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Assessing the Public Relations Tools, Models & Practices in Gambella Regional State Communications Affairs Office (South West Ethiopia)

By

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Assessing the Public Relations Tools, Models & Practices in Gambella Regional State Communications Affairs Office South West Ethiopia

A Research Report Submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature in Partial Fulfilment for the Requirement of MA Degree in Public Relations and Corporate Communications

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Declaration, Confirmation, Approval and Evaluation

Title: Assessing the Public Relations Tools, Models and Practices in Gambella Regional State Communications Affairs Office South West Ethiopia

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this M.A thesis research report is my original work, not Presented for any degree in any universities, and that all the sources used for it are duly acknowledged.

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Confirmation and Approval

This M. A thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as advisor.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the public relations Practices, models and P.R. tools used in Gambela regional government communication affairs office (South west Ethiopia). The study employed mixed approach: qualitative and quantitative methodology. For qualitative method, indepth interviews but for the quantitative, document analysis and observation were employed.

Besides, it explored the subjects based on Grunig's four P.R. models; the Media agentry, the Public Information, the Two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models. The qualitative data was analyzed with thematic analyses and the quantitative data with tables showing frequency and percentage distribution. According to the result obtained from the in-depth interviews, document analysis and observations showed that the press agency model of public relations was the most commonly used model of the public relations practice in the study area. The result also showed that there was a problem in relation to implementing some strategies like broacher and magazines in reaching to the external customers, the communication office did not listen to the various stakeholders when identifying problems and communication priorities. The office also did not clearly and appropriately define the target group for different objectives and priorities. opportunities are not there for attachment to news events or partners exploited. In addition, the office had not effective training program in place to develop the skills of existing staff.

Key Words: P.R. practices/models/tools/GRGCAO

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List of Abbreviations (Acronyms)

CIP.R. - Chartered Institute of Public Relations;

E.C - Ethiopian Calendar;

GRSGCAO - Gambella Regional State Government Communications Affairs Office;

NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations;

n.d. – undated;

P.R. - Public Relations;

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The importance of communication with the public and maintenance of positive public image was known as early as the past days. In fact, P.R. has been practiced in its conventional, as well as modern ways, as a powerful instrument for the reconstruction and transformation of industrial, technological, educational, political and socioeconomic developments. However, P.R. activities in the ancient society were restricted only on recording and communicating information about religion and government. In addition, the communication tools and media used at the time include, singing, drum talking, moon-light storytelling, folk tales telling, and village square gathering, and sporting activities (Odedele, n.d.).

Later, due to internal and external factors, the concept and practice of P.R. was reshaped to its modernized way. Internally, the theorization or modeling of the profession as [James Grunig and Todd Hunt 's four models], has prominently advanced the involvement of P.R. as a holistic 'profession in modern corporate matters. Similarly, the dynamic transformation of the global [technological, social and business] environment, has influenced the P.R. practice. For example, it is due to the development of Information Technology (IT) system that, the diffusion of technology in the 1990s accelerated and led us to new definitions of media and communication studies (Gane & Beer, 2008). So, although the beginnings of modern P.R. can be dated to the 18th c. America and Europe, the scientific development of current public relations both as a profession and academic discipline, has strengthen in the early 20th century (Gane & Beer, 2008, New Media Theory, 2012, Public Relations Through Time, 2012, IPR, 2012 & Wilson, & Supa, 2013).

Further, the credit of P.R., not only as creative but also as scientific practice expanded across the globe with delicate attention to social and public responsibilities amongst government administrators and business executives (Oliver, 2007). As Oliver (2007) & Miller (2012) pointed out, public relations play a magnificent contribution in making public organizations responsive to public interests and creating a more effective democratic process. Generally speaking, the practice of P.R. in government (public sectors) aims at achieving mutual understanding between their

agencies and publics by following a strategic public relations process. So, understanding of the nature and type of P.R. practices in public sectors help contemporary public-sector managers do their jobs (Maina & Hellen, 2014).

Furthermore, scholars claimed the need for government administrators to go with the changing trends of the twenty-first-century world and apply the developed theoretical and practical frameworks such as the four models of P.R. Again, some have argued the need to use new tools (e.g. social media) to address the changing context of government communication (Lee, Neeley, & Stewart, 2012). Academics (researchers) too, have been incorporating new ideas (practices) in the teaching of new practitioners and help them diffuse to current practices (Stacks, 2011).

In the same manner, the Ethiopian Government strategically communicates various services offered by the Government including the increase of public awareness regarding democratic, human, social or civil rights as a means to advocate government policies and schemes through internal and external communications. The government also aims to create a sense of ownership and a culture of higher compliance leading to closer ties between the government and the people (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, National Information and Communication Policy and Strategy, (August, 2009).

In addition, implementations of government strategies are possible mechanisms to create end automation and adherence of a common set of policies and standards in the country. Furthermore, the communication, leading to a better integration and information sharing among the heterogeneous stakeholders, could make government organizations more effective and efficient in providing their services or execute public duties. Likewise, building capacities of public servants through trainings on skills that enhance effectiveness of customer service is an integral part of the overall government strategies. Generally, the integral elements of the national government strategy would be high in providing community services and the benefit the available services and rising the overall awareness on both short and long term programs of the Government at the federal and regional levels (ibid).

With similar aim of the federal communications affairs bureau, the Gambella Regional State Government Communications Affairs Office [GRSGCAO] was established in 1979 by the name

Information Office". Today, having its name changed to *Government Communications Affairs Office,* the office is actively engaged in facilitating communications programs/services to/between the government and community through different public relations officers within the office by using different communication tactics.

Gambella zone was divided into nine Weredas until recently: Akobo, Jikawo, Itang, Gambella, Abobo, Jor, Gog, Dimma and Godere. ―However, administrative redistricting occurred in 2004-2005‖. The new administrative setup consists of six weredas and one ―special‖ Wereda administered by the Federal government: Alwero-Peno, Gilo, Jikawo, Akobo, Dimma, Godere and Gambella (special). ―The Gambella region today has three Anuak Woredas (Alwero-Peno, Dimma and Gilo); two Nuer Woredas (Jikawo and Akobo); and one Majenger Woreda (Godere).‖

So, the public relations department within the Gambella regional state communication office is central in designing, implementing and monitoring all communication activities. The office also integrates employees (internal publics) and connects the different government and non-government agencies (external publics) in facilitating communication services and controls various activities of other sectors.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

There have been innovations both in P.R. theories and practices (Grunig, 2009) and on the global social, technological, political, business and media environment (Gane & Beer, 2008). However, the interplay between changes in the media technology and the social world (stakeholders'behavior patterns), has enhanced the dynamics of P.R. (communication) between administrators and their publics (Damásio, (2012). For example, as it has been argued by Lee, Neeley, and Stewart, (2012), due to the media influence on the practical (social) world, the civic life is being dominated much more by the news media and related public communications technologies. In the same way, stating the influence of new media technology on organizational activities (e.g. communication) Moreno, Navarro, C. Tench, R. and Zerfass, A. (2015) said, the advent of digital technologies, not only shaped the social [political & economic] environment, but also twisted the means, form, and culture of communication or business (Lee, Neeley, & Stewart, 2012, & Moreno, Navarro, Tench, & Zerfass, 2015).

