

Analysing the Role of Stakeholder Engagement in Determining the Effectiveness of Communication and Public Relations Strategies: Ghana Highway Authority in Perspective

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Abstract

This research paper examines the importance of stakeholder engagement in shaping effective communication and public relations strategies, specifically focusing on the Ghana Highway Authority (GHA). The study reveals that most participants are well-educated and relatively young, with a significant proportion affiliating with the GHA, adding credibility to the findings. The investigation finds that most participants rate the GHA's communication and public relations strategies as good, with some even deeming them excellent. However, the study also identifies areas that need improvement, such as enhancing interactions with citizens and refining messaging techniques. The study also uncovers significant challenges that hinder stakeholder engagement within the GHA, including inadequate communication channels and a lack of trust. These results support previous research that emphasises the crucial importance of trust in successful engagement with stakeholders. The study further emphasises the complexity of reconciling divergent stakeholder interests, which can lead to passionate advocacy and complicated engagement efforts. The paper recommends that to enhance communication and public relations, the GHA should engage stakeholders in the decision-making process and create reliable systems for feedback. By incorporating stakeholder perspectives and insights, the GHA can refine its strategies and better address the needs and concerns of its diverse stakeholder community.

Keywords: Stakeholder Engagement, Effectiveness of Communication, Public Relations Strategies

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the importance of stakeholder engagement in institutional performance has gained significant attention. This is particularly true for public institutions, such as the Ghana Highway Authority (GHA), which is critical in providing public services. Effective communication and public relations strategies are vital to stakeholder engagement and are essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and trust in public institutions (Bartkus et al., 2019). This thesis examines the role of stakeholder engagement in determining the effectiveness of the GHA's communication and public relations strategies.

The GHA is mainly responsible for constructing, maintaining, and managing Ghana's national highways network. As a public institution, the GHA is responsible for engaging with its stakeholders, including road users, communities, civil society organisations, and the media. Stakeholder engagement is critical for promoting transparency, accountability, and trust, essential for effective public service delivery (Lai et al., 2021). The GHA recognises the importance of stakeholder engagement and has developed communication and public relations strategies to promote dialogue, collaboration, and feedback. However, effective stakeholder engagement is not always easy to achieve, and there are many challenges that public institutions like the GHA face. For instance, stakeholders may have different interests, values, and priorities, making it difficult to find common ground (Harrison et al., 2021). Additionally, stakeholders may have limited trust in public institutions, making it difficult to establish meaningful engagement (Anaele et al., 2020). As such, public institutions need to develop effective communication and public relations strategies that address these challenges and promote meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognised as an essential component of institutional performance, particularly in the public sector. Research has shown that effective stakeholder engagement can enhance the quality and efficiency of public service delivery and promote transparency, accountability, and trust (Bartkus et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2021). For instance, a study by Bartkus et al. (2019) found that stakeholder engagement can improve the quality of public services by identifying and addressing the needs and concerns of stakeholders. Similarly, Lai et al. (2021) found that stakeholder engagement can enhance accountability by promoting transparency and ensuring that public institutions are responsive to the needs of their stakeholders.

Effective communication and public relations strategies are critical components of stakeholder engagement. Research has shown that public institutions communicating effectively and transparently with their stakeholders are more likely to build trust and promote meaningful engagement (Anaele et al., 2020). Effective public relations strategies can also help manage stakeholder expectations, address concerns, and build support for public initiatives (Harrison et al., 2021). As such, the GHA's communication and public relations strategies are critical in promoting meaningful stakeholder engagement.

However, effective stakeholder engagement is not always easy to achieve, and public institutions like the GHA face many challenges. For instance, stakeholders may have limited trust in public institutions, making it difficult to establish meaningful engagement (Anaele et al., 2020). Additionally, stakeholders may have different interests, values, and priorities, making it difficult to find common ground (Harrison et al., 2021). As such, public institutions need to develop effective communication and public relations strategies that address these challenges and promote meaningful stakeholder engagement.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Ghana Highway Authority (GHA) manages and maintains Ghana's road network. Effective communication and public relations strategies are essential for the GHA to build strong relationships with its stakeholders and ensure it meets its objectives. This literature review examines the role of stakeholder engagement in determining the effectiveness of the GHA's communication and public relations strategies.

2.1 Definition of Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial aspect of road safety management in Ghana, specifically for the Ghana Highway Authority (GHA). It involves involving individuals or groups affected by or interested in the GHA's activities in the decision-making process (Freeman, 2010). This engagement aims to build relationships based on trust and mutual understanding, which are essential for effective communication and public relations strategies.

