

EVALUATING GOVERNMENT-MEDIA RELATIONS IN THE NAMIBIAN
PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate government-media relations in the Namibian public service. This study employs a qualitative design by using two methods of data collection namely the face-to-face interviews as well as focus group discussions. Data was collected by means of key informant interview guides as well as focus group discussion guides. The population of this study comprised of the 23 government Ministries and the country's 13 print media houses. Data received was presented in the form of figures as well as narrative statements. The study revealed that the attitude of public relations officers towards journalists in Namibia remains very bad and poor and the journalist from both private and state owned media house are treated equally by public relations officers because of their common responsibility of informing the public. Findings from the study further indicated that public relations officers also prevents journalist from executing their duties of reporting. The study concluded that government at all levels in Namibia need to establish a coordinating forum between the government and the leadership of the media. This forum can be used to straighten out any misunderstandings that arise in the day to day relationships and also start a new culture of mutual cooperation between journalist and public relations officers.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ET	Excellence theory
IUM	International University of Management
MAWF	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry
MICT	Ministry of Information Communication and Technology
MoHSS	Ministry of Health and Social Sciences
NUST	Namibia University of Science and Technology
PR	Public relations
PROs	Public relations officers
PRP	Public relations practitioners
PRISA	Public relations Institute of Southern Africa
UNAM	University of Namibia

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my mother Patricia Nampa Kashuupulwa and my father Clemens Kashuupulwa for providing their out most support. I also dedicate this study to my husband Erikson Malwa for giving me academic support and according me the necessary support during the period of carrying out this study.

DECLARATION

I declare that the ideas in this study “Evaluating government – media relation in the Namibian public service” were not copied from somewhere else but are a result of my own work. The sources that I used were acknowledged by means of reference. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the University of Namibia.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Public relations and journalism share a number of similarities and differences. According to Inamdar (2015, para.6) the field of journalism and public relations, both work as a public informer, but they differ in terms of the definition of newsworthiness and how the public should be informed. Inamdar (2015, para.7) posits that public relations professionals are seen as ‘spin-doctors’ or ‘truth benders’, as people think that the role of public relation practitioner is to lie or manipulate the truth. Similarly, Mutambo (2014) argues that public relations officers ought to be information spin doctors. However, given the bureaucratic government system, their role is abridged to plain information vectors directed by management.

Diescho as cited in Mutumbo, 2014) posits that the Namibian public service comprises a growing number of young Namibians who are entering the public sector with qualifications from University of Namibia (UNAM), Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) former known as the Polytechnic of Namibia, International University of Management (IUM) and other institutions outside the country. He maintains that these young professionals constantly face a brick wall from the older counterparts who loath to be challenged with new ways of doing things (Mutambo, 2014).

Public relations and journalism can be seen as two sides of the same coin. One side has news and interesting events it wants to get out into the public domain; the other side needs news and interesting events to cover (Curtis, 2011). On the similar note Malaysia (2006) also argues that research that has been carried out for decades on the relationship between public relations officers and journalists indicate that both journalists and public relations practitioners are sceptical of each others’ roles. At the heart of this problem is the perceptual

climate – journalists, among others, think that public relations practitioners do not understand news; public relations practitioners, on the other hand, complain that journalists do not understand the public relations role (Bolinger,2003, as cited in Kaur & Shaari ,2006,p.4). Having given that caveat, perhaps, a brief background of public relations in the Namibian public service is inevitable.

Public relations (PR) professionals in managerial positions experience the following problems with people who apply for PR positions: lack of critical thinking, poor grammar and editing skills, lack of ability to learn things that are not within the scope of PR, and lack of ability to conduct environmental scanning to find communication gaps or issues that can potentially harm the organisation. These issues are immediate threats towards the legitimacy of the PR industry and as a result in combating this, the Institute of Public Relations In Southern Africa (PRISA) and other academics should compile a PR Code of Ethics booklet that applies to the Namibian context.

1.1 Orientation of the proposed study

According to Grunig (1992), public relations can truly mean the difference between life and death for an organisation, or a difference between productivity and failure. Governmental organisations have only recently become significant players in public relations (Franklin, Hogan, Langley, Masdell & Pill, 2009).

Government information workers' duties include communicating the activities of government agencies so that citizens can benefit from them, getting feedback from citizens so that programmes can be amended, modified or continued, advising government officials on how best to communicate with citizens, solving taxpayers' problems as well as educating administrators and bureaucrats about media relations (Akpabio, 2005). A germane question would be how is Namibia faring?

Mohan (2014) argues that access to information held by government or public institutions is not easily obtainable even though freedom of expression and human rights are guaranteed in the democratic Namibia. He is of the view that secrecy prevails, as there is no access to information legislation or even a government communication policy to guide public service information officers on how and when to communicate with the public. The Namibian government, Mohan further posits that it is not legally obligated to share or disclose any details regarding their operations and it largely acts under a veil of secrecy unless it decides on its own accord to share information or the information is leaked to the media by whistleblowers.

This is similar to the way communication is practiced in the Ministry of Health and Social Services between the Public relations officer of the ministry as well as the Community Liaison Officers of the different directorates and journalist, this is because for any form of communication to the media has to be checked and signed off by the Permanent secretary of the ministry.

Mutambo (2014) asserted that only a few government institutions allow their communication practitioners to form part of the management meetings. This strips this important function of the amount of information they need to successfully defend their institutions or the first-hand information to discharge their functions in a manner that adds value to the organization.

However, in a recent meeting with editors, President Hage Geingob requested that they bring to his attention government officials that are withholding information from the media arguing that “transparency is the cornerstone of this administration. This is not about my personal legacy but the legacy of Namibia. We would like to be open. We want a media-friendly government and we mean that” (“New Era”, 2016, par. 20). Similarly, the Minister of Information Communication and Technology (MICT) Tjekero Tweya has indicated that his

ministry is working towards an access to information legislation that would ensure that government divulges information to the media and the public (Immanuel, 2016).

In addition the minister prefers that “a statutory body be set up to watch over the media” in order to protect members of the public (Immanuel, 2016, par. 5). Similarly, Albertus Aochamub, the state house press secretary, inveighed against *The Namibian* news story titled “Geingob hits pay dirt” arguing that

“In a clear open war against the person of Dr Hage Geingob and in furtherance of what some declared to make the country ungovernable, this article confirms a worrisome trend in some segments of our society. The paper in question has been consistent in its hatred and stigmatisation of the President and evidently taken a stance of consistent anti-Geingob reporting since his inauguration a year ago. To that end, one is not too surprised about that piece. In fact, anything to the contrary would have been a pleasant surprise” (Aochamub, 2016, par. 5).

The sentiments expressed by President Geingob and the Minister of Information Communication and Technology is in line with the role of Public Relations Officers (PROs) in government institutions and establishments as they are to give out relevant information on policies, plans and achievements, informing and educating various publics about legislation as well as providing feedback as regards actual and proposed policies (Ogwezzy, 2005).

It is also the responsibility of the PROs to highlight success stories, facilitate communication with the internal and external stakeholders and change public perception of the quality of government services. This can contribute greatly to the country’s global competitiveness (Mutambo, 2014).

Additionally, an institution like the Ministry of Health and Social Service's Public Relations Officer would refer journalists seeking information to the Senior health Programme officers in respective directorates, who, in turn, advises journalist to send a formal request to the Permanent Secretary (Mohan, 2014), thus defeating the purpose of government-media relations via bureaucratic red tape.

Based on these conflicting signals from government and its communication machinery, this study set out to investigate the status of the relationship between public relations officers in the public service and one of their key publics - journalists - who are critical players when it comes to explaining government policies and actions in order to carry citizens along. They also provide feedback that will be critical input towards national development to government so that programmes and policies can be modified, amended or continued amongst others to ensure maximum benefit to the citizens for whom the policies or services are meant (Akpabio, 2005; Onabajo, 2005).

In addition to this absence of an access to information law, Namibia still does not have legislation protecting whistle-blowers, which can act as a warning to citizens reporting dishonesty, bribery, and corruption. Charron (1989) states that the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners has been hotly debated in the field of communication studies. These debates tend to be dominated by normative questions: Is the work of public relations officers legitimate? Does it affect the quality of information? Are journalists starting to become the subservient agents of public relations undertakings? Therefore the purpose of this study is to investigate the status of communication between public relations officers in in the public service and journalists in Namibia.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Davis (2007) point out that it is generally, an uneasy relationship, supposedly distinguished by a pronounced asymmetry, based on the widely accepted notion that public relations people need journalists but journalists do not need public relations people. This relationship is further compounded in the Namibian context given that the country's legal environment take into consideration that Namibia's legal background is primarily designed to encourage secrecy and confidentiality, with apartheid era legislation, such as the Protection of Information Act 1982 still in need of repeal (Mohan, 2014). Flynn (2014) argues that public relation from its murky early-twentieth-century history of publicity and promotion to its current and continuing association with political spin, propaganda, and persuasion has elicited challenges by journalists and others. This research will therefore examine how public relation officers in government ministries elative with one of their most important publics – Journalist in the discharge of their duties. .