Following changes and related complexities both in organizations and social climate contexts, some studies (e.g. Lee, Neeley, & Stewart, 2012, Grunig, 2009, *et.al*.) recommended the need to differentiate the general [traditional] P.R. practices from modern [context based] practices. For instance, Lee, (2012) affirms the need for public sector P.R.s to adapt context based practice in *implementing the agency"s central mission* and fulfilling the *democratic responsibilities* inherent in the government. Besides, it has been argued that, the practice of P.R. in the global context overlays an overall perspective on a program executed in two or more countries, recognizing the similarities among audiences while necessarily adapting to regional differences (Moss, Vercic, & Warnaby, 2002). These according to Gregory (2010), demonstrates the diversified, interconnected, integrated and openness of the global environment, which pushed P.R. professionals to adapt the practice of ―planning and managing P.R.s campaigns‖ (p.83).

Despite of changes in the academic (theoretical) arenas of P.R. profession and the diffusion of the contemporary society to the emerging global [business & communication] trends, current studies show that the practice of P.R. still lacks basic conceptual foundations that frame the practice on, organization (business) or audience wise (Grunig, 2009). For some reasons, the researcher observed personally that the PR practitioners in the regional government communication affairs office are not discharging their social responsibility duties to address the public concerns. Besides, they were observed practicing the press agentry/publicity model in which they communicate with the public via one direction: outward from the organization, through the media, to the public, clients and stakeholders. They were still on the conventional continuum in the adapting (defusing) process to new P.R. theories (ideas) or media practices (Rogers, 1995). Maina and Hellen (2014) added to the point explaining that most of the difficulties and challenges modern P.R. practitioners facing, are due to globalization which brought some alternations on the pace and landscape of the profession that speeded the flow of information (Maina & Hellen, 2014).

Hence, at least two conclusions can be drawn from the above reviews: The P.R. practice of the present era must be based on theories developed through academic research. So it is imperative, first, to test the practice of P.R. in the public [political] administration setting. Then, practices must be evaluated in light of theoretical basis, where practice can inform theory and theory can inform practice. However, to the best knowledge of the writer of this study, no study has been

dully conducted on the area. This thesis therefore, intended to explore the theoretical (conceptual) grounds of the government P.R. practices and tools used to accomplish tasks at the Gambella Regional State Government Communication Affairs Office.

1.3. Research Questions

1.3.1. General Question

What are the practice of P.R. practitioners and the P.R. tools being used at Gambella Regional State Government Communication Affairs Office?

1.3.2. Specific Questions

The specific questions of the study are;

- What are the practices of public relations in the regional state government communication affairs office?
- What are the tools employed to realize the public relations activities?
- Which public relations models does the practice imply?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. General Objective

The general objective of the study is to assess the public relations practices, P.R. tools and models used at Gambella Regional State Communications Affairs Office.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the research are to;

- Identify major P.R. practices in the regional state government communication affairs office;
- Reveal the PR tools employed to realize the purpose of the communication;
- Determine the major P.R. model usage in regional state communications affairs office.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Since the study is a first investigation of PR activities particularly in the context of communications office of Gambella region, it is expected to provide new information on the practices, tools and publics of the public relations department at the area. Hence, it will be an input for practitioners, to compare the types of performed public relations with tools deployed.

Moreover, the general status of the public relations actions was appraised and empirical outcomes were verified in light of theoretical grounds that will direct practitioners either maintain, shape or defuse current trends. It can also be used as a base line for future researches.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The investigation is intended to address the types of public relations practices and tools that has been being used at Gambella regional state government communications affairs office. Issues embraced in the study are, PR practices and tools used at the area. However, since the practice of PR is pervasive, the study focused, only on the communicative aspects of the practice with publics (internal or external). Besides, the operational aspects of the PR practice and outcomes (effects) of the communication activities were also covered under the study.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

Many constraints limited this study. However, the lack of available time and material were the prominent obstacles. To do all the necessary researches, three-month duration was not enough. Above and beyond, the lack of local empirical studies on the area was the rigorous problem of the study. Therefore, the research objectives were addressed mostly based on the western contexts which might render the need to do more cross-sectional studies. Again, the time shortcomings along with respondents' business, the number of participants in this study were limited and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The definition P.R could be drawn from two distinctive routes for it is generally practiced from two contexts but to achieve different purposes. For instance, according to Mehta and Xavier (n.d.), the nature of P.R. practice can be communicative or operational and it can be based on a short-term campaign or a long term strategic plan (Mehta & Xavier, n.d.). Consequently, the P.R. definitions have taken both the *operational form* which describe the type of activities that make up the P.R. practice and the largely *conceptual form* that have been reflecting the evolving nature and understanding of the P.R. function (Skinner, 1994). The preferred definitional dimensions of this study are the various conceptualizations of P.R. which have been put forward over the years both by academics and professional bodies.

For example, according to the Roman University Communication Institute (2000), P.R. (_sematikos' in Greece) means, ―to signify or to get people to believe things and do things‖ (p.1). While, the broader and ideal meaning of P.R. as stated in Grunig, *et.al*., (2006), could be a continuous, two-way symmetrical, inter-personal, inter-organizational or intra-organizational communication, that is practiced using different mass media (communication channels) to create, maintain and foster relationships or reputations (Roman University Communication Institute, 2000, & Grunig, 2006).

Seemingly, Macnamara, (n.d.) stated, the term _public relations' is used to include, issues such as, public affairs, corporate relations, corporate affairs, corporate communication and other broadly synonymous terms (Macnamara, n.d.). In addition, as the definition by the 1978 World Assembly of Public Relations Associations, Mexico;

> Public relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization‘s and the public interest (Wilcox et al. 2003: 6 quoted in Theaker, 2007 p.4).

In addition, Europe's largest professional body in the P.R. field and the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), defined P.R. as:

> Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding & support and influencing opinion & behavior. It is the planned & sustained effort to establish & maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (Gregory, 2010 p.3).

Adding to these, Rex Harlow lightly touched through 472 definitions of public relations to come up with the following statements:

> Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Harlow, quoted in Wilcox et al. 2003 p.7 & Theaker, 2007 p.4).

From the various scholars' definitions of P.R., it can be inferred that the concept and domain of P.R. is a little huge and sophisticated. Through their communication, some P.R. practitioners work to build or maintain relationships with the diversified stakeholders that are important to the organization and its goals. Similarly, others exhaust to build or enhance organizational reputation that can keep the business more competitive. Seemingly, most P.R. practitioners in the modern day are responsible for monitoring and responding to changes in the external environment, including issues, expectations, relationships. At the same time, maintaining effective working environments within the organization through employee communication is the other contribution of P.R. practitioners (Oliver, 2007).

Then, the global public relations theory has come to the profession as extension plan of practices to every corner of living world. According to Grunig (2009) hypnotized, a P.R. should fall in the middle between standardization and individualization in such a way that can be replicated across nations, companies, different social or business settings. In the theory called, ‗excellence theory ', Whereas, Grunig and colleagues contended that, though the generic principles(set) of P.R. theories seems inapplicable to other environmental contexts at an abstract level, there are a set of practices that *could* be applied universally but with slight contextualization (Grunig, 2009).