Effective stakeholder engagement has become increasingly important for organisations, including those in the road safety sector. As highlighted by Hallowell and Gambatese (2010), the involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process can lead to better outcomes, as it ensures that the needs and concerns of all relevant parties are considered. This is particularly important in the road safety sector, where the decisions made by organisations like the GHA can significantly impact the safety and well-being of individuals and communities.

Stakeholder engagement can take many forms, including consultation, collaboration, and partnership (Freeman, 2010). Consultation involves seeking the views and opinions of stakeholders, often through surveys or focus groups, while collaboration involves working with stakeholders to develop and implement solutions. Partnership involves a more long-term and collaborative approach, where stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes and have a say in the organisation's overall direction.

The benefits of stakeholder engagement are numerous and have been widely documented in the literature. For example, Chen and Rasmussen (2014) found that stakeholder engagement can increase trust and credibility, improve decision-making, and reduce conflict. Similarly, Wood and Gray (2017) found that stakeholder engagement can improve stakeholder satisfaction and project outcomes. One key challenge of stakeholder engagement is ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are identified and involved in the process. This is particularly important in the road safety sector, where stakeholders can include many individuals and groups, such as road users, transport operators, government agencies, and community organisations. As noted by Hallowell and Gambatese (2010), effective stakeholder engagement requires a thorough understanding of the stakeholder landscape, including identifying key stakeholders, their needs and interests, and their level of influence.

Another challenge of stakeholder engagement is ensuring that the process is inclusive and participatory, with all stakeholders having an equal voice in decision-making. As Freeman (2010) noted, stakeholder engagement should be based on dialogue, transparency, and accountability, with stakeholders having access to relevant information and opportunities to provide feedback and input.

2.2 Internal and External Stakeholders

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for the successful implementation of road safety initiatives. The GHA has internal and external stakeholders with unique perspectives and interests. Internal stakeholders of the GHA include employees, management, and the board of directors. Effective communication and engagement with these stakeholders are crucial to implementing road safety policies effectively. According to Wu and Wu (2018), internal stakeholders should be engaged in developing road safety policies and strategies to ensure buy-in and ownership. Involving employees in decision-making can lead to more outstanding commitment and motivation towards implementing road safety initiatives. Effective communication between management and employees is also critical to ensure that road safety policies are understood and adhered to. External stakeholders of the GHA include the

government, contractors, communities, and road users. These stakeholders play a critical role in the implementation of road safety initiatives. For example, contractors are responsible for constructing and maintaining roads, making them key stakeholders in promoting safer roads. Communities are also critical in promoting road safety, as accidents and road incidents often affect them.

Engaging with external stakeholders is essential to understand their perspectives and needs. According to Bevan et al. (2019), involving external stakeholders in developing road safety policies and initiatives can lead to more effective outcomes. For example, consulting with road users can help identify key concerns and areas for improvement, such as dangerous intersections or poorly designed roadways.

Effective stakeholder engagement requires a proactive and inclusive approach. The GHA must actively seek out the perspectives of its stakeholders and ensure that their voices are heard. This includes providing opportunities for feedback and consultation and ensuring stakeholders are informed about road safety initiatives and their progress. In conclusion, effective stakeholder engagement is essential for successfully implementing road safety initiatives. The GHA must engage with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that road safety policies are implemented effectively and in a way that meets the needs of all stakeholders. By adopting a proactive and inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement, the GHA can help promote safer roads for all Ghanaians.

2.3 Perceptions of Stakeholders

The Ghana Highway Authority (GHA) is no exception, and stakeholders' perceptions of the GHA's communication and public relations strategies can significantly impact their support for the organisation's activities. According to a study by Bui and Hossain (2017), stakeholders who perceive the GHA as transparent and responsive are more likely to support the organisation's initiatives. This finding underscores the importance of the GHA's communication and public relations strategies in cultivating positive stakeholder perceptions. One potential avenue for improving stakeholder perceptions of the GHA is through increased transparency in the organisation's decision-making processes. By sharing information about how decisions are made and engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process, the GHA can demonstrate its commitment to openness and accountability. This approach is practical in other settings, such as healthcare, where increased transparency has been associated with improved patient outcomes (Hannawa et al., 2021). Another critical aspect of effective communication and public relations is responsiveness to stakeholder concerns. When stakeholders feel their concerns are being heard and addressed, they are more likely to support the organisation's initiatives. The GHA can improve its responsiveness by establishing clear channels for stakeholder feedback and regularly communicating the organisation's steps in response to that feedback.