1.3 Objectives of the study

In considering the relationship of Public relations and journalists in the public service, the following research objectives will be addressed:

- To explore the attitudes of public relation officers in the Namibian public service towards the media.
- To determine if there exists differences in the relationship between Public Relations Officers and journalists from government and privately-owned media.
- To find out from journalists if Public Relation Officers assist or serve as hindrances in the execution of their duties.

1.4 Significance of the study

The findings of this study would provide some insight into the government media-relations in the public service with regards to answering the research objectives stated above.

Castelli (2007) notes that little research have been conducted on the way public relation is practiced in public organizations. In order to further the understanding of government public relations, we must first determine what type of public relations models are used in government organizations and what role the head public relations practitioner plays. The findings of this study will help with understanding the current practice of communication between public relation officers in government ministries and the media. This study will further provide some insight into the models and approaches that can be used to better the relationship between PROs and the press. The study will further assist with filling the gap in knowledge about the relationship between public relations officers and journalists. The findings will also provide data for possible exploration by other researchers.

1.5 Limitation of the study

The study only concentrates on the public relations departments of government ministries in the Khomas region. Public relations practice in state-owned enterprises and the private sector do not form part of the study.

Summary

Firstly the study started off by explaining and giving background information about the government-media relations in the public service. The statement of the problem showed the need for research in the area of media. To give this paper the required direction, three main objectives were posed for investigation. This chapter further highlighted the significance and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Punch (2005) asserts that literature review is an assessment of a body of research that addresses research questions. Literature review also identifies what is already known about an area of study and identifies questions that a body of research does not answer. A literature review can also be further understood as a critical analysis of a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature and theoretical framework (Baxter & Jack, 2000).

This chapter will evaluate government media relations in the Namibian public service by discussing and critically exploring the literature on the attitudes of PROs towards the media. Secondly this chapter will feature views of scholars and commentators on the relationship between PROs and journalists. The chapter will also feature the theory undergirding this study.

2.1 The global perspective on public relations and journalism

In countries like Namibia little research has been conducted on the way public relations is practiced in public organizations. In order to further our understanding of government public relations, we must first determine what type of public relations models are used in government organizations and what role the public relations practitioner plays (Castelli, 2007). However, the relationship between public relations and journalism is, and always has been, a complex and necessary symbiotic liaison of mutual dependence (Kuar & Shaari, 2006). Research on the relationship between public relations officers and journalists indicates that both journalists and public relations practitioners are sceptical of each others' roles (Malaysia, 2006; Pincus, Rimmer & Rayfield, 1993). At the heart of this problem is the perceptual climate – journalists, among others, think that public relations practitioners do not

understand news. Public relations practitioners, on the other hand, complain that journalists do not understand the role of public relations (Bolinger, 2003, as cited in Kaura and Shaari, 2006, p. 4).

Democracy, defined as government of the people, by the people, for the people, cannot function properly without good Public Relations. The electorate requires knowledge on how the government functions, information on decisions being made in its name, and education in order to take full advantage of the facilities and services provided. Clearly, there is need for Public Relations activities to help citizens understand their privileges and responsibilities under a democratic form of government (Black, 1976, as cited in Omondi, 2006, p.16). Much of the significant dialogue needed to ensure democracies function properly is generated, moulded and enunciated by Public Relations practitioners. The success and stability of democratic government are determined by continuous citizens' approval, and this approval is the one public information officers seek. In the democratic system, it is assumed that government will respond to the wishes of the governed and Public Relations work to determine the wishes of the governed and strive to make government responsive to those wishes (Aronof and Baskin, 1983, as cited in Omondi, 2006, p.16).

Government Public Relations activities, many embraced by terms such as public affairs and public information, have developed as a political and administrative response to various organizational goals. They are a key component of the administrative system, specifically designed to bridge the gap between popular and bureaucratic government (Cutlip et al, 1994, as cited in Omondi, 2006, p.16).

According to Black (1976) as quoted in Omondi (2006) the practice of public relations in the British as well as the USA government main tasks included giving regular information on

policy, plans and achievements of the department; informing and educating the public on legislation, regulation and matters that affect the daily life of citizens. It also advises ministers and senior officials of reaction and potential reaction to actual or proposed policies.

Much of the literature on the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners indicates that the majority of attitudes and perceptions journalists hold towards public relations practitioners are generally negative (Aronoff, 1975). According to Grabowski (1992), some researchers believe public relations practitioners often make fundamental mistakes when they interact with journalists.

Grabowski (1992) further indicated that such mistakes include being ignorant about the needs of a journalist, offering media releases and story ideas that lack news value or relevance to the target audiences, contacting journalists when they are frantically busy on deadline and being obstructive. These mistakes and tactics as Grabowski (1992) states frustrate and annoy journalists and often result in them viewing public relations practitioners negatively.

Bollinger (2003) also points out that journalists and editors do not trust public relations practitioners and have a poor attitude towards the profession. Wilcox and Nolte (1995, p.229) point out that “journalists receive hundreds of news releases that are poorly written, contain no news and read like commercial advertisements without the graphics”. As such, it is no wonder that after a while, journalists form the opinion that the majority of public relations practitioners are incompetent given their excessive use of hype and promotion in news releases.

Another common complaint by journalists and editors is that practitioners lack subject knowledge (Grabowski, 1992). Grabowski further stated that practitioners need to have technical knowledge of their field in order to be taken seriously. Additional to these another

problem that journalists have towards public relations officers is the out-dated and stereotype perception that public relations practitioners are “flacks”, which according to Wilcox and Nolte (1995, p.229) is a derogatory term for press agents.

Seemingly, Derlome & Fedler (2003) also states that for years, journalists have charged that public relations practitioners are unethical, manipulative, one-sided, and deceptive. They also complain that PR practitioners serve special interests rather than the public.

McCoy, Renaud, Wagler, Struthers, and Baker (2011) argue that journalism and public relations have had a long and often contentious relationship. Much of that disharmony comes from the major difference in how the two groups serve their constituencies. Journalists write stories to inform a general audience. Public relations practitioners provide information to particular audiences on behalf of their clients. Both groups use similar techniques, but their responsibilities, objectives, and the way they frame information can be quite different (McCoy, Renaud, Wagler, Struthers & Baker 2011, p.3).

The relationship between journalists and public relations (PR) practitioners has attracted serious attention over many decades from academics. Scholars such as (Aronoff, 1975 & Jeffers 1977 as cited in Callard, 2011) examine how the two perceive each other in terms of credibility and status and come to the conclusion that all was not well and that it was by no means an easy relationship. This view has with it a steady flow of literature claiming journalists and PR practitioners have an often-troubled relationship fraught with antagonism (White & Hobsbawm, 2007, as cited in Callard, 2011).

According to DeLorme and Fedler (2003) difficulties in the relationship can be traced back to the rise of publicity in the 19th century and the unethical tactics, such as bribes, gifts and stunts, that early public relations practitioners used as a way to gather media attention and

coverage for their clients or organisations. Over time, this behaviour led journalists to view public relations as “deceptive, unethical and foolish” (p. 105).

White and Hobsbawm (2007) notes that “while public relations practitioners are aware of the extent to which they work with and provide information to journalists, journalists are perhaps less willing to acknowledge the use made of public relations material”.

According to Stegall and Saunders (1986) over time journalists and public relations practitioners have tried to work out what each others’ role entail to determine where the boundaries in their relationship lie. During this process, however, misunderstandings have arisen and stereotypes have been created, such stereotypes include journalists dismissing PR practitioners as “spin doctors , media manipulators, corporate flunkies, flak catchers and paid liars” (Comrie, 2002, p. 158). On the other hand, PR practitioners’ view of journalists is not always healthy- with some believing journalists are “incompetent bunglers who quote out of context and sensationalize the negative” (Stegall & Saunders, 1986, p. 341). The historical origins of the relationship, therefore, appear to have laid the foundations for a troubled relationship that over the years has done anything but ease the friction.

Furthermore, the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalism is mutually dependent (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007). The PR practitioners need journalists to publish and promote their clients’ interests, while journalists depend on newsworthy PR material to help them fulfil their role (Shin & Cameron, 2004, as cited in Callard, 2011).

According to Charron (1989) the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is both complex and ambiguous and characterized by both cooperation and conflict. The element of cooperation results from the nature of the relationship between the two groups. Journalists produce news on world and social events and to do so they need sources of information. The fact that these sources are represented or advised by public

relations experts does not basically change the nature of this dependence, although it might change its degree. This dependence is however not one-sided. Those individuals or groups involved in the news scene also depend on journalists to reach their audiences. This dependence is even more crucial for public relations practitioners whose work consists in distributing information about the source they represent in the great game of "news" making. They cannot succeed in their job unless they collaborate with the press (Charron, 1989).