Therefore, the Global Alliance of Public Relations Associations [GAPRA] founded in 2000, developed a declaration of principles which, among others stated, a profession 's characteristics should be based on acceptance of duties for a broader society than merely one 's clients or employees '. It seems subsequent that, today, countries, organizations or publics around the globe are adapted to the practice of professional P.R. activities (Moss, Verčič, & Warnaby, 2002 & Public Relations Through Time, 2012 & Miller, 2012).

2.2 The Purpose of Public Relations

P.R. has no constant meaning due to the fact that the work of P.R.s people greatly vary from one organization to another or from one practitioner to another (Skinner, 1994). For instance, *public sectors (mainly service providers*) P.R. is different from *private business enterprises (mainly product providers)* P.R. that, according to Theaker, (2004), in the first, P.R. is enacted to change/shape public 's attitude on services, programs, policies or informing something of importance, aiming favorable image/reputation for the organization; whereas in the second, it is more of promoting specific products to escalate/maximize profit. It is due to these and many peculiarity of practices that brought a doubt whether to classify the field as a *„mediates"* or a *business and management"* subject (Theaker, 2004).

So, in actual practice, it can be conceptualized as little more than what P.R.s people do (Skinner, 1994). Public relations is a general term that includes many other relations with different audiences, strategies and tactics. For example, *employee relations* is a function of public relations that include, responding to employee concerns and informing and motivating staff. Again, tactics

used for employee relations may include, new employee education, employee award programs and recognitions, new-hire press releases and newsletters to name a few (Pearson Edu., 2012).

Another relations within the P.R. category is *community relations* which handles, the function of actively planning and participating with and within a community for the benefit of the community and the organization. In this case, tactics applied, might include community events, volunteer activities and co-sponsorship opportunities with other community organizations. Community relations may also include fundraising and development activities (ibid).

Through *government relations*, P.R. practitioners execute a function of relating to government officials and agencies about issues that impact an organization and its audiences. Finally, *Media relations*, often considered synonymous with public relations, is the function of working with the media to communicate news. Media relations can be *active* − seeking positive publicity for a newsworthy topic at the organization or *reactive* − responding to news inquiry about a positive or negative story of interest to the media and its readers or viewers (ibid).

As Sam Black pointed out, the discipline [P.R. practice], regardless of its operational areas, whether it is applied to politics arena, economic (trade), relations within communities, charity, work in foundations or to other specific external conditions, the essence of public relations remain the same and ethical (cited in Wyszomirski, 2014).

Apparently, in government sectors, a P.R. can help an administrator do a better job in *implementing the agency"s central mission* and fulfilling the *democratic responsibilities* inherent in the government. The different purposes of government P.R. can be categorized in three general typologies as; *Mandatory purposes*, which includes the practice of media relations public reporting and responsiveness to the public (as citizens). The second fold of P.R. is *Pragmatic purposes* of government P.R., which comprises: responsiveness to the public (as customers and clients), increasing the utilization of services and products (Public outreach), public education and public service campaigns (Public outreach), seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations (Public outreach) and using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency (Public outreach). The third typology of government P.R. is *political purposes* which is also labeled as ―dangerous and powerful‖ function of P.R. (Lee, 2012, p.13).

In relation with these, Lee Mordecai (2012) further claimed that;

The approach to public relations based on *purposes* in general and the focus on the *purposes* of government public relations in particular is helpful because once that particular goal has been identified, the specific communications techniques to use to accomplish that purpose will flow naturally from the purpose itself. For example, a news release might be useful for notifying the entire populace about a new regulation that affects the citizenry at large. However, if a new program targets, say, new immigrants from a specific country, then there are likely to be communication channels that are much more specialized to reach such a narrowly defined demographic. (Lee, 2012, p.13).

Generally speaking, the purpose of P.R. can be conceptualized as public propaganda [*information*], media publication [*manipulation*], asymmetrical [*persuasion*] and symmetrical [*negotiation*] purposes. These practical dimensions also determine the communication direction whether it is a one-way dissemination or two-way interaction (Grunig, & Hunt, 1984). In conclusion, P.R. practices are and should be based on P.R./Communication theories that help a practitioner predict on how events and actions are related. Consequently, the use of theories in the P.R. practice is mandatory especially in the today communication environment (Ben & Jerry, 2010).

2.3 PUBLIC RELATION TOOLS

According to Wells et al (2003) P.R. tools are categorized depending on the amount of control the company has in its communication. The following are the common divisions of P.R. tools:

2.3.1 Controlled P.R.

Controlled PR relies on the control and use and placement of the company. The company control the PR tools they are utilizing in a controlled channel. The following are some of the controlled PR tools:

- Publications: Brochures, flyers, news magazines
- Annual reports
- Display, exhibits
- Product placement
- Speakers
- Photographs

- Staged events

2.3.2 Uncontrolled PR

When a company relies the use and placement of their PR to the media, they are using uncontrolled channels. Examples of this category are listed below:

- Publicity (radio, TV and print media)
- News releases (Print, audio, video, email)
- Press conferences and media advisory
- Articles
- Talks and interview shows

2.3.3 Semi-controlled PR

This category of PR activities shares both of the above controlled and uncontrolled PR tools. For instance:
- Special events and sponsorship
- Interpersonal communication
- Electronic communication (web chats and chats rooms)

While using the above listed PR tools, the PR practitioners need to work closely with the marketing department. PR tends to complement advertising activities.

2.4 COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Speaking of P.R. tools (means of communications), might probably be drawn from values, principles, thoughts, behaviors, or actions that the field (P.R.) does or stands for. If one just focus on the communicative aspect of P.R., communication is Who says What on Which channel to Whom with What Effect (Lasswell, cited in Wenxiu, 2015). For that matter, the content, target audience or media used in a particular P.R.s campaign can differ according to the purpose of the communication.

Hence, it is worth to start the discussion with Grunig, and Hunt's (1984) most suitable and distinct P.R. model. Grunig, and Hunt, (as cited in Theaker, 2007), understandably comprehended P.R. as; a planned but balanced, two-way exchange of communication, rolling through all directions, to accommodate the needs of others, manage conflicts or improve understandings with publics.

Therefore, P.R. is a communication [Means] to create a genuine relationship [which is the dead end of P.R.] based on understanding or mutually shared [ethical] values, not a persuasion through [unethical] manipulation or propaganda (Theaker, 2007).

Like that of the various purposes of P.R. stated in myriad literatures, communication strategies or techniques also vary on the type of business (purpose) and characteristics of target public, which might also determine the discretion of the communication situation. For instance, P.R. practitioners may use communication techniques like appeal to oral or visual type of interpersonal communication (e.g. online forum) to communicate with audiences of special interest group that are composed or recomposed depending on immediate interests (Wyszomirski, 2014).

Nevertheless, as Josan, (2010, et.al.) described, most of the P.R. techniques/tools deployed almost in all [profit, not for profit and NGOs], and responsible of providing both general and specialized information, tailored to both general and different target groups. Also, he stated some of the techniques devised for the communication process as follows; Word-of-Mouth, Press Releases, Media Alerts and Advisories, Press Kit, Brochure/Collateral, Backgrounder and Frequently Asked Questions, Biography, Media Contact List, Press Conferences/Briefings/Tours, Letters to the Editor, Opinion Editorials, Writing a Feature, Special event, Clippings and Reprints. Also, some works like Cabot, (2012), listed further tools like media lobby and advocacy that are disseminated over Media appearances such that: shows, talk shows, questions and answers and newspapers (Josan, 2010, Cabot, 2012 & Lindenmann, 2002).