Moreover, the GHA can leverage social media and other digital communication channels to engage stakeholders more effectively. A study by Kyem and Singh (2021) found that social media can effectively engage stakeholders and promote road safety awareness. Using social media to share information about road safety initiatives and solicit stakeholder feedback, the GHA can improve its communication and public relations strategies and foster positive stakeholder perceptions. Finally, it is essential to note that stakeholder perceptions of the GHA's communication and public relations strategies are not fixed but can evolve. As the GHA implements new communication and public relations strategies and engages more effectively with stakeholders, it can expect changes in stakeholder perceptions.

2.4 Factors Affecting Stakeholder Engagement

Road safety is a critical issue in Ghana, with high rates of road traffic accidents resulting in injuries and fatalities. The Ghana Highway Authority (GHA) is a critical stakeholder in promoting road safety in the country, responsible for maintaining and managing the national road network. However, effective stakeholder engagement is essential for promoting road safety, and several factors can impact engagement with the GHA.

One critical factor affecting stakeholder engagement is the quality of communication. Effective communication is essential for building trust and facilitating meaningful engagement with stakeholders. Chowdhury et al. (2020) found that communication is critical in engaging stakeholders in road safety initiatives, with stakeholders often requiring clear and concise information to make informed decisions. Therefore, the GHA must adopt effective communication strategies that facilitate stakeholder engagement, including clear and concise messaging and accessible information.

Another important factor impacting stakeholder engagement is trust between stakeholders and the GHA. Trust is built through open and transparent communication, consistent messaging, and a commitment to delivering on promises. According to a study by De Silva (2021), trust is a fundamental component of stakeholder engagement, with stakeholders requiring a level of trust in the GHA before committing to engagement. Therefore, the GHA must build trust with stakeholders through transparent communication, consistent messaging, and delivering on-ground interventions.

Power dynamics also play a critical role in stakeholder engagement. Power imbalances can create challenges in engaging stakeholders effectively, particularly if stakeholders perceive that their voices are not heard or that their input is not valued. According to a study by Giannopoulos et al. (2021), power dynamics can impact stakeholder engagement by limiting the ability of stakeholders to provide meaningful input, mainly if they are not in positions of power. Therefore, the GHA needs to be mindful of power dynamics and work to create a level playing field for engagement, allowing all stakeholders to provide meaningful input.

2.5 Impact of Stakeholder Engagement

In Ghana, the Ghana Highway Authority (GHA) has been leading the implementation of road safety policies and programs to reduce road accidents and fatalities. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives largely depends on stakeholder engagement, which can significantly impact the GHA's communication and public relations strategies.

According to Ghebreyesus and van Boven's (2017) study, stakeholder engagement can lead to increased support for road safety initiatives, improved decision-making, and more effective policy and program implementation. This underscores the importance of engaging stakeholders, including road users, community leaders, civil society organisations, and government agencies, in developing and implementing road safety policies and programs.

One of the critical benefits of stakeholder engagement is increased support for road safety initiatives. When stakeholders are involved in developing and implementing road safety policies and programs, they are more likely to support and champion these initiatives. This can help to create a sense of ownership and responsibility among stakeholders, which is critical in achieving sustainable results in road safety. In addition to increased support, stakeholder engagement can

lead to improved decision-making. When stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process, they can provide valuable insights and perspectives that may have been overlooked. This can help to ensure that decisions are informed, evidence-based, and aligned with the needs and expectations of stakeholders.

Furthermore, stakeholder engagement can lead to more effective implementation of road safety policies and programs. When stakeholders are involved in the implementation process, they can help identify and address challenges and barriers that may impede the implementation of initiatives. This can help to ensure that programs are implemented in a way that is responsive to the needs and expectations of stakeholders, which is critical in achieving sustainable results.

However, effective stakeholder engagement requires a systematic approach that involves identifying and engaging stakeholders, developing effective communication strategies, and building trust and credibility. The GHA can adopt a stakeholder engagement framework tailored to its unique needs and circumstances and consider stakeholders' diverse needs and expectations.

In conclusion, stakeholder engagement is a critical component of road safety initiatives in Ghana. It can lead to increased support for initiatives, improved decision-making, and more effective implementation of policies and programs. However, effective stakeholder engagement requires a systematic approach tailored to the GHA's needs and circumstances. The GHA must prioritise stakeholder engagement to ensure its road safety initiatives are effective, sustainable, and responsive to stakeholders' needs and expectations.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

Melissa (2018) defines research design as the framework for connecting problems with empirical research. The design informs decisions on participant selection, data collection and analysis. This study utilises a mixed-method approach to understand better stakeholder engagement and communication strategies in the Ghana Highway Authority. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse numeric patterns and extract specific details. According to Powoh (2016), a mixed-method design provides a more comprehensive understanding than using only one method. Creswell (2014) categorises research design into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches, each with strengths. By utilising a mixed-method approach, this study aims to enhance the limits of both approaches and provide a more complete understanding of the research question.

