses on how data were derived, analyzed, and interpreted to enhance an empirical conclusion.

3.1 Detailed Information About Respondents

The section lists the sample characteristics of the respondents, including age, highest educational level, gender, marital status, employment status, and position in the office. In the table below the total number of respondents is 100, and the percentages are calculated based on this total number.

Table 2. Respondents' demographic profile

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Section / Branches	Central Freetown	36	60
	Western area rural	12	20
	Western area urban	12	20
Gender	Female	36	60
	Male	24	40
Age	18 to 25 years	12	20
	26 to 35 years	15	25
	36 to 49 years	21	35
	55 and older	12	20
Marital Status		17	28.3
	Single	26	43.3
	Married	6	10.1
	Divorced/Separated Widow/widower	11	18.3
Education Level	First grade (primary)	3	5.0
	Second grade (secondary)	5	8.3
	Certificate/Diploma	10	16.7
	Undergraduate degree	17	28.3
	Master's degree	16	26.7
	PhD (others)	9	15.0
Employment status	Volunteer	6	10
	Internship Staff	9	15
	Employed/Staff	33	55
	Others (Stakeholders)	12	20
Position (in office or community)		1	1.7
	Director General (National)	9	15.0
	Branch Executives/Managers	18	30.0
	Public relations officer, Marketer	9	15.0
	Shareholder/stakeholder	14	23.3
	ICT Specialist	9	15.0

Source: Researcher's Design, 2023.

The above Table 1 indicates that the study is represented by respondents from the central part of the capital city of Sierra Leone and from the surroundings of the city of Freetown. Also, according to the study's findings, the sample consisted of men and women. Due to conventional expectations that women are more persuasive than males, they make up the majority in public relations and brand-building efforts for Orange Sierra Leone. The study continued to determine the respondents' various age groups, and the results are shown in this table as well. For instance, all responders were 18 years of age or older. This suggests that senior citizens have the energy to actively participate in business activities.

The study went on to determine the respondent's marital status, and the results are shown in Table 1. The survey also inquired about the respondents' educational backgrounds, and the results are shown in the table above. This was necessary in part to enhance the study's findings because education level and understanding of the study issue were significantly correlated. It suggests that the majority of study participants were literate, indicating high levels of schooling. Since the majority appeared to be better off, this further suggests that they were conscious of the importance of public relations to brand image. The study's findings showed that the majority of respondents were married, and because they had children to care for and few resources to do so, they were compelled to actively participate in the company's operations. According to their employment status, the majority of the respondents are permanently employed staff, volunteers, and interns. At the same time, the minority are other stakeholders (customers, suppliers, regulatory agencies, and many more) of the company "Orange Sierra Leone." And that only a few of them are not holding any position in the organization because they are non-workers of the said company.

3.2 Findings on Functions of Public Relations in Brand Image

To accomplish this goal, the respondents were questioned about the function of public relations in the Telecommunications Company's brand image, and they provided the following response. The numbers in the table below represent the sum of the ratings for each category. For example, the "Disagree" column is the sum of "Strongly Disagree (SD)" and "Disagree (D)" ratings. Similarly, the "Agree" column is the sum of "Agree (A)" and "Strongly Agree (SA)" ratings. The "Neutral" column remains the same.

Table 3. Functions of public relations on the brand image of Orange Sierra Leone's reputation management

Statements	Neutral		
	Disagree (SD + D)		Agree (A+ SA)
One of the more well-known roles of public relations is representing the business or person to the media.	10	6	44
Another responsibility of public relations professionals is to defend the organization from threats to its reputation.	16	4	40
Another crucial function of public relations is representing an organization to stakeholder groups	17	4	39
Public relations experts frequently plan events to increase the organization's visibility or lend its name and brand to a charity because that embodies the company's mission.	15	4	41

Source: Researcher's Design, 2023.

According to the above table, the majority of respondents generally concurred that speaking on behalf of the organization or individual to the media is one of the more well-known responsibilities of public relations, indicating that the idea of public relations is crucial to the company's brand image.