In addition, writing editorials that media will be interested to comment about; Organizational meetings for debates (round tables), discussion groups, websites, newsletters, blogs, forums, social networks, direct mails, and opinion polls, Raising the issue at every opportunity and Contacting government officials who have the power of decision (Speaking engagement), are other means over which a P.R. task is accomplished (Josan, 2010, Cabot, 2012, Harris & Smith, 2013 & The California State Parks).

In general, many tools of public relations can help accomplish the agency programmatic mission: delivery of services, customer relations, and so on. Besides, public relations can help promote the

democratic accountability of a government agency to the citizenry, which is a unique activity to public administration in contrast to business administration and nonprofit management (Lee, 2012).

2.5 COMMUNICATION THEORIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Once the concern of a communication situation [what is the message about?] is understood, then, the concern of identifying a theoretical foundation to guide campaign efforts is extremely beneficial for P.R. practitioners. Therefore, the nature, role and importance of public relations, (communication) can be researched/evaluated based on different theoretical approaches (Skinner, 1994).

The "Excellence Theory", according to Grunig and others, for instance, incorporates a number of middle-range theories of public relations, including theories of publics, public relations and strategic management, models of public relations, evaluation of public relations, employee communication, public relations roles, gender, diversity, power, activism, ethics and social responsibility, and global public relations. In addition, the theory suggests procedures to Public Relations programs (Dozier & Grunig, 1995).

However, there has been other communication theories applied for long periods in the study of

P.R. practices. For example, Shanon-Webber's mathematical model of communication, which postulates communication as a one-way transmission and the alternative/game theory, that casts communication as a two-way interaction, are the renowned theories. In fact, while plenty theories are out there in the field of communication, Grunig and Hunt's four models of P.R. practice has been the prominent theories used for the evaluation of P.R. practices (inputs) or effects (outputs) (Skinner, 1994).

2.6 PUBLIC RELATIONS IN GOVERNMENT

Government is intended to provide services that would otherwise be impractical for individuals to provide, such as law enforcement and fire protection, wildlife preservation, national defense, public transportation systems, justice systems, social programs, and national museums and so on. Thus, the most basic function of government Public Relations is to contribute to the definition and achievement

of government program goals, enhance government responsiveness and service, and to provide the public with sufficient information to permit self-government (Aronoff & Baskin, 1983).

The goals for government Public Relations programs, regardless of the level of government, have at least three things in common: informing constituents about the activities of the government agency; ensuring active cooperation in government programs for example, voting, as well as compliance in regulatory programs (for example, mandatory seat belt use, antismoking ordinances); and fostering citizen support for established policies and programs (Cutlip *el al,* 1994).

The diversity of goals and activities in government is greater than any other area of Public Relations practice. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that governments touch every aspect of society, and virtually every facet of government is closely tied to and reliant upon Public Relations. In a very real sense, the purpose of government itself closely matches the purpose of Public Relations. Successful governments maintain responsive, mutual understanding based on two-way communication with citizens (Cutlip *el al,* 1994:462-463).

Contradicting this view, the belief by most people that government communication is "propaganda" is a great challenge to government public relations. Especially, when Public Relations in government is associated with elected officials or politicians the cynicism about PR practitioners' trustworthiness is greatest. Public Relations activities in the modern world help individuals and organizations to build prestige, to promote products, and to win elections or legislative battles; in short, to achieve their aims in the public sphere (Encarta Encyclopedia, 2005).

Thus, Public Relations is neither a barrier between the truth and the public nor is it propaganda to impose a point of view regardless of truth, ethics and the public good. It is not publicity aimed directly at achieving sales, although Public Relations activities can be very helpful to sales and marketing efforts. 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 (AronofT & Baskin, 1983). 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).

2.7 PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ETHIOPIA

In Ethiopia, the practice of public relations is a recent phenomenon. During the previous regimes, public relations was conducted in a traditional manner. During the reign of Emperor Minilik II where modern mass media started, two magazines and the first Amharic weekly newspaper,

―Aemro‖ was first published in 1888. Next, newspapers such as ―Addis Zemen‖ and the ―Ethiopian Herald‖ started publication in 1941 and 1943 respectively. In addition, radio programs started in 1935 employing modern radio technology which started under the auspices of the Ministry of Information only in the late 1940`s. Whereas, Television program started in 1964. Thus, it was the then Ministry of Information which was serving as the bridge between the government, the people and the rest of the world. (Lisane Mastawekia, 2003). It was named the Ethiopian Information organization under Yetsehfet Ministry. Its mandate was to disseminate information, controlling the printing press of the government and newspapers, publishing laws, regulations by Negarett Gazette. Later, in 1976 it was named Ministry of Information and Merha Behere. From 1988-1995 it changed its name as Ministry of Information. In 2008, it is organized under the name of government communication affairs office at federal and regional government level.

In Ethiopian government, public relations has two fundamental national missions: creating national consensus locally and building Ethiopia's image internationally. The national policy was established to create awareness locally about the benefits of unity in diversity and tolerance. The policy gives due emphasis to intensifying the development of democratic institutions and realizing fair distribution of income from the rapid economic growth and hence prevent disintegration and civil war. In addition, the policy envisions to promoting the country's image externally to facilitate the development of investment, trade, and tourism. It also aspires for the country to have its rightful place in international politics. However, the practice of public relations activities has not been carried out to realize the above mentioned national goals. The public relations activities carried out by the responsible

government bodies and public media outlets have not brought about the expected result at the desired level. However, it is recent phenomenon where private sectors were joining the PR industry by introducing new technologies and perform their duties as professionals.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

Theoretical conceptualization is a logical and a systematic thinking about definitions, ideas, measures and relationships. The evaluation of PR practice can be conceptualized in different ways, depending on the variables that are under investigation (Grunig, 2006). Research in public relations usually focuses on the entire process of PR and examines the communications relationships that exist among and between institutions and their key target audience groups. Seemingly, a researcher investigating the practice of P.R. in a public [service] organization, may probably adapt a different concept from the one investigates the same subject in a private [product] corporate. However, Grunig, (2006), conceptualizes public relations practice as, a management of *communication* with *top managers* and with *publics* to contribute to the strategic decision processes of organizations. (Ben & Jerry, 2010).

As far as practical framework P.R. practice is concerned, with best practices and theoretical ideas which can be used and evaluated *in* the practice of public relations—thus fusing research *on* the practice, *for* the practice, and *in* the practice. Such fusion is the hallmark of a true profession (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). Furthermore, Stacks (2011), provided the *RACE* formula for public relations which identified four stages: *research, action, communication* and *evaluation*. Cutlip and Center provided their own formula based on this which they expressed as *fact-finding, planning, communication* and *evaluation*. Borrowing from systems theory, Richard Carter, (cited in Stacks, 2011), coined the term ‗behavioral molecule' for a model that describes how people make decisions about what to do. The segments of a behavioral molecule continue endlessly in a chain reaction. In the context of a ‗behavioral molecule', Grunig, (cited in Stacks, 2011), describes the elements of public relations as *detect, construct, define, select, confirm, behave, detect* (Stacks, 2011).