3.2 Sampling strategy

A stratified random sampling strategy will be used to select a representative sample of stakeholders. The strata will be defined based on stakeholders' roles and relationships with the Ghana Highway Authority, such as internal stakeholders (employees, management) and external stakeholders (clients, suppliers, government agencies). The sample size will be determined using a power analysis to ensure adequate statistical power for testing the research hypotheses.

3.2.1 Sample Calculation

A combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques will be used to select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling will select participants based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the GHA's communication and public relations activities.

Stratified sampling will ensure that the sample is representative of the different stakeholder groups, including employees, contractors, government agencies, and the general public. The sample size will be calculated using the Cochran formula for determining the sample size for a survey:

$$n = (Z^2 * p * q) / e^2$$

Where:

n = sample size Z = the standard normal deviate, set at 1.96 for a 95% confidence level p = estimated proportion of the population that possesses the attribute in question (unknown, but conservatively set at 0.5) q = 1 - p e = margin of error, set at 5%

Assuming a conservative estimate of 50% for the proportion of stakeholders who will participate in the survey, a margin of error of 5%, and a confidence level of 95%, the calculated sample size is:

$$n = (1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5) / (0.05^2) = 384.16 \approx 385$$

However, since this study employs a mixed-method approach, a minimum sample of **200** participants will be targeted for this study to supplement the qualitative findings. To ensure that the sample is representative of the different stakeholder groups, the sample will be stratified as follows:

- Internal stakeholders: 30% of the sample
- External stakeholders: 70% of the sample
- Government agencies: 15% of the external stakeholder sample
- General public: 55% of the external stakeholder sample

The participants will be selected based on the stratified sampling plan, and participants within each group will be selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the GHA's communication and public relations activities. The final sample size and distribution may be adjusted based on the availability and accessibility of participants.

3.3 Data collection methods

Data will be collected through a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The survey questionnaire will be designed to elicit information on stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of the organisation's communication and public relations strategies, the key factors that influence stakeholder engagement, and the impact of stakeholder engagement on the effectiveness of the organisation's communication and public relations strategies. The semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a subset of survey participants to gather more in-depth qualitative data on their perceptions and experiences.

3.4 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics will be used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the stakeholders and their responses to the survey questions. Inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analyses, will be used to test the research hypotheses. The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in stakeholders' perceptions and experiences.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before they participate in the study. Participants' identities and responses will be kept confidential, and data will be reported in aggregate form to protect participants' privacy.

3.6 Limitations

The study is limited to stakeholders with experience with the Ghana Highway Authority's communication and public relations strategies, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study may be subject to response bias, as stakeholders may provide socially desirable responses.

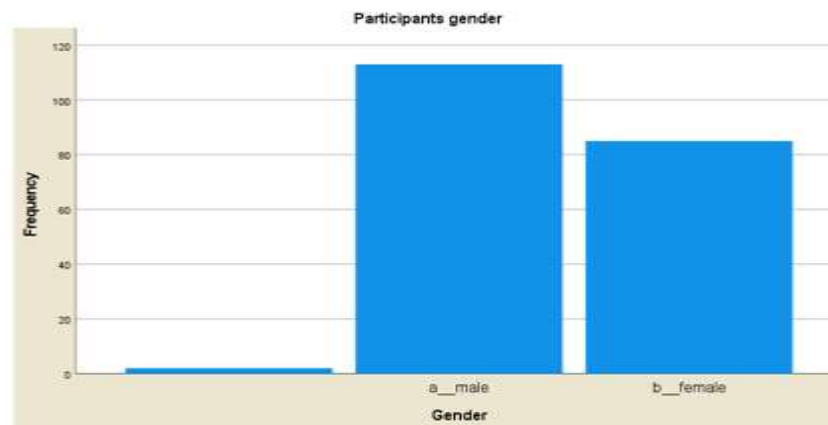
Overall, the proposed research methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Ghana Highway Authority's communication and public relations strategies, the key factors that influence stakeholder engagement, and the impact of stakeholder engagement on the effectiveness of the organisation's communication and public relations strategies.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this critical section, the study carefully examines the results of substantial research efforts and presents the study's highly anticipated findings. Representing the core of the investigation, Chapter 4 encompasses the concrete empirical evidence, statistical analyses, and relevant observations that elucidate the objectives and hypotheses formulated in the preceding chapters. The primary aim of this chapter is to reveal the study's results and significance, meticulously obtained through a rigorous and systematic research methodology.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Figure 4. 1: Gender



Among the 200 participants surveyed, 113 individuals, accounting for 56.5% of the total, were males, while 87 individuals, representing 43.5%, were females.