Additional to these, Public relations officers depend less on journalists when they are able to rely on other means of publicity. Likewise, journalists are less dependent on a given source when they are able to obtain the required information elsewhere.

A more conflictual "political" dimension (struggle for control over news making) is thus added to the "economic" dimension of cooperation (exchange of resources). Charron (1989) further emphasizes that journalists and public relations officers find themselves mutually dependent on one another, a situation which demands cooperation, while their divergent control interests cause distrust and opposition.

Shin and Cameron (2004) believe that both sides bring conflict to the relationship through the nature of their roles and goals, and the values, attitudes and views they hold of each other (Callard, 2011). Similarly, Charron (1989) argues that while the relationship is one of mutual dependence, a tension between conflict and cooperation exists between the two parties as they struggle over the production of newsworthy bulletin (Callard, 2011).

Understanding the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists is of paramount importance to practicing effective media relations. The interaction between Public relations practitioners and journalists as they exchange information, often for mutual benefit is referred to as media relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In similar vein media relations is defined by Turk (1985) as the practice, performed by public relations practitioners, of

providing information subsidies to the media to systematically distribute on behalf of their client. Its goal is to establish trust, understanding and respect between the two groups (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth, & Leuven, 2004). However, seemingly as problematic to define as public relations, media relations can generally be viewed as the relationship between the uncontrolled mass media and public relations practitioners (Kendall, 1996).

Public relations practitioners who take the time to develop good media relations skills and who make the effort to build good relationships with journalists are more likely to achieve better results for their clients or organisation. While scholars have examined the current relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners, there have been no studies (to our knowledge) that have uncovered the problem's historic roots specifically from the views of "journalism's early insiders" (Derlome & Feedler, 2003, p. 100). Additionally, Kaura & Shaari (2006) states that public relations has a vital and strategic role to play in building and enhancing on-going or long-term relationships with an organisation's key constituencies, including the media public.

Callard (2011) stated that every day, journalists and PR practitioners around the world interact with each other as part of the news production process (.p.2). He further states that public relations practitioners suggest stories and provide journalists with information they have shaped that they would like to see published in the newspaper. Journalists contact public relations practitioners will requests for information or interviews to help produce news stories they are writing. While this may, from the outside, seem like a simple and smooth transaction, hence it is often not the case. Instead, the relationship that journalists and public relations practitioners have can often be troubled due in part to their mutual dependence but often also their conflicting goals.

According to Delorme and Fedler (2003, p107), by the start of the twentieth century journalists had developed a unique style of writing and they complained that public relations practitioners failed to conform to it. Editors wanted stories that were clear, specific, and interesting. As a result, to save valuable space, they taught reporters “to state a fact and to state it quickly,” cutting reporters’ cherished adjectives (Delome & Fedler, 2003, p.107).

In addition, news stories were expected to be accurate, objective, and fair—not bogus. Reporters were trained to see both sides of every issue and to get all the facts. They therefore complained that publicists favoured their clients’ side instead of presenting both sides of issues.

Derlome and Fedler (2003) further notes that three other factors that worsened the conflict include journalists being envious, since PR practitioners seemed to enjoy better salaries and working conditions. Secondly PROs annoys journalists by repeatedly calling with unimportant stories. Thirdly, journalists felt that their work of informing the public was noble and pure whereas public relations practitioners were propagandists willing to work for anyone able to pay

According to Hobsbawm (2006) a weakness of public relations practitioners is poor pitching. In most circumstances public relations practitioners do not convey their message concisely or have all the information the journalist may require at hand. Additional to this, Callard (2011) states that journalists also view some information supplied by PR practitioners as unabashedly seeking to promote self-serving interests without having any real news value (p.107).

Delorme & Fedler further detailed some of the accusations such as that journalist complains that PR practitioners try to obtain free advertisements for their clients. Journalists charged that PR practitioners were inaccurate and unqualified, calling them “fakers,” “flacks,”

“propagandists,” and “publicity crooks.” Some journalists compared PR practitioners to pimps. Others accused them of corrupting the nation’s channels of communication and the democratic process (p.106).

Delorme & Fedler (2003) posit that early public relations practitioners angered journalists. They invaded newsrooms and tried to use or manipulate journalists. Furthermore, some corrupted journalists by offering them money and gifts. Whatever their tactics, their goal was the same free publicity and preferably on newspapers’ front pages. Delorme & Fedler (2003) further note that many PR practitioners were former journalists who understood the press and knew how to write (or invent) good stories. They flattered, cultivated, and exaggerated, creating sensational stories which reporters seemed unable to ignore. Journalists resented their efforts complaining that publicists misled them, misled the public, and endangered the media’s credibility (p.101).

Howard (2004) explains that the only way for media relations people to overcome the skepticism and hostility from journalists is to master the fundamentals on how to assist them as this makes the difference in the long-term relationships with the media.

On a different note, Sallot and Johnson (2006) found that journalists perceived public relations practitioners who were former journalists to be more skilled and ethical than those who have no journalistic experience. Sriramesh (2004) also stated that in Malaysian public relations practice, media personnel are appreciative of the contributions that public relations professionals make by providing them with news items or in making it possible for them to meet with the policy-makers in the organisation.

In this regard, it is encouraging to note scholars’ suggestions that the stereotype perception may be changing. Positive relationships are more common today and there seems to be a fairly high level of mutual respect between public relations practitioners and journalists.

2.2 The African perspective on public relations and journalism

The application of public relation techniques is not a new concept on the African continent. It dates back to the beginning of the African civilization. According to Narty in Rensburg (2002:5), the concept of PR was practiced in Africa before the era of colonialism. Narty further explains how the task of the spokesman at the chief's seat of power in traditional villages is very similar to that of a PR practitioner. PR is therefore not a foreign concept in the African context but it has been practiced in a different format and is deeply rooted in the African culture (Rensburg, 2002:6). This is similar to the words of Akpbio (2009) who also stated that one can easily find ancient roots of public relations in towns of African continents such as India , Greece etc,

Akpbio (2009) argues that as in other areas of human endeavour, public relations scholarship and practice in Africa is not very visible to the rest of the world. This means that its contribution to the practice is relatively unacknowledged and invisible. It makes the practitioners and academics in the continent appear unaware of current theory, research and practice in the field. It also means that academics from other fields rush to fill the void by providing an outsider's look at the practice (p.351).

The precise nature of the relationship between those who practise public relations and those who practise journalism is vaguely defined (Owanda, 2010). According to (Skinner, 2001, as cited in Owanda, 2010, p.8) South African public relations practitioner's working within the communication industry argues that the relationship between the public relations practitioners and the media is one of the most important responsibilities of a public relations practitioner. Skinner (2001,p.8) further states that media liaison includes writing and delivery of media releases from the organisation, and delivering it to print and broadcast journalists. It is also

the development of a relationship between the public relations practitioner and the journalist to ensure distribution of the organisational message contained in the media release. Wragg (1993, p.11) agrees that media relations is "important not just because it is a core activity in any public relations function, but because the media act as a conduit to those other audiences which are so important to an organisation."

Additionally, literature confirms the complexity and awkwardness relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists while trying to explain the divide between the two professions (Delorme & Fedler, 2003). In the USA and many other western countries, the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners has been characterised as "distrustful and contemptuous, with a certain degree of social distance remaining between the two groups" (Cameron, Sallot and Curtin, 1997, p.147).

According to Owanda (2010) the distrust and scorn between the two professions is not one-sided. Grunig & Hunt (1983) says 'To listen to journalists and public relations practitioners' talk about each other is to get the impression that the field of media relations is a battleground' (p.223). Journalists feel besieged by hordes of press agents and publicists - 'flacks' – as they call public relations people, who dump unwanted press releases on their desks and push self-serving stories that have little news value. Public relations practitioners, on the other hand, feel they are at the mercy of reporters and editors, who would rather expose than explain, and who know little about the complexities of their public relations organisation."

The distrust and scorn is not one-sided, neither is the hostility between public relations practitioner and journalist recent phenomenon. Jeffers (1977, p.302) found that journalists

viewed public relations practitioners as “obstructionists” who prevent journalists from obtaining the truth. Journalists also considered themselves “superior” to public relations practitioners in status, ethical, and skills terms.

It seems that the hostility between the two functions has existed almost as long as the two professions have existed (Owanda, 2010, p.35). Charron (1994,p.43) states that public relations practitioners and journalists find themselves mutually dependent on one another, a situation which demands cooperation, while their divergent control interests cause distrust and opposition.