The process of detecting, constructing, defining, selecting, confirming, behaving (which, in systems language, means producing outputs) and detecting, continues ad infinitum. Aronoff and Baskin, (1983), echoed the same view in their text on public relations research. They say: ―... evaluation is

not the final stage of the public relations process. In actual practice, evaluation is frequently the beginning of a new effort‖ (p.179).

Further, in order to formulate corporate communication strategy, practitioners need to understand the nature of business and societal issues that the organization is dealing. Moreover, he/she need to be expert in applying different communications devices that overcome barriers to success. This comprehensive program therefore, intend to address issues about *corporate communication*. It covers all key disciplines, skills and best practices in P.R.s, Media relations, Corporate Communications Strategy/skills, writing for media, crisis communication, and perhaps online PR (Rhee, 2004).

Apparently, due to changes within the profession as well as the surrounding world, the PR practice continued to reshape itself in adapting the body of knowledge with the changing environment. Subsequently, several theories have been postulated to support or otherwise criticize the PR practices. As stated in Rhee, (2004), a team of six researchers (Grunig, Grunig, Dozier, Ehling, Repper, and White), began their research by addressing questions: *how*, *why*, and to *what* extent does communication contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives (ibid).

Later, Grunig and Hunt (1984, p7, cited in Rhee, 2004), have provided grounds for the *reconceptualization* of public relations practice and its models. They defined public relations as *"the management of communication between an organization and its publics"* (Rhee, 2004).

2.9 MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

An understanding of Grunig's Four Models of Public Relations which describe the evolving types of P.R. practice from Press Agentry through Public Information to Two-way Asymmetric and Two-Way Symmetric communication is important to study the P.R. practice, because different objectives pertain to each model. Besides, the four models have been promoted, practiced, criticized and deliberated among global P.R. professionals for decades (Stephen, 2012).

James Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984) suggested four perspectives in which PR is practiced in modern way. Their suggestion is based on two dimensional combinations; *directions* of communication—*one-way versus two-way*, and *purposes* of communication—*asymmetrical versus symmetrical*. The

models describe the different forms of communication (relationship) between an organization and its stakeholders. These are, the *Press Agentry*, the *Public Information*, the *Two-way Asymmetrical* and the *Two-way Symmetrical* models of PR (Theaker, 2007 & Stephen, 2012).

Model	Type of Communication	Characteristics
1. Press agent or publicity	One-way communication	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisation desires.
2. Public information model	One-way communication	Uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to distribute organisational information. The public relations practitioner is often referred to as the in-house journalist.
3. Two-way asymmetrical model	Two-way communication (imbalanced)	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisation desires. Does not use research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organisation.
4. Two-way symmetrical model	Two-way communication	Uses communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and its stakeholders

Figure 1: James Grunig and Tod Hunt's Four Models Adopted from Theaker, A. (2007)

2.9.1 PRESS AGENTRY MODEL

This model is a one-way communication from the press agents to their publics that uses persuasion and manipulation to influence behavior of an audience. Besides, accuracy and credibility are not priorities with this kind of model. The method is usually employed by practitioners for one way communications to sell products or services without any quantitative analysis of the results. The press agent invests no time in research and even less in the discussion of ethics. The aim is behavior manipulation.

With roots in the 19th century, press agents worked to influence public opinion by creating news (Simpson, 2014). The press agentry/publicity and the public information models both stress information via outgoing information from the organization to the public and the relative absence of feedback. Scholars like Haywood, (2002) consider the act as a one-way communications value, constantly transmitting but never receiving; they are all mouths and no ears. Press agentry model applies when a public relations program strives only for favorable publicity in the mass media, often

in a deceptive way which can be called as propaganda. Thus, propaganda is not about communication between an organization and their publics; it is about miscommunication. Its first aim is to dissolve communication between people in order to disable their ability to form publics. This act cannot be taken as the function of public relation since its basic purpose is to create constraints to communications or one sided information flow.

2.9.2 PUBLIC INFORMATION MODEL

Public information is the second model which is practiced basically to inform the public. So, it does not seek to persuade or change the attitude of the public directly but to disseminate any relevant information to them. It is thus predicated that if the public has sufficient, relevant and truthful information about the organization, then the public will believe and behave to what the organization desired. In Public Information Model, the job of P.R.s practitioners, also referred as the _journalists in residence', is to report objectively information about their organizations to the public through mass media and controlled media such as newspapers, brochures and direct mail (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

While One-way communication is the feature of the public information model, tools such that, press releases, brochures, even static Web content, are tools used by these information dispensers. They tell the story and hope someone is paying attention (Simpson, 2014). Today's practitioners (and students training to be practitioners) greatly benefit by understanding the crucial role that the news media plays in public life, how to deal with the media and, more generally, how external communications efforts can be used to advance the work of public agencies (Theaker, 2007).

2.9.3 TWO-WAY ASYMMETRICAL MODEL

The two-way asymmetrical model is the third level model in public relation. The aim of a P.R. practice in this model is not to improve organizational practices but rather to influence attitudes of audiences. Under the two-way asymmetrical model, feedback is more important to practitioners since the goal is to get into the psychology of audiences so that messages can be tailored to get the most effective reaction. So, research is used to get inside the heads of consumers and to sell messages. Grunig and Hunt call it _scientific persuasion,' and it remains the stock-in-trade of advertisers everywhere.

Moreover, the method is mostly used by advertisers all round the world. While asymmetrical communication is two-way, the goal is anything but persuasion to trigger a transaction, thus its popularity with marketers (Simpson, 2014). The feedback is primarily to help construct a better message (Botan and Hazleton 1989:23). In this role practitioners actively engage in persuasion. Their goal is to bring target publics around to a certain way of thinking through advocacy (Guth and Marsh 2005:7). Expertise or knowledge in your communication department to perform these tasks: Persuade a public that your organization is right on an issue, get publics to behave as your organization wants, manipulates publics scientifically, use attitudes theory in a campaign the dominant coalition in this organization believes public relations should be practiced: in public relations, the broad goal is to persuade publics to behave as the organization wants them to behave before beginning a public relations program, one should examine attitude surveys to ensure the organization and its policies are described in ways its publics would be most likely to accept, after completing a public relations program, research should be done to determine how effective this program has been in changing people's attitudes (Rice and Atkin 2001).

2.9.4 THE TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL MODEL

This model usually attempts to find a mutually advantageous solution to problems and a P.R. uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflicts, and promote mutual understandings and respect between the organization and its public(s) (Theaker, 2007). This implies the two-way symmetrical model allows for more input from publics that can provide innovative solutions and corrective discourse, both essential for sound strategic PR management. However, the weakness of this model is the imbalance of relationship among the management and the public

Hence, the two-way symmetrical model casts P.R. in the role of mediator versus persuader. Under that model, P.R. experts listen to the concerns of both clients and key publics and help them adapt to one another. So, it seems the P.R. professional must represent the interests of all parties and believed to work well with enlightened management who take a long-term effect. However, it is a utopian model, for these clients are rare to be found nowhere in the world. It has also been labeled as, _the ideal model' by Grunig (1984). This is mainly because in this model both the flow of communication and influence between the organization and its publics is more balanced.

Proponent of this model advocate the idea that communication must be a two-way process for anything opposite to this should not be considered as communication. The two-way process indicate that feedback is mandatory to check whether the message conveyed are accepted by the audiences whom the public practitioner attempt to persuade (Haywood 2002).