4.2.2 Age group of participants

| Age range | Frequency | Per cent |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| a__18_25 | 32 | 16.0 |
| b__26_35 | 104 | 52.0 |

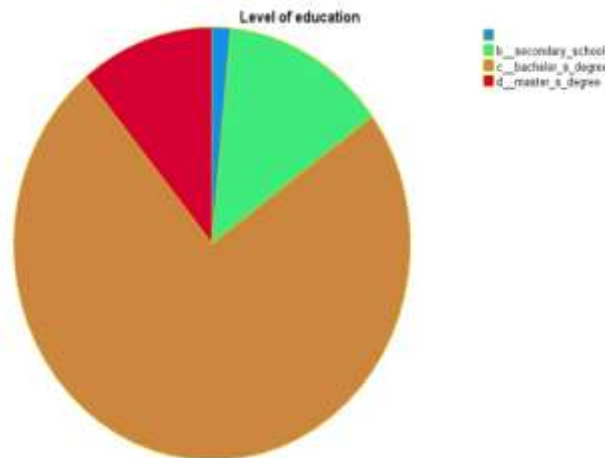
| | | | |
|--|----------------|-----|-------|
| | c_36_45 | 51 | 25.5 |
| | d_46_55 | 9 | 4.5 |
| | e_56_and_above | 4 | 2.0 |
| | Total | 200 | 100.0 |

Table 4. 1: Age

The survey data reveals that a significant proportion of the participants, comprising 52% (equivalent to 104 individuals), fell within the age range of 26 to 35. The subsequent major age group comprised respondents aged 36 to 45, accounting for 25.5% (equivalent to 51 individuals). In contrast, respondents aged 46 to 55 and those aged 56 and above had notably lower representation, comprising only 4.5% and 2% of the total participants, respectively.

4.2.3 Educational level of participants

Figure 4. 2: Educational level



Based on the pie chart data, the analysis reveals that most respondents, 75.5% or 151 individuals, possessed a bachelor's degree. On the other hand, the most minor proportion of participants, only 11% or 22 individuals, held a master's degree. At the same time, the second lowest representation was found among those with a secondary school qualification, accounting for 13.5% or 27 participants.

4.2.4 Stakeholder identification

Table 4. 2: Stakeholder identification

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------|
| a. Internal stakeholder | 73 | 36.5 |
| b. External stakeholder | 127 | 63.5 |
| Total | 200 | 100.0 |

As per the data presented in the table above, it can be observed that 36.5% of the participants in the study were individuals associated with the Ghana Highway Authority, either as employees or stakeholders. On the other hand, the remaining 63.5% of respondents were external representatives not directly affiliated with the organisation. This distribution aligns with the researcher's expectations, as they intended to have a balanced representation of internal and external perspectives. This approach was chosen to enhance the study's findings' credibility, validity, and reliability.

4.3 Perception Of Communication And Public Relations Strategies

4.3.1 How effective are Ghana Highway Authority's communication and public relations strategies?

Table 4. 3 How effective are Ghana Highway Authority's communication and public relations strategies?