Again, a threat to its reputation is another function of the public, according to the results shown in the table above. As seen in the table above, the majority of respondents concur that one additional duty of public relations professionals is to defend the company against threats to its reputation. It also suggests that the management of the company must participate in public relations activities in order to promote and enhance its brand image.

Also, the result above suggests that the majority of respondents concur that another crucial function of public relations is to represent an organization to stakeholder groups. This suggests that Orange Mobile Company – Sierra Leone's management must keep an eye on and keep track of its stakeholders who are involved in public relations.

Additionally, the result suggests that the majority of respondents concurred that public relations professionals frequently organize events to increase the organization's profile or lend its brand and name to a charitable event that exemplifies the company's philosophy, and it also suggests that public relations is important for organizations.

3.3 Findings on the Challenges of Public Relations in Relation to Brand Image

The respondents' responses to a question about the difficulties of public relations in connection to brand image were as follows. Note that each category's total rating is represented by the numbers in the table. The "Strongly Disagree (SD)" and "Disagree (D)" ratings are added up to form the "Disagree" column, for instance. The total of the ratings for "Agree (A)" and "Strongly Agree (SA)" is what appears in the "Agree" column. Nothing changes in the "Neutral" column.

Table 4. The challenges of public relations in relation to brand image

Statements	Disagree (SD + D)	Neutral	Agree (A + SA)
Not all public relations practitioners have received the same level of or type of public relations education.	15	4	41
The practitioner's experience is another factor influencing public relations' efficacy.	15	4	41
Information, particularly on the numerous laws governing dowry torture and job harassment. The public relations staff should pay particular attention to forgery, human rights violations, the right to information, etc.	10	6	44
In the continent, the practice of public relations is not well known, which means that many organizations and individuals do not comprehend the concept of the profession.	15	4	41

Source: researcher's design, 2023.

From the table below, the study's findings, which are presented in the table above, show that the majority of participants agreed that not everyone who works in public relations has had the same level or type of training, suggesting that the field is also quite difficult. The majority of respondents, it was also revealed, concurred that another factor influencing the efficacy of public relations is the practitioner's experience, which suggests that there are many difficulties facing businesses when it comes to public relations.

According to the table above, the majority of respondents believed that public relations staff should pay special attention to information, particularly on various legislations regarding dowry torture, workplace harassment, forgery,

human rights abuses, the right to information, etc. Additionally, it was revealed that the majority of respondents concurred that the practice of public relations is not well understood on the continent, i.e., many organizations and people do not comprehend the concept of protection. This further suggests that Sierra Leone's management should invest in its public relations division.

3.4 Findings on Ideal Solutions to Public Relations Challenges Associated With Managing an Organization's Reputation

The respondents were questioned about the ideal approaches to public relations in regard to brand image in order to accomplish this goal, and they provided the following response. It should be noted that the figures in the table show the total of the ratings for every category. For instance, the ratings for "Strongly Disagree (SD)" and "Disagree (D)" are added up to form the "Disagree" column. In a similar vein, the "Agree" column represents the total of the "Strongly Agree (SA)" and "Agree (A)" ratings. The column labeled "Neutral" stays unchanged.

The foregoing findings demonstrate that Orange Sierra Leone employs public relations before a media incident ever arises. This suggests that the management of the business does not wait until the problem has already been made public and the public relations expert hired to clean it up has to play catch-up in order to bring the business back on track to restoring the brand's reputation.

According to one of the respondents, "The company's good name and reputation, like those of an individual, are priceless and should be carefully monitored and protected against reputational hazards".

In fact, the majority of the respondents subscribed to the above facts and added that nowadays, everyone turns to the internet as their first resource for information on any business or topic. So, a website that is professionally designed and laid out can reveal a lot about a business. The Internet acts as a wonderful equalizer for small businesses by showcasing them alongside any large corporation.