For an organization to follow open system public relations uses the ―two-way symmetric‖ methods, which is to say communication is two-way and that information exchange causes changes on both sides of the organization-public relationships. Supporting this view Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) emphasized that the duty of public relation practitioners should be maintaining the relationship of the organizations by adjusting and adapting themselves and their publics to ever changing social, political and economic environments. In other words, the public relation practitioner is duty bound to change the attitude and behavior of the management as well as it is to change the attitude and behavior of publics, public relations should provide mediation for the organization-to help management and publics negotiate conflicts. In general, the symmetrical worldview incorporates the ideas of negotiation, conflict resolution, and compromise in an organizations operating procedures where P.R. public relation build relations with strategic publics that limit the autonomy of the organization (Liu and Horsley 2007).

3.0 PUBLIC RELATIONS CODE OF ETHICS

Ethics are the values that guide the ways we think and act. Without values, we have no ethics. Ethics are about integrity. In its fullest sense; integrity means an integration of ideas and actions. To maintain standards of practice for public relations that do not allow representation of unethical behavior means having the courage to stand up for ethical codes as well as having a strong set of personal values. It also means having the courage of once convictions and refusing to do what is unethical. Both the practice of public relation and the act of organizations are inextricably tied to the responsibility for the public. Social responsibility of public relation and organizations are grounded in the ethical code of conducts of public relation. The relationship between public relation and the organization is reminding the later or creating constant awareness by management of the institutions responsibility to all its publics (Newsom, Turk & Cruckeberg, 2000).

Public responsibility is a basic tenet of public relations. If the organization does not need to be responsible to its publics, it also does not need a public relations function. Public responsibility results from communication, negotiation and compromise between interpenetrating systems. The code of ethics first presents a set of core professional values that should guide all professional practitioners of public relations. The commitment to ethical practices on the parts of the public relation association is intended to counter the image of public relations practitioners as

―hired guns‖ who will say or do whatever it takes to accomplish the goals of their clients (Hendrix 2004). This statement presents the core values of PRSA members and, more broadly, of the public relations profession. These values provide the foundation for the member code of ethics and set the industry standard for the professional practice of public relations. These values are the fundamental beliefs that guide our behaviors and decision-making process. We believe our professional values are vital to the integrity of the profession as a whole. The ethics code of the public relations society of America begins with a statement of six core values:

Advocacy: We serve the public interest by acting as a responsible advocate for those we represent. We provide a voice in the market place of ideas, facts and viewpoints to aid informed public debate.

 Honesty: We adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of those we represent and in communicating with the public.

Expertise: We acquire and responsibly use specialized knowledge and experience. We advance the profession through continued professional development research and education. We build mutual understanding, credibility and relationships among a wide variety of institutions and audiences.

Independence: We provide objective counsel to those we represent. We are accountable for our actions.

Loyalty: We are faithful for those we represent, while honoring our obligation to serve the public interest.

Fairness: We deal fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, vendors, the media and the general public. We respect all opinions and support the right of free expression (Guth and Marsh 2005:245).

Public relation officer always tell the truth when he/she succeed in the management and practice of public relation. In addition the public relation should always equally uncompromising no matter how he/she might find himself/herself under pressure or temptations (Stone, 1995).

3.1 PUBLIC INTEREST AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Public interest is defined in the media contexts of ethics following communications policy and social responsibility (Franklin et al.2005). It is clearly in the public interest that the media do not cause social problems or extreme offence. But the idea of a public interest also involves positive expectations. The difficulties of handling the public interest concept are inextricably connected with its high significance. In this respect, Blumler (1998:54-55) makes three key points. First, as in the case of government, there are questions of authority as well as of power: ―in communications the media are similarly placed. The justification for their freedoms, their wide ranging roles in society, politics and culture, and their place in regulatory orders depends ultimately on the public interests presumed to be served thereby‖.

In short, the power of the media, like that of government, has to be used in a legitimate way, which is not far removed from the notion of responsibility. Secondly, Blumler argues that ―a certain transcendent quality attaches to the notion of public interest. It is different from and, in policy terms, superior to particular interests. This entails a longer-term, in which the claims of successor generations and the future of society are included as well as people's immediate needs.‖ Thirdly, ―notions of public interest must work in an imperfect perspective and impure world.‖ This means inevitable tension, compromise and improvisation according to circumstances.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Exploratory research approach was employed for this study. The researcher used this approach for the results are purely of qualitative data. The study is to describe the types of P.R. practices and the means used to exercise them at Gambela regional government communication affairs office. Following the grounded theory, the researcher explored the associated variables which were used since he had an opportunity to report what happened in the area where the research was conducted.

3.2. Participants of the Study

The study population were 20 workers of the Gambella Regional State Government Communication Affairs Office. These include the heads, the deputy, and all other employees as stated in the following sections. The researcher considered all of them since their number is manageable.

3.3. Sample Size

According to the data collected from HR in the communication affairs office, the total number of staffs in the P.R. department and administrative team were twenty. Therefore, all employees were included for the study.

3.4. Sampling Techniques

Available sampling technique was used since the size of the staff was small in number and believed appropriate to consider all of them. Moreover, the head of the office, deputy head of the office and the eight core process owners in the office were selected using comprehensive sampling technique for the in-depth interview. However, for documents reviewed, sample were taken from every communication practices which was communicated from the year 2008-2009 E.C.

3.5. Sources of Data

The study population were 15 workers of the Gambella Regional State Government Communication Affairs Office. These include the heads, the deputy, and all other employees as stated in the following

sections. The researcher considered all of them since their number can be manageable. To this end, the primary data were collected from respondents that comprised P.R. professionals, officers, IT experts and top managers in Gambella Regional State Government Communication Affairs Office. Whereas, the secondary data were obtained from official websites, records and other footages (communication archives).

3.6. Data Collection Tools

The researcher used two data collection instruments: in-depth interview and document analyses.

Both of the data gathering tools are used as discussed below:

3.6.1. In-depth Interview

Semi-structured interview was used to gather data regarding the practice of public relation and the PR tools used in the regional government communication affairs office. Thus, all P.R. professionals, officers, IT experts and top managers were interviewed. The researcher employed the data gathering tools since it is recommended by researchers for its flexibility and gives a room for the researcher to deeply probe information. This instrument was used to verify and validate the validity of the data that were collected by the other two instruments mentioned below. The tool enabled the researcher to capture the participants as they created their own structure and meaning.

Such discussions were audio recorded and later replayed and transcribed.

3.6.2. Document Analysis

Data collected from documents, office reports, archives and other communications were reviewed to assess the practice and tools of P.R. with internal and external stakeholders or media. Analyses of documents include the analysis of posters, billboards, brochures, calendars, video recordings, writings and caps, official websites and other footages (communication archives).

3.7. Data Collection Procedure

Pilot study was conducted to check the weaknesses and strengths of instruments in the actual study. From the result, the researcher modified problems related to double statements and equivocal ideas. Therefore, after designing an interview guide, a pilot study was carried out with respondents outside

of the study population. Accordingly, the pilot study was conducted in Jimma University and then, it was modified. During the actual data collection, the researcher strictly followed all necessary ethical steps with the respondents and collected the data. For instance, the respondents were told the purpose of the research, asked for their permission, told not to state their name and other personal identification and guaranteed for confidentiality of the information during analysis.