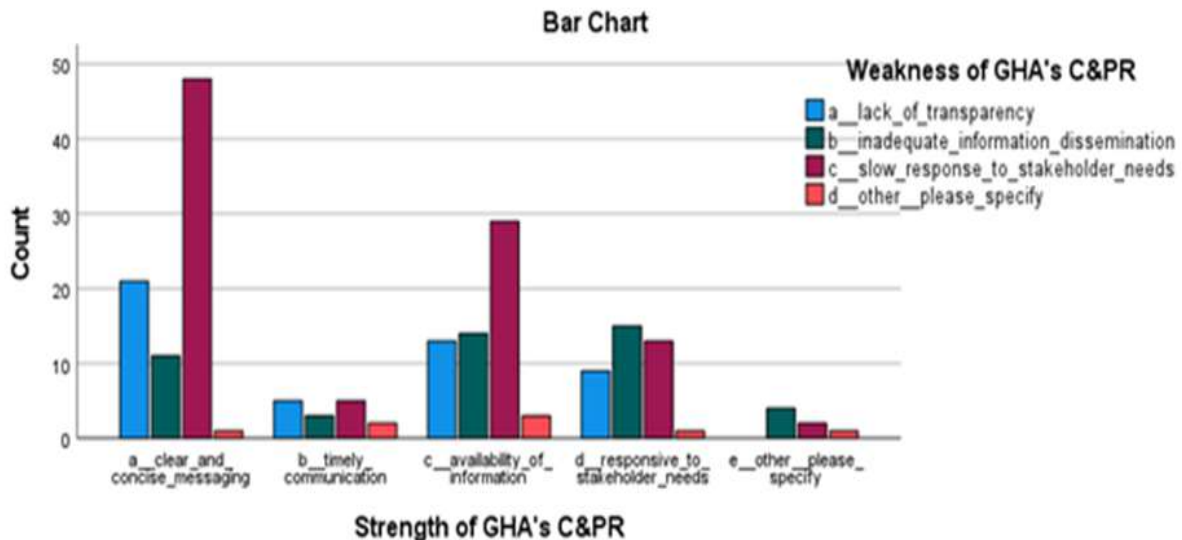
| | | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Valid | A_excellent | 13 | 6.5 |
| | B_good | 133 | 66.5 |
| | C_fair | 35 | 17.5 |
| | D_poor | 17 | 8.5 |
| | E_no opinion | 2 | 1.0 |
| | Total | 200 | 100.0 |

According to the data presented in the table, it can be observed that approximately two-thirds of the participants, accounting for 66.5%, perceived the communication and public relations strategies of the Ghana Highway Authority as good. Meanwhile, a smaller percentage, specifically 6.5%, expressed their opinion that these strategies were excellent. In contrast, a relatively lower proportion of respondents (17.5% and 8.5%) believed that the Authority's communication and public relations strategies were fair and poor, respectively. In an interview with the Acting Public Affairs Director of GHA regarding the effectiveness of GHA's communication and PR strategies, he said they are good. He explained that the public is consistently informed about major roadworks and processes through the Authority's social media platforms and websites. Based on this, he feels confident that their strategies are sound. Below is the GHA's Public Affairs Director's response about the effectiveness of GHA's PR strategies:

"I think it is good. The public is constantly updated on our major roadworks and processes through social media platforms and websites. So, I think we can say it is good."

4.3.2 The Strengths and weakness of Ghana Highway Authority's Communication and public relations strategies

Figure 4. 3: Crosstabulation of the strength of GHA's Communication and public relations strategies * Weakness of GHA's Communication and public relations strategies



According to the diagram presented, 24% of the participants, 48 individuals, believed that GHA's communication and public relations strategies are vital in delivering clear and concise messages to their audience. At the same time, their weakness lies in their slow response to stakeholder needs. In contrast, 10.5% of the respondents stated that GHA's strength in communication lies in clear and concise messaging. However, they also identified a weakness in a lack of transparency.

Additionally, the diagram shows that 14.5% of the participants believe that GHA excels in making information available to its audience. However, they also pointed out a weakness in GHA's communication strategies: its slow response to stakeholder needs. During an interview with the Information Officer of the GHA, we explored the organisation's communication and public relations strategies. When asked about its weaknesses and strengths, she pointed out that the communication strategy could benefit from more two-way engagement with citizens. Additionally, the messaging should focus more on outcomes and their impact on society than just activities and outputs. Furthermore, there is limited transparency on project planning processes, budgets, feasibility studies, and logistics. Despite these areas for improvement, the GHA's communication and public relations strategy has strengths. For instance, the organisation regularly releases press updates on new road projects and construction progress. The GHA also maintains an active social media presence, highlighting its initiatives and activities. Moreover, the organisation's PR events, such as inaugurations and project launches, showcase significant developments.

The GHA's Information Officer of Public Affairs gave feedback on their communication and PR strategies. In terms of our department's strengths, we excel in media communication. We issue timely press releases about significant road diversions- preventing motorists from being stranded or inconvenienced. Our events include sword-cutting and commission events, effectively showcasing our completed projects and informing the public about the start of new projects, keeping them updated on our road projects. However, our strategy is primarily reactionary, waiting for reports or concerns raised by the media before we respond. Going forward, we can be more transparent by proactively disclosing. Our communication is also one-way, mostly disseminating information with minimal act on people's feedback. Unfortunately, we do not have established structures to address public feedback effectively.