However, according to DeLorme & Fedler (2003), far year’s journalists have charged that public relations practitioners are unethical, manipulative, one-sided, and deceptive. Journalists also complain that practitioners serve special interests rather than the public. Public relations practitioners respond that journalists have a narrow and self-righteous view of their work and know little about public relations, a profession in which ethical conduct is important.

2.3 The Namibian perspective on public relations and journalism

In Namibia for instance, Mutambo (2014) notes that despite the establishment of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) in Namibia to harmonise government information management under one umbrella, communication remains painstakingly uncoordinated and fragmented across government institutions, offices, Ministries and Agencies in Namibia. Mutambo (2014) further asserts that ministries still disseminate their own media release, sometimes without the knowledge of the designated mouthpiece of the government – the MICT. What is more nerve-wracking is hearing a

custodian of government information being quoted in the media saying; “I am not aware of that.”

Public relations practitioners need the media to publish or broadcast organisational information to obtain positive publicity and to make the organisation known to the public (Clear, 2015). It is their duty to demonstrate this by appearing knowledgeably in their field, professional, and trustworthy and to permeate the boundaries and attain the necessary recognition that the public relations industry deserves through strategic contributions they bring to the organisation (Mutambo, 2014).

The Communication and Public Relations Corporate Officer at Agra Limited see media practitioners as partners with public relations officers” (Mhunduru, 2016, par7). She stressed that “media practitioners are independent entities that provide public relations officers with a platform to share the company’s profiles and it’s offering”. Mhunduru (2016) further states that the media allows public relations practitioners to reach out to different parts of the country and that media practitioners are important stakeholders in the communication industry.

Similarly, (Akwenye, 2016 as cited in Mhunduru, 2016) states that “media practitioners and public relations officers are partners in the media industry” (par.6). She further emphasised that “public relations jobs are dependent on what is covered and how it is covered.”

Hence, Mutambo (2014) further states that it is safe to argue that little credibility is accorded to public relations in the public sector as only a few government institutions allow their communication practitioners to form part of the management meetings. This strips this important function of the armour of information they need to successfully defend their institutions or the first-hand information to discharge their functions in a manner that adds value to the organisation.

The relationship between PR practitioners and journalists is a territory of fertile debate and at times heated opinions, particularly for those working within PR and journalism (Callard, 2011, p. 2). While many scholars have studied the relationship over many decades, in Africa a very few academic studies on the topic have been conducted.

According to Johnson (2016) relationships between public relations practitioners and the media should be straightforward and based on mutual trust and goals, but like every relationship, these are as good or as bad as the individuals involved. Similarly, Charron (1989) stated that the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners has been hotly debated in the field of communication studies. These debates tend to be dominated by normative questions: Is the work of public relations officers legitimate? Does it affect the quality of information? Are journalists starting to become the subservient agents of public relations undertakings?

The cornerstone of a good relationship is trust, and trust is based on open and honest communication. Effective public relations tell a company's story in a way that is accurate, honest, and easy to understand thus helping to establish a reputation for credibility (Carter, 2015).

Cater (2016) argues that public relations officers are the most incompetent and time wasting hurdles in the dissemination of information. He is of the view that the role basically of public relations is about managing the reputation of their different clientele, gaining understanding of and support for clients, as well as trying to influence opinion and behaviour. Public relations officers use all forms of media and communication to build, maintain and manage the reputation of their employer.

There have been deviations from this noble intention where the media often get half-baked press releases that are marred with errors that the journalists often have to fix. It seems public

relations officers have in-fact decided to give journalists the extra work that they are supposed to handle before putting out an official statement (Carter, 2016). To make matters worse public relations officers feed journalists with a lot of ‘fluff’ which are basically flat-lines when journalism’s aim is to bring factual articles to the masses.

Additional to these the Director of Communication and Marketing at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) notes that “there are instances where journalists present negative information to the public about institutions while getting factual information from public relations officers” (Kapitako, 2003, par12). He had more criticism that there are also instances where journalists would misquote public relations officers as well as instances where a journalist has a story about an institution but does not have the courtesy to check with public relations officers or wait for comments from those responsible. And these creates bad synergy between journalists and public relations officers” (Kapitako, 2013, par13).

He also notes that there is often a misconception among journalists that public relations practitioners engage only in cover up and do not supply the real hard-facts. Similarly, Clear (2015) notes that journalists are sometimes sceptical about information received from public relations practitioners or their departments about controversial issues and that public relations practitioners should always remember that the media want to cover the full story and will, in most cases, consult other sources as well.

The Director of Communications and Marketing at the Namibia University of Science and Technology further argues that public relation practitioners do not respond negatively to media people simply because it is part of their job as public relations practitioners to deal with the media and to provide them with information (Kapitako,2013,par 12).

Additional to this, a survey by Sallot and Johnson (2006) showed that journalists complained about public relations practitioners “lack of news sense and values, accuracy, timeliness and style of presentation” (p. 84). Grabowski (1992) also highlights a number of wrongdoings at the hands of practitioners when it comes to media relations. These include the view that public relations practitioners often lack knowledge about their subject matter, they are ignorant about journalism, have poor sales skills, poor writing skills, rely too often on gimmicks and fail to plan appropriately. As a result public relation practitioners responded by saying that journalists have a narrow and self-righteous view of their work and know little about public relations, a profession in which ethical conduct is important (Derlome & Fedler, 2003, p.100).

Carter (2016) stresses that “most publications or newspapers have a lot of errors, but they often stem from the root, which is the public relations officers who give journalists information that needs ‘panel beating’, but the thing is that you can panel beat it to a certain extent but only so much” (par,4).

Again, what baffled Carter is that some companies opt to use South African public relations firms rather than those in Namibia. “I often asked why, until I realised how difficult it was to actually get any information from in-house public relations officers’ (par, 4).

It is arguable that gaining insights into journalists hostility toward public relations practitioners and vice versa from the perspective of early insiders will assist today’s journalists and public relations practitioners in better understanding how and why certain prejudices and stereotypes arose. These insights may, in turn, help today’s practitioners correct these prejudices and stereotypes either by changing their behaviours or by trying to change mistaken attitudes. This study will therefore provide strategic recommendations and practises that Namibia can adapt in addressing this issue.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This section of the research presents theories on which the study will be based. These are the Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations as well as the Excellence Theory (ET).

According to Black (1999) theories are formulated to explain, predict and understand a phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge, within the limits of a critical bounding assumptions. The theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory which explains why research problem under study exist (Black, 1999).

Grunig and Hunt (1984) make an important contribution to defining what public relations is and what it is not. They define public relations as "management of communication between an organization and its publics" (p. 6).

One of the most useful ways of thinking about public relations has been through the description of public relations models that identify the central ideas of public relations and how they are related to each other. There have historically been four models of public relations used to define the variations in the way public relation is practiced (Castelli 2007, p.1). Grunig and Hunt generally defined the four models in their 1984 book as press agency/publicity, public information, and two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical (p.1). However these study will only employ two models namely the public information model which uses press releases and other one way communication techniques to distribute organisational information as well as the two way symmetrical models which seeks to resolve conflicts and promote mutual benefits, understanding and respect between the organisation and key publics/stakeholders.

Castelli (2007) states that in most literature, government public relations practice has typically been described as following the public information model. Similarly Namibia public relations practitioners in government ministries are also following the public information model which highly advocates for a one-way communication in such a way that their only contact with the public is through the sharing of information related materials such as press releases, annual reports as well as expression of interest through the media. The Minister of Information, Communication and Technology Hon. Tjekero Tweya was also quoted in a newspaper articles stating that “I believe that every empowerment starts with information and therefore it is a responsibility of the public relations officers to avail information to the public through the use of different media platforms” (par.8). The minister further stated that he noted that “platforms such as social media has become the most powerful and interactive tool of communication the world has ever known but he strongly warned public relations practitioners to guard against the dangers caused by these technological platforms such as cyber-crime and advise them to strongly stick to sharing the ministries information through media platforms such as newspapers “(par.11).

The second and last model of public relation that undergirds this study is the two-way symmetrical model. According to Grunig (2001) the two-way symmetrical model depicts a public relations orientation in which organizations and their publics adjust to each other. It focuses on the use of social science research methods to achieve mutual understanding and two-way communication rather than one-way persuasion. In 2001, the theorist by the name James E. Grunig created other names for the symmetrical model as mixed motives, collaborative advocacy, and cooperative antagonism. His intent was to present a model that “balanced self-interests with the interest of others in a give-and-take process that can waver

between advocacy and collaboration (p.62). Grunig argues that this model was the most ethical because all groups were part of the resolution of problems (p.62).