3.8. Method of Data Analysis

Data collected via an in-depth interview and document analysis were analyzed using qualitative method. Likewise, media contents recorded with content checklist were also analyzed thematically. The findings were presented, explained and corroborated by quotations arising from the in-depth interviews with the director of Gambella Regional State Government Communication

Affairs Office and PR practitioners' team. The interpretation and discussion were guided by the objectives of the study. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed by the researcher through constant comparative analysis using Corbin and Strauss' (2008) coding framework, moving from open to axial and ultimately selective coding. Transcripts were analyzed first to gain a broad understanding of the various key concepts and categories offered by participants. In the axial coding stage, links between these concepts and categories were identified to reveal organizing themes. Finally, the selective coding stage further refined these organizing themes into the overarching categories.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns of the study were addressed through written informed consent before the data collection. Moreover, identities of respondents were used in anyways during or after the data collection. Besides, the collected data were analyzed objectively without any attempt of changing or twisting.

Generally, ethical issues which were taken into account to protect participants' safety are:

+ Permission to engage respondents or access documents from the communication office were officially be asked;

+ The purpose of the study was briefly explained for target participants;

+ No one was forced or manipulated to provide the requited data;

+ The data collection process was handled in free periods of respondents and there were not be any interruption of Work time;

+ Confidentiality of the information were protected;

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The aim of this section of data presentation and analysis is to assess the practices and PR tools used in the regional state government communication affairs office. The kind of public relation models followed in the regional state government communication affairs office were also assessed. In doing so, sixteen in-depth interviewees from the regional office of communication affairs and public relations practitioners have participated. The interviewees were selected because of their position/job title, experience, knowledge and exposure to the public relations works of the communication affairs. Analysis of data gathered through observation check list and document analyses have also been incorporated.

4.1 Respondents Background

The study sought to establish basic data about the respondents in terms of their age category, gender, educational levels, their work experience, professional training and job title/position.

4.1.1 Respondents Age

Table 1: Percentages and Frequencies of Participants by Age

Age	Frequency	Percent
20-29	9	45.00
30-39	6	30.33
40-49	5	25.00
50-59	0	00
Total	20	100

The regional office of communication affairs has 20 workers in its structure from the regional to the woreda level. It has 15 staffs and 5 supporting staffs. Thus, the structure was formed with 20 employees as a whole.

4.1.2 Gender Distribution

The study also endeavored to establish the distribution of respondents in respect to their gender. Findings indicated that male respondents constituted 75% while female respondents account for 25%.
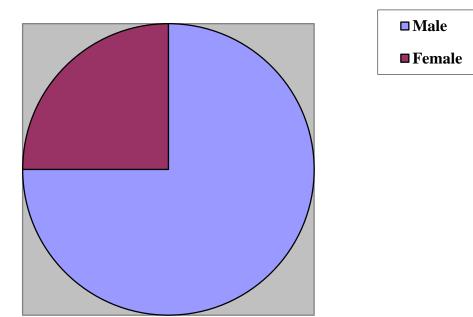
Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

4.1.3 Education Levels of Respondents

Table 3: Education Levels of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percent
Certificate	2	10
Diploma	8	40
Degree	10	50
Masters	0	00
Total	20	100

Table 2 shows the level of education of the respondents. At least 5% of respondents were Diploma holders, 10% were Degree holders. 2% college certificate holders. None of the respondents was a holder of Masters Degrees.

4.1.4 Respondents Work Experience

The study also sought to determine the level of education of the respondents. Table 3 below shows the respondents work experience.

Table 4: Respondents Work Experience

Work Experience	Frequency	Percent
1- 5 years	8	40
6-10 years	10	50
11-15 years	2	10
16 years & above	0	00
Total	20	100

Respondents were asked about their experience in different areas, 8 (40%) respondents indicated 1-5 years of experience, 10 (50%) respondents revealed 6-10 years of experience, only 2 (10%) of the respondents indicated 11-15 years of experience in the communication affairs office.

4.1.5 Job Titles/position of the respondents

Table 5: The Job Titles of the respondents

Job Title	Frequency	Percent
Director of Regional Communication Affairs	1	05.00
Deputy Director of Regional Communication Affairs	1	05.00
Directors of Media Development Study & Research	4	20.00
Public Relation Officers	7	35.00
Media relations Officers	3	15.00
IT officers	2	10.00
Community relations officers	2	10.00
Total	**20**	**100**

The above table reveals the job titles and positions of the respondents in the regional state communication organization. Accordingly, there are two directors (one general director and one deputy Director), and four Directors of Media Development Study & Research. In addition, there are seven public relation officers, three Media relations Officers, two IT officers and two Community relations officers.

4.2 Results on Major Public Relation Practices of the Gambella Regional Government Communication Affairs Office

The practices of P.R. in the regional state government communication affairs office were discussed with 15 respondents from the office. To preserve the confidentiality of respondents, all the 15 interviewees were coded as P001 (Participant 1), P002 (Participant 2) for the analyses. So, instead of their names, coded identifications were used during analyses of data. As the thematic analysis revealed, P.R. is practiced practices to achieve four major goals of the office. The identified P.R. functions are; Reporting Relationships, Strategic Planning and Decision Making, Information Gathering and Research and Organizational Support. The detail analyses of the four functions of the practices are presented in the following sections.

4.2.1 Reporting Relationships

Respondents were asked about their office 's relationship of reporting or their nature of communication as serving the general public. Thus, the P.R. practitioners believe that they are expected to serve publics interests and government. However, in their practice some of them admitted that they are biased in serving only the side of the government. They are not actually performing up to their expectation as a public relation professional but as a tube passing information only in one direction. In most instances, failures with regards to government policies and programs will not be reported. According to the respondents, this is mainly because there exist self-censorship of the practitioners and communication office coordinators and fear of accountability and rejection that arise from contents of their reporting communication.

One participant explained that he always experiences a personal conflict with his own convictions as doing what he professionally believed right and lying for the government simply to live peacefully.

Even though the top level managements did not directly put the regulation on how and what to report on different issues, they have different view that there should be a balance reporting style between the government and the public interests. One of the respondents explained that: ―Whenever we report on certain issues, we try as much as possible to incorporate the needs and concerns of the society but balancing the interest of the government and the society has never been realized. Proving the accuracy and objectivity of sensitive political and economic issues were among the prominent once. ‖ (P001)

Other respondent also admitted the fact that the society itself do not tell our office workers about their concerns that real exist in the society. To hear from her mouth:

> ―Majority of the public have lost its trust in our performance since we most of the time are expected to counter reply on the negative reporting of government performances by other media. ‖ (P002).

Other respondent also revealed the existing reporting relationship among the whole employees.

This claim is evident in the following reflection during interview:

> ―Our reporting relationship with top management level was reflected on monthly meeting session where every employee's in the communication affairs office self-criticize on their performance or on feedback raised by our colleagues. During these kind of sessions, public relation practitioners who have attempted to serve as a bridge between the government and the public get high criticism. ‖ (P003).

However, according to one of the top level management response, there is nothing as such a thing as systematically filtering information gathered by the public relation practitioners while reporting or putting a pressure on them to report only the success of the government substantiated with inaccurate information. To hear from the respondent 's statement:

> ―PR organization to communicate effectively what is done by the government. Our reporting was never biased in focusing the positive side of the government. The P.R.

office was committed to the guiding principle to serve as a bridge between the public and the government. ‖ (P004).