4.4 Factors Influencing Stakeholder Engagement

Table 4. 4: Barriers to stakeholder engagement in the Ghana Highway Authority

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Valid | A_lack of trust | 67 | 33.5 |
| | B_limited resources | 61 | 30.5 |
| | C_inadequate communication channels | 67 | 33.5 |
| | D_other | 5 | 2.5 |
| | Total | 200 | 100.0 |

Based on the data in the table, 134 individuals, accounting for 67% of the participants, believed that the primary obstacles to stakeholder engagement in GHA were the absence of trust and insufficient communication channels. On the other hand, 30.5% of the respondents identified limited resources as the main hindrance to stakeholder engagement in GHA.

The GHA's acting Director of Public Affairs has identified several hurdles the organisation must overcome to effectively engage and communicate with stakeholders. These include balancing the conflicting interests of various parties, such as commuters, businesses, environmental organisations, and residents. Additionally, the organisation must manage project opposition, which can involve addressing complaints, lawsuits, and demonstrations. It is essential to ensure the involvement of minority groups, economically underprivileged individuals, and people with impairments. The organisation must also combat the spread of false information, particularly on social media. Finally, resource limitations, including insufficient funding and workforce and bureaucratic obstacles, such as navigating red tape and delays in information sharing, present significant challenges to thorough stakeholder engagement processes.

4.5 Impact of Stakeholder Engagement on Communication and Public Relations Strategies

Table 4. 5: Crosstab of the impact of stakeholder engagement and role of stakeholder engagement in communication and PR strategies

| | | | SE in C & PR | | | | Total | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|--------|-------|
| | | | a_improved_stakeholder_satisfaction | b_enhance_stakeholder_trust | c_improved_decision_making_processes | d_others | | |
| Impact of stakeholder engagement (SE) | a_very_positive_impact | Count | 0 | 39 | 31 | 22 | 1 | 93 |
| | | % of Total | 0.0% | 19.5% | 15.5% | 11.0% | 0.5% | 46.5% |
| | b_positive_impact | Count | 1 | 27 | 42 | 29 | 0 | 99 |
| | | % of Total | 0.5% | 13.5% | 21.0% | 14.5% | 0.0% | 49.5% |
| | c_no_impact | Count | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| | | % of Total | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.5% | 1.5% | 2.0% |
| | d_negative_impact | Count | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| | | % of Total | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.5% | 1.0% | 0.0% | 1.5% |
| | e_very_negative_impact | Count | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | % of Total | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| Total | Count | 1 | 66 | 74 | 55 | 4 | 200 | |
| | % of Total | 0.5% | 33.0% | 37.0% | 27.5% | 2.0% | 100.0% | |

Based on the crosstabulation provided, the data reveals various perspectives on the impact of stakeholder engagement on GHA's communication and public relations strategies. Out of the 200 respondents surveyed, 19.5% indicated that stakeholder engagement positively impacts and improves stakeholder satisfaction, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of GHA's communication and public relations strategies. Conversely, 15.5% of the respondents believed that stakeholder engagement enhances stakeholder trust and significantly impacts the effectiveness of GHA's communication and public relations strategies.

Similarly, 21% of the participants believed that stakeholder engagement positively impacts stakeholder trust, subsequently leading to the effectiveness of GHA's communication and public relations strategies. Additionally, 14.5% of the representatives highlighted that stakeholder engagement yields positive outcomes by improving the decision-making process within GHA's communication and public relations strategies. However, there were contrasting viewpoints as well.

A mere 2% of the respondents stated that stakeholder engagement does not impact GHA's communication and public relations strategies. A small percentage of 1.5% indicated that it hurts the same. In summary, the data suggests diverse opinions on the effects of stakeholder engagement on GHA's communication and public relations strategies, with the majority acknowledging its positive influence on various aspects of the organisation's functioning.

4.6 Recommendations

Table 4. 6: Recommendations

| | | engagement | | | Total | |
|--|--|---------------------------|--|---|--------|-------|
| | | a_allocation_of_resources | b_development_of_stakeholder_engagement_policies | c_regular_stakeholder_feedback_and_evaluation | | |
| Propose best practiced strategies for SE | a_more_frequent_and_transparent_communication | Count | 10 | 34 | 28 | 72 |
| | | % of Total | 5.0% | 17.0% | 14.0% | 36.0% |
| | b_use_of_diverse_communication_channels | Count | 12 | 6 | 25 | 43 |
| | | % of Total | 6.0% | 3.0% | 12.5% | 21.5% |
| | c_involvement_of_stakeholders_in_decision_making | Count | 10 | 26 | 48 | 84 |
| | | % of Total | 5.0% | 13.0% | 24.0% | 42.0% |
| | d_other_please_specify | Count | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | % of Total | 0.0% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 0.5% |
| Total | Count | 32 | 67 | 101 | 200 | |
| | % of Total | 16.0% | 33.5% | 50.5% | 100.0% | |

According to the crosstabulation data, 24% of the 200 representatives believe that involving stakeholders in decision-making processes and providing regular stakeholder feedback and evaluation are essential for ensuring the effectiveness of GHA's communication and public relations strategies. Conversely, 17% of the respondents advocate for a more frequent and transparent communication approach and recommend developing stakeholder engagement policies.