The Two-way symmetrical model according to Grunig and Hunt, (1984) has its goal in a mutual understanding between organization and its publics. They further state that this model relies on open dialogue between the parties and “ideally both management and the publics will change somewhat after a public relations effort” (p. 23). The end result is often viewed as a compromise, a solution that would benefit both the organization and its public. A number of Ministries such as the Ministry of Health and Social Services in Namibia has over the years adopted the two ways symmetrical model based on the behaviour change campaigns that they hold with the public , were the public relations officers goes and hold campaign for a period of 5 days with the public. This campaigns are mostly targeted to the public were interaction is aimed at problem solving as well as motivation.

The Excellence theory is a general theory of public relations that “specifies how public relations makes organizations more effective, how it is organized and managed when it contributes most to organizational effectiveness, the conditions in organizations and their environments that make organizations more effective, and how the monetary value of public relations can be determined.

The excellence theory first explained the value of public relations to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics. For an organization to be effective, according to the theory, it must behave in ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of stakeholders as well as of management (Grunig, 1992, p1).

As defined by Grunig et al. (2002), in a broad sense public relations can simply be defined as “management of communication between an organization and its publics” (p. 2). Grunig’s model of Excellence in public relations (or just Excellence theory) is a benchmark for success in public relations (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995) as well as one of the most cited paradigms in the public relations literature. The model helps to define excellent/effective public relations and demonstrates why and to what extent it contributes to producing “effective organizations” (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 10).

Public relations contribute to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies by building long-term relationships with strategic constituencies. Public relations is most likely to contribute to effectiveness when the head/senior public relations manager forms part of management meetings where he or she is able to shape the organization’s goals and to help determine which external publics are most strategic (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 10).

Therefore, the excellence theory supports this study in a sense that it is advocating for organisational qualities that allows public relations to contribute to the effectiveness of the organisation, through good relationship building with the public and important stakeholders (journalists). Building and maintaining relationships with publics falls under the strategic management heading of public relations and is the key characteristic of excellent public relations.

According to Grunig (1992) “strategically managed public relations is designed to build relationships with the most important stakeholders of an organization (p. 123)”.

Organizations can perform more effectively by developing and maintaining relationships with these organizations and individuals to achieve their goals in a mutually beneficial way.

The excellence theory of public relations is a fundamental and defining statement about what effective public relations is. The Excellence theory is the result of a 15-year comprehensive study to determine what the characteristics of excellent communications and of the companies that do excellent public relations are.

Summary

Understanding the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists is of paramount importance to practising effective media relations. Much of the literature on the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners indicates that the majority of attitudes and perceptions journalists hold towards public relations practitioners are generally negative and they are sceptical of each other's roles. The Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations as well as the Excellence theory were as well used to support the literature of this study. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the following research objectives: 1. exploring the attitudes of public relations officers in the Namibian public service towards the media; 2. determining if differences in the relationship between public relations officers and journalists from government and privately-owned media exist. 3. Find out from journalists if PROs assist or serve as hindrances in the execution of their duties.

Chapter 3 will deal with the research design methodology and explain how the investigation into the research objectives will take place. It will give all the elements that allow the research to be conducted in a proper way. Hence the methodology of how the research will be conducted and all data pertaining to it will be outlined and analysed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the research methodologies used to gather and analyze the data for this study such as design, population, sample, research instruments as well as the data collection procedures that were used.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design which is defined by Hancock (1998) as a research design that is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals.

This study therefore also employed two methods namely the face-to-face interviews as well as the focus group discussions. The face- to- face interview is defined by Becker (2011) as a method that is utilized when a specific target population is involved. The purpose of conducting a face-face/personal interview is to explore the responses of the people to gather more and deeper information. Additionally, face-to-face interviews as according to Becker (2011) have the following advantages: the interviewer can help the participants to understand the question, employment of different techniques are possible such as open-ended questions, visual aids, answer scales, etc and longer interviews are tolerated, higher reluctance to quit. Another advantage of using face-face interview is that it is convenient for interviewees as it can be conducted in their home and their body language and reaction can guide the interviewer. The disadvantages of using the face-to-face interviews are that it is expensive and time consuming (Becker, 2011). Focus group discussion is defined by Hancock (1998) as an organized discussion between 6 to 8 people. Focus group discussions provide participants with a space to discuss a particular topic, in a context where people are allowed to agree or disagree with each other. Focus group discussions can be relatively low cost and provide quick results which means that the actual time and cost for planning, conducting, and

analysing data may be relatively small when compared to alternatives such as survey and individual interviews. Additional to this, the focus group discussions are a flexible assessment tool as interactions between the moderator and participants allow the moderator to probe issues in depth, address new issues as they arise, and to ask participants to elaborate on their responses. On a final note focus group discussion data are easily understood and provide insights into how respondents think about the topic (Palomba & Banta, 199, P. 1996).

On the other hand the disadvantages of using focus group discussions according to Palomba and Banta (1999) are as follows: The group setting can influence the responses of individuals, which is problematic when a dominant member affects the outcomes. The small numbers in focus groups can limit the extent to which the results can and should be generalized: the quality and quantity of focus group data is dependent on the ability of the moderator, making it essential that the moderator is carefully trained and skilful and qualitative nature of focus group data can make it more difficult to summarize and interpret than more quantitative types.

Population

The target population according to Lancaster (2005) is the entire group a researcher is interested in, the group about which the researcher wishes to draw conclusions. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), a population of the study is to specify the boundaries of the body of content to be considered. The population of this study comprised of the 23 government Ministries (Government of Namibia, 2016) and the country's 13 print media houses.

3.2 Sample

According to Payne and Payne (2004) a sample size represents the number of observations taken to conduct a statistical analysis. Sample sizes can compose of people, animals, food batches, machines, batteries or whatever population is being evaluated.

This study used the probability sampling techniques, specifically the simple random sampling which is defined by Mugo (2002) as the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population.

Five names of five Ministries were drawn from a hat contain twenty-three names of all the government ministries in Namibia. As a result, the following Ministries were selected (Ministry of Health and Social Services, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare, Office of the Auditor General and the Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology).

Additional to these, the same process was used to select the 16 print media journalists by means of throwing all the names of journalist working in the 13 print media houses in a basket and randomly selecting 16 journalists.

3.3 Research instruments

This study used interview guides with open-ended questions for key informant interviews with public relations officers because the open-ended nature of the question defines the topic under investigation and provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss the topics in more detail (Hancock, 1998). Another advantage of using the open-ended questions is that if the interviewee has difficulty answering a question or provides only a brief response, the interviewer can use cues or prompts to encourage the interviewee to consider the question further (Faroog, et al, 2011). Another instrument used was the focus

group discussion guide for print media journalists. Focus group discussions guide are ideal to obtain certain types of information or used when circumstances would make it difficult to collect information using other methods of data collection (Hancock, 1998).

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection procedure is defined by Bless (2006) as the manner in which data will be collected and how the research instruments would be used to collect data. In this study, the data was collected based on face-to-face contact. Firstly, the researcher sought permission from the University of Namibia to conduct the research. Thereafter permission was sought from permanent secretaries of ministries. The researcher was referred to the chief public relations officer of the ministry. Appointments through phone calls were scheduled with the Chief public relations officers, however some were in office and some were in the field, for those that were not in office they requested the researcher to interview the senior public relations officers. All the face-to-face interviews with Public relations officers were done at their work offices.

Additional to this, a permission letter was also forwarded to the editors of newspapers that were selected through random sampling such as the *Namibian*, *New Era*, and *Republikein* as well as the *Namibian Sun* newspaper to allow their personnel to take part in the study. The editors just referred the researcher to any journalists. The researcher had to Phone the referred journalists to book for focus group discussion. The focus group discussion took place at the hall at Bokamoso entrepreneurial center in Katutura. There journalists were 16, so they were divided in groups of 8, which makes for 2 groups. They were all interviewed on the same day one group after the other. The only challenged experienced during the focus group discussion is that some journalist were coming late but however they were all cooperative and willing to wait for other.

A digital voice recorder was used to record the information from both set of respondents.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data that was obtained from the research was in the form of words rather than numbers. In its analysis, the qualitative data is not limited to one particular method, as different approaches can be used to analyse the study data depending on the nature and purpose of the study (Dey, 1993).

According to Lancaster (2005) data collection is a process of evaluating data using analytical and logical reasoning to examine each component of the data provided. This form of analysis is just one of the many steps that must be completed when conducting a research experiment. Data from various sources is gathered, reviewed, and then analysed to form some sort of finding or conclusion.

Qualitative data from the interview guides as well as the focus group discussions was analysed using categorization that is informed by the objectives of this study (fixed coding) while making allowance for other incidental findings through flexible coding (Treadwell, 2014).

4. Research Ethics

During the course of this study, ethics was given due consideration. According to William (2006), ethics are the rules of conduct in research. The following ethical norms served as guide in data collection and analysis. The ethical issue of informed consent was considered. Israel and Hay (2006) stated that informed consent means that, participants need first to comprehend and second to agree voluntarily to the nature of the research and their role within it. This will be accomplished through the signing of a consent form by all research subjects. The consent form states the nature of the study and what is expected of all participants in the research.