Table 5. The Ideal solutions to public relations challenges associated with managing brand image

Statements	Disagree (D + D)	Neutral	Agree (A+ SA)
Everyone who works in public relations should have had the same level of training.	7	12	41
To achieve organizational goals, the public relations department at Orange SL must be able to transform peoples' attitudes from one of hostility to one of understanding.	3	4	53
Research must be done often before and after the campaign because it is an uncompromising notion in public relations.	2	6	52
The company must review its campaigns and, depending on the results, determine where it can make changes.	4	4	52
The continent should have a strong understanding of public relations practice, meaning that many individuals and organizations are familiar with the field.	4	4	52
Public relations personnel should pay particular attention to information, particularly on numerous legislations regarding dowry torture, workplace harassment, forgeries, human rights breaches, right to information, etc.	0	2	58

Source: Researcher's Design, 2023.

3.5 Findings on the Relationship Between Organization's Public Relations and Brand Image

In order to accomplish this goal, the respondents were questioned regarding the connection between public relations and brand image, and their responses were as follows. Please be aware that the numbers in the table indicate the total of each category's ratings. The "Disagree" column, for instance, is the total of the "Disagree (D)" and "Strongly Disagree (SD)" ratings. In a similar vein, the ratings for "Strongly Agree (SA)" and "Agree (A)" add up to the "Agree" column. There is no change to the "Neutral" column.

Table 6. Connection between Orange Sierra Leone's reputation management and public relations

Statements	Disagree (SD + D)	Neutral	Agree (A + SA)
There is a lot of proof that a company's identity, reputation, and image are greatly improved by the practice of public relations within the organization	16	4	40
Good PR strategies can be a big help with recruiting and retention, especially in the highly competitive graduate market.	14	4	44
Effective communication is a skill that should be improved by public relations policies, such that all important duties performed by PRPs are carried out through a variety of communication channels.	17	4	39
Effective public relations can mitigate these risks and strengthen a company's identity and reputation by cultivating a true culture of "doing the right thing" for the community.	10	8	42

Source: researcher's design, 2023.

According to the study's findings, which are presented in the table below, the majority of the respondents said there was strong evidence that the practice of public relations within an organization is essential for improving a company's identity, reputation, and image. The study's findings also show that most respondents thought excellent PR strategies may help with retention and recruiting, particularly in the cutthroat graduate job market. This further suggests that PR strategies support the brand image.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents felt that public relations policies should also improve effective communicative practice, meaning that all important functions performed by PRPs are carried out through a variety of forms of communication. This suggests that effective communication techniques can improve public relations.

Besides, the vast majority of respondents concurred that fostering an authentic culture of "doing the right thing for a community through effectiveness in public relations can offset these risks and strengthen the identity and reputation of companies." This suggests that public relations are crucial to building the company's brand.

3.6 Discussion

According to the study's findings, from Table 3 above, 6 (10%) of respondents severely disagreed, 4 (6.7%) disagreed, 6 (10%) were unsure, 24 (40%) agreed, and the remaining 20 (33.3%) highly agreed. This suggests that the majority of respondents generally believed that speaking on behalf of the organization or individual to the media is one of the more well-known responsibilities of public relations, which suggests that the idea of public relations is crucial to the company's brand image. In line with Stellah (2018), who observed that one of the most well-known roles of public relations is representing a business or person to the media. Writing and delivering news releases, presenting stories to journalists, and answering questions from reporters are all included in media management.

The study's findings (Table 3 above) also showed that 22 (36.7%) respondents agreed, 9 (15%) strongly disagreed, 7 (13.7%) disagreed, 4 (6.7%) were not sure, and 18 (30%) highly agreed. This suggests that the majority of respondents concur that one additional duty of public relations professionals is to defend the company against threats to its reputation. It also suggests that the management of the company must participate in public relations activities in order to advance and enhance its brand image. This concurs with Stellah (2018), and Davies, Chun, da Silva & Roper's (2023) assertion that another role of public relations is to safeguard a corporation against threats to its reputation. While media representation is a component of crisis communication, a public relations department is in charge of creating a crisis communication plan and educating leadership and staff on its elements.