Meanwhile, 12.5% of the participants propose using diverse communication channels to disseminate messages to their stakeholders while emphasising the importance of regular stakeholder feedback and evaluation. During an interview, the Information Officer of Public Affairs responded to suggestions for enhancing the organisation's PR and communication tactics by saying: Okay, most of the stakeholder engagements I have participated in take a one-way approach, with a primary focus on disseminating.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

In this crucial section, we delve deeply into the core of the research, meticulously exploring the ramifications of our findings on theory, practice, and policy within the realm of stakeholder engagement in communication and public relations. As we summarise the fundamental aspects of the study, our objective is to shed light on the valuable insights and knowledge that have surfaced as a result of our investigation.

5.2 Demographic Characteristics Of Respondent

According to the survey data, a significant number of participants fell between the ages of 26 and 35, with the next largest age group being 36 to 45, making up 25.5% of the total participants. Most participants had a bachelor's degree, with 11% having a master's degree, and the most miniature representation being those with a secondary school qualification. Furthermore, the study found that 36.5% of the participants were employees or stakeholders of the Ghana Highway Authority, with the remaining 63.5% being external representatives. This distribution aligned with the researcher's expectations and helped increase the credibility, validity, and reliability of the study's findings.

5.3 Perception Of Communication And Public Relations Strategies

According to the research, the majority of participants, precisely two-thirds, rated the communication and public relations strategies of the Ghana Highway Authority as good. Additionally, a small percentage, around 6.5%, believed these strategies were excellent. These findings support the conclusions of Kaur and Lodhia's (2018) study, which emphasises the significance of stakeholder engagement throughout the sustainability accounting and reporting process. This includes developing strategic plans and indicators, measuring sustainability performance, and preparing reports. While the GHA's communication and public relations strategy has its merits, including frequent press updates and an engaged social media presence, there is room for improvement in interacting with citizens and crafting more effective messaging.

5.4 Factors Influencing Stakeholder Engagement

According to the study, inadequate communication channels and a lack of trust were identified as the primary obstacles to stakeholder engagement in the Ghana Highway Authority by 67% of the participants. These findings support De Silva's (2021) research, which highlights the importance of trust in stakeholder engagement. Additionally, the study reveals that balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders is a significant challenge. While Giannopoulos et al. (2021) focus on power dynamics as a limiting factor in stakeholder engagement, it is worth noting that power imbalances can also result in conflicting interests among stakeholders, leading to vigorous advocacy for their positions.

5.5 Conclusion

The demographic analysis revealed that most participants were between the ages of 26 to 35, followed by the age bracket of 36 to 45, indicating a relatively youthful participant profile.

Additionally, most participants possessed bachelor's degrees, with a notable proportion holding master's degrees, reflecting a higher level of educational attainment among the participants. The distribution of participants, with a significant portion being employees or stakeholders of the GHA, is in line with expectations and bolsters the credibility of the study's findings.

Furthermore, the study revealed that most participants rated the communication and public relations strategies of the Ghana Highway Authority as good, with a small percentage believing them to be excellent. This supports the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout the sustainability accounting and reporting process, including developing strategic plans and indicators, measuring sustainability performance, and preparing sustainability reports. The GHA's strategies have merits, such as frequent press updates and an engaged social media presence. However, there is room for improvement in interacting with citizens and crafting more effective messaging.

The research also highlighted vital factors influencing stakeholder engagement within the GHA. Inadequate communication channels and a lack of trust emerged as significant barriers, corroborating previous studies that emphasise the pivotal role of trust in stakeholder engagement. The study also brought to light the challenge of balancing divergent stakeholder interests. While power dynamics can play a role, it is evident that varying stakeholder priorities can lead to vigorous advocacy, potentially complicating engagement efforts.

5.6 Recommendation

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that the GHA involve stakeholders and foster regular feedback for effective communication and public relations strategies. This aligns with prior research emphasising the benefits of including stakeholders in decision-making to achieve more holistic and responsive outcomes. By integrating stakeholder perspectives and insights, the GHA can enhance its strategies and better address the needs and concerns of its various stakeholders.

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