All the participants were assured of confidentiality. This will be done to protect them (Parker, 2005, as cited in Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Hence, to ensure that the principles of anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed, there will be no collection of the details or the personal information on the participants (McMurray, 2004) and their names will not be revealed in this study.

Summary

This chapter described the various criteria and techniques used in collecting and analysing data for the study. A qualitative research design was used in this study where face to face interviews as well as focus group discussions were conducted to gather data from the public relations officers and journalists in order to answer the research questions. This study used key informant interview guides as well as focus group guides to collect the data. Fixed coding and flexible analysis was used to describe and interpret the results of the project.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Introduction

This chapter gives a brief presentation of the data collected from the journalists of the different print media houses namely *The Namibian*, *New Era*, *Republikein*, *Namibian Sun* were only the New Era newspaper is state owned while the Namibia, Republikein as well as the Namibian Sun are all privately owned newspapers. It further presents data collected from the public relations officers of the five Namibian government ministries namely Ministry of Health and social services (MoHSS), Ministry of Information Communication and Technology (MICT), Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF), Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare and lastly from the office of the Auditor General. The main objective of this study was to explore the status of government-media relations from the perspective of the public service and the reporters covering the public service taking into consideration that hostility between these parties would impede the goals of public communication and effective engagement with citizens.

This Chapter is divided into three sections namely, Section A which looks at the demographic characteristics of research participants which includes the gender and age groups of all the participants of the study, section B which looks at data collected on government- media relations in the Namibian public service during the face-to-face interviews with public relations officers from the sampled ministries, and the final Section C which looks at data collected on the government- media relations in the Namibian public service during the focus group discussions conducted with journalist from *The Namibian*, *New Era*, and *Namibia Sun* as well as *Republikein* newspapers.

4.1 Section A: Demographic information

Data collected for the study from both public relation officers as well as journalists indicates that the total of participants interviewed for the whole study were 21. There were four female who are public relations officers and 12 female journalists, one male public relations officer and 4 male journalists. A total of 16 (76%) females and five (24%) males therefore participated in the study. All the participants interviewed during the study were between the ages of 26-34 years old (100%), (see figure 1 below).

Figure. 1. Gender and age representation of the study respondents

Table 1

Gender

Sex	Public relations Officers (PROs)	Journalists	Total %
Female	4	12	71%
Male	1	4	29%
Total	5	16	100%

Table 2

Age

Age	Public relations Officer (PROs)	Journalists	Total in %
18-25	0	0	0%
26-34	5	16	100%
35-45	0	0	0%
46 and above	0	0	0%
Total	5	16	100%

4.2 Section B: Government- media relations in the Namibian public Service: Perspective of PROs

The Public relations officers were asked how they see the attitudes of journalists towards them. The majority of them pointed out that “journalists attitudes towards public relations officers are really good because whenever they need information their first point of consultation is always public relations department and this approach really depends on the good working relationships that PROs and organisations builds with journalists” . Only 1 respondent was of the view that “journalist attitudes are bad because, they get aggressive when they are having deadlines for their articles .The respondent further stresses that this is also not fair on them because they also have tight schedules”. (See figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Representation of the attitudes of journalist towards public relations officers

	Public relations officers (PROs)		Total in %	
Good attitudes	4		80%	
Bad attitudes	1		20%	
Total	5		100%	

Another question posted to the Public relation officers was regarding their working relationship with journalists. The majority of respondents , responded by indicating that “they have a very good working relationship with journalists, journalists are free to contact them at all times and for good planning purposes they all have to communicate with journalists in case they have something they want it to be covered” . (See figure 3)

Figure 3: Representation of the working relationship of public relations officers with journalist

	Public relations officers (PROs)	Total in %
Good working relationship	5	100%
Bad working relationship	0	0%

Total	5	100%
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Print media in Namibia is divided between privately owned media houses such as *Republikein* and state-owned media houses such as *New Era*. The majority of public relation officers interviewed during this study indicated that they “treat all journalists the same because they all have the same task which is to inform the public”. The respondents further pointed out that “whether the journalist is from a private or stated owned newspaper they do not even show any sign of hostility towards them”. (see figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Representation of the differences in the relationship between PROs and journalists from Government and privately owned media in %

	Public relations officers (PROs)	Total in %
Treat all journalist the same	5	100%
Treat journalist differently	0	0%
Total	5	100%

All the public relations officers interviewed from the five sampled government ministries indicated that “there is a high need of a good working relationship with journalists”. All respondents indicated that “journalists are every good at building relationships with public relations officers because their aim is to inform the public and probe into issues , with a lack of relationship building skills their duties of informing the public will not be possible”. Only on public relations officer was of the view that “even though journalists are good at building relationships , the problem only arises with public relations officers as they lack understanding of the journalists duties”. (see figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Representation of a need for a good working relationship with journalists in %

	Public relations officers		Total in %	

Good working relationship needed with journalist required	5		100%	
Good working relationship with journalist needed	0		0%	
Total	5		100%	

When the interviewed public relations officers were asked how they felt regarding how journalist cover news of their ministries. The majority responded indicating that “in most cases journalists do not cover news about their ministries fairly, timely nor accurately”. They further stressed that “the information that journalist always choose to cover regarding the ministries they represent is always not newsworthy”. The minority indicated that “their ministries news is always covered fairly and accurately”. However the majority also indicated that if wrong information regarding the ministry they represent is communicated to the public, “They always request the editor of the newspaper to rectify that information through a press release”. (See figure 6 below).

Figure 6: Representation of fairly, timely and accurate news reporting of government ministries in %

	Public relations officers (PROs)	Total in %
News covered fairly, timely and accurately	1	20%
News not covered fairly , timely and accurately	4	80%
Total	5	100%

The majority of public relations officers interviewed indicated that in order to create a good and trusting working relationship with journalists the journalists’ need to “create an open

working environment for the institution they work for with PROs”. Journalists also need to know the PRO names and have their contact details at all times. Journalist must also visit PROs regularly at their ministries to better understand their working environment and news dynamics and further create avenues for engagement and prompt responses. (see figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Representation of how the relationship between PRO”s and journalist should be in %

	Public relations officer (PROs)		Total in %
Good working relationship required	5		100%
Good working relationship not required	0		0%
Total	5		100%

4.3 Section C: Government- media relations in the Namibian public service: Perspective of journalists

Two Focus group discussions were conducted with journalists from the different print media houses, the first interview comprising of eight journalists was conducted on Monday the 3rd July 2017 and the last interview comprising of 8 journalists was conducted on the 5th July 2017. All these focus group discussions interviews were conducted at a conference hall at Bokamoso entrepreneurial centre in Katutura.

According to the data collected during the two focus groups discussion interviews conducted with journalists , the data indicated that the minority of journalists strongly emphasised that the “attitude of public relations officers towards journalists is good and it keeps improving as more young educated PRO”s enters the trait”. However the majority indicated that the “attitude of PROs in Namibia towards journalists is very bad and poor because the PROs

have a tendency of treating journalists like they are all not media practitioners”. They further responded by saying that “most PROs are always not ready to answer questions regarding a story that involves their ministries.” The respondents further strongly emphasised that “PROs especially of Ministries are always pushing them to other people or requesting journalists to get answers from the Permanent secretaries”.

When journalists were asked regarding their working relationship with PROs, minority indicated that “they have a good working relationship with some PROs which is primary because of the relationship they build with them”. The majority indicated that “their working relationship with PROs is generally bad because they are never available for comments” and they responded by stating that “PROs thinks journalists are doing them a favour to cover news about their ministries.” Additional to these journalists further indicated that most “PROs wants journalists to do their jobs in a sense that sometimes PROs will give irrelevant information to journalists to publish and expect journalist to clean that information up and publish it, which is literally unfair”. The majority of the journalists further indicated that “they have an open door policy with PROs, they are free to come in anytime and call them anytime but it is not the case with journalist”.

When journalists were asked if there is a need for a good working relationship with PROs, the majority strongly responded by saying “yes it is very important to have a good working relationship with PROs mostly because PROs are the mouth pieces of every organisation and they will be in a good state to always provide them with the correct information”. All journalists also responded by saying “ most PROs are good at building working relationship but the only problem is their bureaucracies with in their ministries and not knowing what information to give to the media thus as a result most PROs stay away from even building a relationship”.

Another question that was posted to the journalists was to assess if PROs assisted or serves as hindrances in the execution of their duties. All journalists strongly responded by saying that “PROs serve as hindrances in the execution of their duties.” Some of the points that came out strongly were as follows: “PROs mostly need to be pushed to give correct information”, “some are very dodgy and some companies also do not allow their PROs to give comments as they see fit” 16 (100%), “journalist always have to wait for instructions from permanent secretaries before they can respond and in most cases this kills the story” 16 (100%). Additional to this 8 (50%) also agreed that PROs are always not ready to respond to the queries of journalists, they only respond when it suits them and at all times the information they provide to journalists is never newsworthy, mostly just press releases to present their ministries in a good light .