Again, it was discovered that (Table 3 above) 23 (38.3%) respondents strongly agreed, 8 (13.3%) disagreed, 9 (15%) strongly disagreed, 4 (6.7%) were unsure, and 16 (26.7%) agreed. This suggests that another crucial function of public relations is to represent an organization to stakeholder groups, as the majority of respondents appeared to concur. This indicates that Orange Sierra Leone's management must keep an eye on and keep track of its stakeholders who are involved in public relations. This is in line with Stellah (2018) and (Schwartz & Gibb, 2019), who noted that a crisis communication plan created by a public relations team typically includes figuring out specific logistics for anticipated reporters, designating an official spokesperson for the crisis, developing targeted messages for both internal and external audiences, and instructing company leadership on how to handle difficult or hostile questions.

Additionally, it was shown that (Table 3 above) 8 (13.3%) of respondents severely disagreed, 7 (11.7%) disagreed, 4 (6.7%) were unsure, 19 (31.7%) agreed, and the final 22 respondents strongly agreed, making a total of 36.7%. This suggests that the majority of respondents concurred that public relations professionals frequently organize events to boost an organization's profile or lend its name and brand to a charitable event that exemplifies the company's philosophy, and it also suggests that public relations is essential for organizations. This supports Stellah (2018), Kerr (2019), Kuttner (2020), and Gustafson (2021), claim that public relations professionals organize events to increase the organization's visibility or lend their name and brand to a charitable event that exemplifies their business philosophies.

Moreover, the study's findings revealed that (Table 4 above), 28.3% (17) of respondents strongly agreed, compared to 15% (9) who strongly disagreed, 10% (6) who disagreed, 6.7% (4) who were unsure, and 40% (24) who agreed. This suggests that the majority of those surveyed concurred that not everyone who practices public relations has had the same level or type of education in the field and that the field is also highly difficult. This concurs with Ophukah's (2015) assertion that not all public relations practitioners have the same level or type of schooling in the field. Self-study, workshops, and seminars at professional groups, as well as professional accreditation, are just a few of the components of a public relations practitioner's education.

Furthermore, it was revealed from Table 4 above that 8 of the respondents strongly disagreed, 7 disagreed, 4 were unsure, 16 agreed, and the remaining 25% strongly agreed. This suggests that the majority of respondents concur that another factor influencing public relations effectiveness is practitioner experience, and it also suggests that the organization has numerous obstacles in terms of public relations. This is consistent with Ophukah's (2014) observation that practitioner experience is another factor that affects the effectiveness of public relations. Traditionally, a practitioner's professional experience has been defined as the number of years they have worked in the field of public relations.

However, it is also feasible to take into account the quality or type of experience, such as the sorts of specialized PR duties accomplished or the types of strategic vs. just tactical expertise gained. The results shown in Table 4 indicated that 20 respondents strongly agreed, 6 highly disagreed, 4 disagreed, 24 agreed, and 6 strongly were not sure. This suggests that the majority of respondents were largely in agreement that information, particularly on numerous laws pertaining to dowry torture, workplace harassment, forgeries, human rights abuses, the right to information, etc., should be given special attention by the public relations staff. This is consistent with the evidence provided by Riel & Van (2015), who specifically mentioned information on several laws pertaining to workplace harassment and dowry torture. Public relations staff should pay particular attention to crimes like forgeries, abuses of human rights, violations of the right to information, and other similar offenses. They are the individuals who can inform the public about various facets of the laws, different sorts of penalties for breaking them, and other things of that nature.

The study also found that (Table 4) 17 agreed, 7 disagreed, 4 were unsure, 8 strongly disagreed, and the remaining 24 respondents strongly agreed. This suggests that the majority of respondents concur that the practice of public relations is not well understood on the continent, i.e., that many organizations and people lack a basic understanding of the profession. It also suggests that management at Orange Sierra Leone needs to invest in its public relations

division. This is in line with Dozier's (2015) claim that public relations practices are not well understood on the continent. According to Dozier, many businesses and individuals do not fully grasp the idea of the profession, despite the fact that they engage in it on a daily basis. As a result, they do not see the value in having or considering public relations as a part of their everyday activities.