In order to improve the communication between PROs and Journalists, the following suggestions came out strongly from the two groups: the minority indicated that “PROs duties needs to be clearly outlined so that they became the only contact with the media,” the majority of the journalists indicated that “the working relationship from both sides needs to be strengthened”. Additional to that the majority of journalist also indicated that “journalists and PROs also need to attend trainings in order to understand what media relations entails and for them to also discuss what their roles entails and how they can best meet each other half way for the purpose of informing and educating the public “.

All the journalists interviewed indicated that they are not satisfied with the information for placement that PROs provides them with, this is because “the information they get is never timely, accurately nor newsworthy”. “It is just information to portray their organisation in a good light and to get rid of journalists” (see figure 8 below) for the presentation of section C.

Figure 8: Government - media relations in the Namibian public service: Perspective of journalist

		Journalist	Total in %
Good attitudes of public relations officers towards journalist		6	38%
Bad attitudes of public relations officers towards journalist		10	63%
Total		16	100%
Good working relationship between PROs and journalist		1	6%
Bad working relationship between PROs and journalist		10	63%
Average working relationship between PROs and journalist		5	31%
Total		16	100%
Good working relationship with PROs required		16	100%
Good working relationship with PROs not required		0	0%
Total		16	100%
PROs serves as hindrances in the execution of journalist duties		16	100%
Total		16	100%
	Improving Communication between PROs and journalists	Journalist	Total in %

PRO duties needs to be clearly outlined so that they became the only contact with the media		5	31%
working relationship from both sides needs to be strengthened		16	100%
journalists and PROs also need to attend training in order to understand what media relations entails		11	69%
		Journalist	Total in %
Journalists satisfied with the placement that PROs provides them with for placement		0	0%
Journalists not satisfied with placement that PROs provides them with for placement		16	100%
Total		16	100%

Summary

This chapter was divided into three sections, Section A which has given information about the biological information of the respondents. Section B which presented data on government- media relations in the Namibian public service during face-to-face interviews with Public relations officers from Ministry of Health and Social Services, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT), Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare as well as the Office of the Auditor general. Section C which presented data collected on the government- media relations in the

Namibian public service during the focus group discussions conducted with journalist from The Namibian, New Era, and Namibia Sun as well as Republikein newspapers.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the results more fully, draw conclusions and make recommendations. It will also demonstrate whether the research goals, based on the research objectives, were met.

Discussions include limitations of the study and suggestions made for future research. This chapter combines and draws upon all data sources to discuss the overall findings, while highlighting the similarities and differences this study has in relation to literature on the topic.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Discussion on the demographic information collected during the study

From the data collected, it is concluded that the majority of the respondents were female. In terms of the journalist, the majority were female. They were all between the ages of 26-34. This finding is however consistent to previous authors like Ekeanyanwa and Obianingwe (2012) who stated that journalists positions are mostly occupied by female between the ages of 25-35.

5.1.2 Exploring the attitudes of public relations officers in the Namibian public service towards the media.

Regarding the attitudes of public relations officers in the Namibian public service towards the media, data provided by the majority public relations officers strongly showed that “journalists attitudes towards PROs is really good because whenever they need information their first point of consultation is always public relations department and this approach really depends on the good working relationships that PROs and organisations builds with journalists.

This finding is however consistent with the findings by Kaura & Shaari (2006) who posits that public relations has a vital and strategic role to play in building and enhancing on-going or long-term relationships with an organisation's key constituencies, including the media public. It is also consistent with findings by Owanda (2010) who stated that South African public relations practitioners working within the communication industry argues that the relationship between the public relations practitioners and the media is one of the most important responsibilities of a public relations practitioner. Pincus et al. (1993) also found that public relations practitioners who take the time to develop good media relations skills and who make the effort to build good relationships with journalists are more likely to achieve better results for their clients or organisations. Additional to these, White and Hobsbawm (2007) also found that "while public relations practitioners are aware of the extent to which they work with and provide information to journalists, journalists are perhaps less willing to acknowledge the use made of public relations material" (Callard, 2011,p. 290).

According to the data provided by journalists regarding the attitudes of public relations officers towards the media in Namibia, the majority of the journalist indicated that, the "attitude of PRO's towards journalists is very bad and poor because the PROs have a tendency of treating journalists like they are all not media practitioners." This finding is similar to the findings of Jeffers (1977) who also found that journalists viewed public relations practitioners as "obstructionists" who prevent journalists from obtaining the truth and journalists also considered themselves "superior" to public relations practitioners in status, ethical, and skills terms.

The majority of the journalists interviewed further responded by saying that "most PRO's are always not ready to answer questions regarding a story that involves their ministries". This finding is in line with Mutambo (2014)) who stated that it is safe to argue that little credibility is accorded to public relations in the public sector as only a few government

institutions allow their communication practitioners to form part of the management meetings. This strips this important function of the armour of information which they need to successfully defend their institutions or the first-hand information to discharge their functions in a manner that adds value to the organisation. Other researchers such as Comrie (2002) also found similar results stating that journalists have been dismissing PR practitioners as “spin doctors, media manipulators, corporate flunkies, flak catchers and paid liars.

5.1.3 Discussion regarding the existence of the differences in the relationship between PROs and journalists from government and private-owned media.

Print media in Namibia is divided between private owned media houses such as *Republikein* and state-owned media houses such as *New Era*. All the public relation officers interviewed during this study indicated that they “treat all journalists the same because they all have the same task which is to inform the public, even though , there is a difference in the way they cover news from state owned media houses and private owned media houses. “This finding is however similar to the findings of researchers such as Moehler & Singh (2011) who found that in general, the private media are more responsive to the public because they cannot rely on tax subsidies and government advertising and must generate their revenue by being relevant or entertaining. For these reasons, the initial expectation is that trust in private media will exceed trust in public media.

Furthermore, according to the data collected from public relations officers and journalists regarding a need for a good working relationship among each other, all public relations officers and all the journalists interviewed from the five sampled government ministries as well as from the sampled print media houses indicated that “there is a high need of a good working relationship with each other”. This finding is also similar to the findings of Pincus et al (1993) and Comrie (2002) who stated that public relations practitioners who take the time to develop good media relations skills and who make the effort to build good relationships

with journalists are more likely to achieve better results for their clients or organisation. Supporting this theory Comrie (2002) posits that “successful PR people wanting publicity operate from a clear understanding of what it is that journalists are looking for in a story”.

5.1.4 To find out from journalists if PROs assist or serve as hindrances in the execution of their duties.

Data collected from journalists is regarding the role that PROs play in assisting journalists in the execution of their duties. All the journalists strongly responded by indicating the following, “PRO’s serve as hindrances in the execution of their duties”. Some of the points that came out strongly are as follows: all the journalists indicated that “PRO’s mostly need to be pushed to give correct information”, this finding is similar to the findings of Callard (2011) found out that journalists also view some information supplied by PR practitioners as unabashedly seeking to promote self-serving interests without having any real news value (p.107). Another reason that came out strongly was that “some PROs are very dodgy and some companies also do not allow their PROs to give comments as they see fit”, this is similar to the findings of Carter (2016) who found that in Namibia some companies opt to use South African public relations firms rather than those in Namibia because it is very difficult to get information from Namibian in-house PROs. In conjunction to this “journalist always have to wait for instructions from permanent secretaries before they can respond and in most cases this kills the story.” This is similar to the findings of Mohan (2014) who found that some ministries PRO’s refers researcher to Senior Programme Officers, who again directs journalists to send formal requests to the Permanent Secretary of their ministries. Additional to this some journalists also agreed that PROs are always not ready to respond to the queries of journalist, they only respond when it suits them and at all times the information they provide to journalists is never newsworthy, mostly just press releases to present their ministries in a good light This findings is similar to the findings of Grabowski (1992) who

found that most mistakes that public relations officers make include being ignorant about the needs of a journalist, offering media releases and story ideas that lack news value or relevance to the target audiences, contacting journalists when they are frantically busy on deadline and being obstructive. Grabowski (1992) further stated such kinds of mistakes and tactics according to who frustrate and annoy journalists and often result in them viewing public relations practitioners negatively.

When the interviewed public relations officers were asked how they felt regarding how journalists cover news of their ministries. The majority of the PROs responded by indicating that “in most cases journalists do not cover news about their ministries fairly, timely nor accurately”. They further all stressed that “the information that journalists always choose to cover regarding the ministries they represent is always not newsworthy.” These findings are similar to the findings of Sallot and Johnson (2006) who found that journalists complained about PR practitioners “lack of news sense and values, accuracy, timeliness and style of presentation” (p. 84). Additional to these, Delome & Feddler (2003) also found that news stories from public relations officers were expected to be accurate, objective, and fair—not bogus.