However, while there are some tactics organizations can use to lessen the impact of reputational damage, once the information is out there, a company will need to be flexible and try to make things right. Table 5 above, points out that 52 of the respondents are certain that the continent should have a strong understanding of public relations practice, meaning that many individuals and organizations are familiar with the field, as opposed to 4 each of the respondents who are uncertain and not sure. Besides, 58 respondents stated (with high and very high certainty) that the public relations personnel should pay particular attention to information, particularly on numerous legislations regarding dowry torture, workplace harassment, forgeries, human rights breaches, right to information, etc., and only 2 are unsure and no absolute disagrees. This conforms to the Indeed Editorial Team's (2023) assertion that public relations strategies are a collection of techniques used by an organization to go from where it is to where it wants to be. This could be done by gaining exposure, increasing the number of clients it has, or mending its reputation; Proverbs (2022), stated that because the cat is already out of the bag, the public relations specialist hired to clean up the mess must play catch-up in order to get the company back on track toward rebuilding the brand's reputation. She continued by saying that, like a person's reputation, a company's good name and reputation are irreplaceable and need to be carefully watched after and protected from harm.

From Table 6, however, the study's findings revealed that 15% of respondents strongly disagreed and 11.7% disagreed. 6.7% of respondents were unsure, 36.7% agreed, and the remaining 30% strongly agreed. Inferring that the majority of respondents concur that there is convincing evidence that the practice of public relations within an organization is essential in boosting a company's identity, reputation, and image. This is in line with Steyn's (2012) and Van Ruler et al. (2016) observation that there is compelling evidence that public relations practices play a critical role in improving a company's identity, reputation, and image.

Going further, good PR strategies can be a big help with hiring and keeping employees, especially in the cutthroat graduate job market. It was found (from Table 6) that 43.3% agreed, 6.7% were unsure, 11.7% strongly disagreed and disagreed, and the remaining 30% highly agreed with the findings. This suggests that the majority of those surveyed concur that effective PR strategies can help with both recruiting and retention, especially in the cutthroat graduate job market. It also suggests that PR strategies aid in the promotion of brand image. This is consistent with Steyn's (2012) and Van Ruler et al. (2016) claim that many corporate strategies include risk management as a key component. The authors explained how events like corruption scandals or environmental calamities may destroy reputations that take decades to establish in just hours.

According to the study's findings from Table 6, 13.3% of respondents strongly disagreed and 15% disagreed. 6.7% of respondents were unsure, 38.3% agreed, and the remaining 26.7% strongly agreed. This suggests that the majority of respondents felt that successful communicative practice should be enhanced by public relations policy, as all primary duties performed by public relations personnel are carried out through various forms of communication. This suggests that effective communication techniques can improve public relations. According to Black (2016), public relations policies should also improve effective communicative practice because all primary functions performed by public relations personnel are carried out through a variety of communication channels. However, the three conceptual public relations personnel aspects that reflect various communication styles are (1) information, (2) persuasion, and (3) refutation.

Finally, from Table 6 above, it was discovered that 33.3% of respondents agreed, 10% strongly disagreed, 6.7% disagreed, 13.3% were unsure, and 36.7% agreed. This suggests that most respondents were in agreement that fostering a real culture of "doing the right thing" for the community helps mitigate these dangers and enhance a company's brand and reputation. This suggests that public relations are crucial to building the company's brand. Steyn (2012) stated that these occurrences may also attract unwelcome attention from regulators, courts, governments, and the media. This is in keeping with Steyn's observations. Through successful public relations, businesses may mitigate these risks and enhance their identity and reputation by cultivating a true culture of doing the right thing for the community.

4. Recommendation of the Research

This aspect of the research focuses on the recommendations proffered from the results and analysis of the previous chapter. The recommendations are very important and pertinent for policymakers both in the public sector and private sector.

To provide managers and practitioners in public relations with the necessary information and abilities, public relations training should be established. It is important also to arrange seminars and conferences so that staff employees and practitioners with less experience can pick the brains of more knowledgeable individuals. This tactic should lessen difficulties brought on by insufficient experience. Also, a forum and association for public relations should be established. By learning from others' experiences and knowledge, inexperienced practitioners may be able to overcome obstacles. Some of the practitioners should be given access to additional education and training. This will probably increase their understanding of key concepts and methods in public relations. This can be accomplished by providing practitioners with scholarships so they can earn master's or doctoral degrees in the relevant fields.

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