5.2 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to evaluate government-media relation in the Namibian public service. The objectives of the study were mostly to explore the attitudes of public relations officers towards the media to see if there exist differences in the relationship between PROs and journalists from private owned and state owned media houses as well as to find out from journalists if PROs serve as hindrances in the execution of their work. Most of the findings of this study were closely similar to the findings of most researchers that researched on the topic of media relations in the world. However it is very interesting to note that a lot of scholars that did research on this topic recently are starting to find that there is a change in the

perceptual climate between public relations practitioners and the media, were in lots of cases public relations fraternity has witnessed journalists leaving their profession, to seek greener pastures in public relations, this is very similar in Namibia where most radio as well as newspaper journalists find good paying jobs as public relations officers. Given this rationale, the researcher believes that the main issues discussed in this thesis lay the foundation for a mutually beneficial PR-journalist relationship that can help define the role of media relations in corporate public relations practice.

The relationship between the journalists and public relations professionals has changed and will continue to change. But the relationship still consists of mutual dependence and mutual trust of one another. Journalists and PR professionals need to strengthen their relationship in order to serve the public with accurate and relevant information. Now, the two professions have started to work more efficiently and both are benefiting from this relationship.

Journalists and public relations professionals need to possess the ability to communicate clearly, concisely, and honestly. They need to understand the pressures of daily deadlines and be extremely aware of the cause and effect of making public statements. As a journalist, they must be protective of their publication and their readers. Public relations professional need to be protective of the organization/company or client they work for. In a nutshell, if an individual can't write, talk to people, and put forth easily understandable arguments, then they are in a wrong profession.

Public relations professionals know the values of key publics involved with ethical dilemmas, and can conduct rigorous ethical analyses to guide the policies of their organizations, as well as in communications with publics and the news media. Careful and consistent ethical analyses facilitate trust, which enhances the building and maintenance of relationships – after all, that is the ultimate purpose of the public relations function.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and analysis of this study:

- Part of the mandate of PR Practitioners is to feed intelligence to top management on strategic stakeholders' issues, concerns and expectations in order to analyse trends and predict their consequences, to make this possible the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) in Namibia and academics should compile a PR Code of Ethics booklet that applies to the Namibian context
- Namibian PR industry has good media relations and events management skills, good public speaking and multi-tasking skills, however most PR graduates are not proactive and innovative, and could benefit from an expanded mentoring programme in order to also learn things that are not in the scope of PR.
- Government at all levels in Namibia must establish a coordinating forum between the government and the leadership of the media. This forum can be used to straighten out any misunderstandings that arise in the day to day relationships and also start a new culture of mutual cooperation.
- Government communications has to also get its act together in being more responsive to providing information to the media to be able to do their work. Media training for people who are tasked with the work of media liaison as well as training for political principals has to be prioritized.
- Media professional bodies should be serious in maintaining ethics in the media industry by sanctioning defaulting journalists to ensure that journalism practitioners adhere to laid down codes of practice.
- Further investigation into the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists, particularly the inconsistencies between the values placed on public

relations practitioners by journalists, which in some instances is higher than the value placed on public relations practitioners by public relations practitioners.

- The communication policy to be developed by the Ministry of Information , Communication and Technology which would provide guidelines to government communicators on how to conduct external communication, in particular with the general public.
- Public relations officers in the public service need to adopt and make use of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations that uses two way communications to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and their stakeholders.

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APPENDICES

Annexure 1: CONSTENT FORM

Good day sir/madam, my name is Albertina KASHUUPULWA. I am conducting a research study on the topic: **Evaluating government-media relations in the Namibian public service** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master's degree in Media Studies at the University of Namibia.

The study's specific objectives are to:

- **To explore the attitudes of public relations officers in the Namibian public service towards the media.**
- **To determine if there exists differences in the relationship between PROs and journalists from government and privately-owned media.**
- **To find out from journalists if PROs assist or serve as hindrances in the execution of their duties.**

You have been selected for this study because of your job as a journalist or public relations officer in the Namibian public service. You will be asked questions about journalists/PRO relations.

Participation is voluntary and your responses will not be credited to you except you choose otherwise. No discomfort, stress or risks are anticipated. Your participation in the study will aid the practice of media relations.

I agree to participate in the study titled "**Evaluating government-media relations in the Namibian public service**" by Albertina KASHUUPULWA of the Department of Information and Communication Studies, University of Namibia. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of this participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research record or destroyed.

Albertina KASHUUPULWA (0851413334)

Signature and Date

Participant

Signature and Date

Research at the University of Namibia that involves human participation is overseen by the Centre for Research and Publications. Questions and queries as regards your rights as a

participant should be addressed to my main supervisor, Prof Eno Akpabio (eakpabio@unam.na; 061-2064794).

Annexure 2: Focus group discussion guide for journalists

I am Albertina Kashiupulwa, A master's student at the University of Namibia. My research study is titled: **Evaluating government-media relations in the Namibian public service.**

Kindly assist me by answering the following questions regarding my research topic. The response in this interview guide will respect the ethics of research in the manner that it will be highly kept confidential and nothing will be disclosed that can link the participant to the response.

The aim of this study is to explore the status of government-media relations from the perspective of the public service and the reporters covering the public service bearing in mind that hostility between these parties would impede the goals of public communication and effective engagement with citizens. The data will be used to formulate appropriate recommendations for Namibia specifically in the field of Media Relations.

Research questions on government-media relations in the public service

1. How is the attitude of PRO's towards journalists?

Probe:

- Is it good/ bad and why?

2. How is your working relationship with PROs?

- Are you always a phone call away when they need you

- Do they have to book in advance to see you or can they just come through?

3. Do you think there is a need for a good working relationship with PRO's?

- Are PRO's good at building relationships with journalists

4. In your opinions, do PRO's assist or serve as hindrances in the execution of your duties/ if they do what can they do to improve that?

- Do PRO's make your job of collecting news easier?

- Are PRO's always available when you need them for interviews?

- Are the PRO's always ready to respond to your queries?

- Do they provide you with proper (newsworthy) information?

5. What do you think need to be done in order to improve the communication between PROs and Journalist?

6. Are you satisfied with the information for placement that public relations officers provides you with?

Probe:

- Do public relations officers provide you with relevant, accurate and timely information for placing, or do they just give you anything to get rid of you?

- Are public relations officers forthcoming when you call them about information for placements?

Annexure 3: Interview Guide for Public Relations officers

I am Albertina Kashuupulwa, A master's student at the University of Namibia. My research study is titled: **Evaluating government-media relations in the Namibian public service.**

Kindly assist me by answering the following questions regarding my research topic. The response in this interview guide will respect the ethics of research in the manner that it will be highly kept confidential and nothing will be disclosed that can link the participant to the response.

The aim of this study is to explore the status of government-media relations from the perspective of the public service and the reporters covering the public service bearing in mind that hostility between these parties would impede the goals of public communication and effective engagement with citizens. The data will be used to formulate appropriate recommendations for Namibia specifically in the field of Media Relations.

Section A: Biographical Information

Instructions: Please choose one answer by marking it with a “X”

1. Gender

01	Male	
02	Female	

2. Age

01	18-25	
02	26-34	
03	35-45	
04	46 and above	

3. Occupation

	Designation		Mark with a “X” the appropriate answer
01	Public relations officer		
02	Information officer		
03	Public relations practitioner		

Section B: Research questions on government-media relations in the public service

4. How are the attitudes of Journalist towards public relations officers?

Probe:

- Is it good/bad and why?

5. How is your working relationship with journalists?

Probe:

- Are you always a phone call away when they need you?

- Do you always have to book in advance to get them to come and cover events for your organisations or how do you go about it?

6. Is there a difference in the relationship between PRO's and journalists from government and privately owned media?

Probe:

- Do you treat journalists from privately-owned media (Republikein, AZ etc.) differently from those from state-owned media like NBC and New Era?

- Are journalists from state-owned media more sympathetic and understanding than those from privately-owned media?

- Do you detect hostility/tensions in your relationship with journalists from privately-owned media as opposed to those from state-owned media?

7. Do you think there is a need for a good working relationship with journalists?

Probe:

- Are journalists good at building and maintaining good working relationships?

8. Are you satisfied with the way the journalists cover news for your institutions/organisation?

Probe:

- Do journalists cover news about your organisation fairly, timely and accurately?

- Is the information that the journalist report on your organisation newsworthy?

- What happens when journalists cover something which is not true about your institution?

9. In your opinion how should the relationship between PRO's and journalists be in order to create a good and trusting working relationship?

- How should PRO's and Journalist work best together