From these, it is possible to conclude that the reporting relationship with the top level management is dominated by government and authorities in power. The P.R. practitioners were not given the duty to serve the public interest by following the guiding principle of social responsibility, their sources of information are government offices, their nature of reporting relationship is one sided where there is tight control of information by regional top authorities. This in turn results in poor performance of the regional government communication affairs office as a whole in standing as a bridge between the government and the public. This finding contradict with what Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) said about the practice of P.R: ―Public relations must be practiced with a commitment to social responsibility and ethics.

4.2.2 Strategic Planning and Decision Making

With regards to the P.R. department level of involvement in strategic and decision making process with the top managements, respondents explained that they never had an opportunity to discuss on the design of strategies and decision making process. The regional government communication affairs office does not use the P.R. practitioners in put in the planning and decision making processes.

One of the participant in the in-depth interview explained:

> ―The P.R. office and the strategic public had never been given a platform where they could have contributed their advice on the plan and strategies decided up on and given from their top regional and federal officials. Even if they were given an opportunity, most of them do not come out without fear of the repercussion of criticizing the plan critically. Besides, there is no scientific practice of gathering information from the public so that the interest and concerns of it could be considered during planning and decision making process. ‖ (P005).

Other respondent also added that. ―Since the five years' strategic plan is given from the federal government, the regional government communication affairs office and the strategic public have no

power to engage in the planning, improving, altering or criticizing it. During my stay in this office, I never seen any plan changed and an information considered as a result of the discussion we had. However, there is a practice of informing the whole P.R. team about the new plan on our internal publics where there is no room for amending the plan or decisions‖ (P006).

One of the top management level respondent emphasized that:

> ─Since we know what public needs from the government, we did not need to participate strategic public in the planning and decision making process. However, there is a good practice of participation of P.R. practitioners on our internal publics. ‖ (P009)

Based on what the in-depth interviewees replied, it is clear that the public relations is not involving the P.R. practitioners and general public in the planning and decision making process at Zonal and Woreda level. This indirectly leads to the conclusion that the communication affairs office is not functioning by engaging in a problem solving activities.

Nevertheless, this practice contradicts with the scholars' view of considering the concerns of the public which are collected through scientific research in the strategic planning and decision making process. Supporting this view, Haywood (2002) stated that strategic planning uses research to define and redefine the perceived problem.

4.2.3 Information Gathering and Research

Respondents were asked about the practice of their information gathering and research skills, all of them agree that research is not part of the practice of their public relations function. From their response, there is no practice of conducting research to gather information about their image or reputation, trust and credibility and public's needs and satisfaction. However, they customarily practice the traditional and unscientific ways identifying and understanding key publics, framing important issues and developing public relations prioritizing publicity as their main concern and an end by itself. One of the respondents admitted that:

> ─I never considered research as part of my task and my work has never been based on conducting a research. My communication effort in the office is not based on

conducting participatory research based and similar to moving in the dark with no light at hand. ‖ (P0010)

Whereas, the top level management in the office explained that, ―No matter how we did not follow the formal scientific procedures to gather information, the strategy we were following had been brought us crucial outcomes in responding to the public concerns. ‖ (P0011)

Other respondent described the P.R. information gathering process as follows: ―In our office, there are no structure where P.R. practitioners engage in a research work process. I don't remember a single incident where research has been carried out to identify the information needs of our publics by P.R. practitioners in the office. ‖ (P0012).

From their responses, one can easily conclude that Gambela regional government communication affairs office had never considered conducting research as a vital function in the process of public relations '(Wimmer & Dominick 2006). These findings contradict with scholars 'view of significances of public relation research in any organizations. For example, Gronstedt (1997) stated that public relations research provides the foundation for almost everything communicators do, including identifying and understanding key publics, framing important issues, developing public relations and organizational strategy, and measuring results helps identify the existing knowledge, predisposition or behaviors of key publics, their preferred information sources, and how best to reach them. In addition, Grunig et al. (2002) found that that research plays a crucial role in how organizations with excellent public relations departments respond to key publics such as activists. Public relations research to develop strategy should include both informal and formal methods which were totally ignored by Gambela regional government communication affairs office.

4.2.4 Organizational Support

In order for the PR practitioners to perform their duties effectively, the organization should provide adequate support in all necessary forms. Based on the in-depth interview held with the key participants of the regional government communication affair office, there are no adequate support provided for the PR practitioners to discharge their duties. One of the respondent clearly assert that:

―There are no positive perception among the high level officials to support the activities of the P.R. practitioners. The manifestation of this attitude can be seen in providing necessary logistic, services and financial aids. Even when the P.R. practitioners attempt to perform their responsibility to meet the expectation of the public, the office leaders 'treatment of the practitioners directly affect their interest in serving the public negatively. ‖ (P0014).

Other respondent stated that, ―There is poor management in the regional government communication affairs office with regards to utilizing the office 's resources. Most of the HR and top officials are not willing to cooperate with PR practitioners. ‖ (P0015).

Thus, based on what they reply about the organization support for the P.R. practitioners, it is legitimate to say the office is not supporting the practitioners perform their duties, their bad treatment has affected their positive expectation of discharging their responsibility, their practice in balancing the government and the public interest has been affected. Besides, there is poor management in utilizing the office's resources and unwillingness to cooperate while the practitioners attempt to serve the government and the public. However, the finding of this study is in contradiction with the idea that better organization support is the primary condition for the success of P.R. practitioners 'performance in discharging their duties. It is also an indication of the lack of respect for the profession and the low power public relations practitioners have in deciding their strategies and tactics in most organizations.

4.3 The Public Relation Tools in the regional state government communication affairs office.

Many of the regional government communication affairs office practitioners interviewed reported that the office uses various public relations tools which help them reach their potential publics, customers and clients, notify the public of new laws and programs, promote the goals of the agency through public service campaigns that encourage (or discourage) certain behaviors, or increase public cooperation with the agency, such as through tip lines and websites. According to the respondent view:

‖The office uses commonly Gambela regional TV since the agency has two programs per week to reach the majority of audiences. ‖ Kat. Another respondent similarly explained that: ‖We use any possible communication tools where the office reaches out its publics, customers and clients. Among them, face to face, meetings, letter, phone calls and other tolls include newsletter, press release, TV, radio, and social Medias such as Facebook. To reach out internal public and potential customers and clients and serve as a bridge for the society and the government. ‖ (P005).

One higher official in the communication office explained the way how she spends a lot of her time doing public relations in a reactionary mode whenever there exist very sensitive issues. She explained that ‖we work with pertinent bodies to disseminate information and normalize the situation when an unanticipated incident (crisis) occurs in the office by analyzing information collected through questionnaire from samples audiences and produces programs and makes them broadcast on radio and TV productions that will enable to publicize the Office 's polices, strategies, plans, programs and projects and that will help to have a national consensus and build image. ‖ (P003)

As a regional communication office director in public relations said, ‖In terms of the communications pieces, obviously the PR departments are better equipped for the communications aspect of the writing, designing, brand standards and a close partnership between public relations and human resources on internal communication initiatives. All the workers in the communication office internally communicate by working side by side, in order to really integrate and moving in the same direction. ‖ (P002).

Another officer in the P.R. department admitted that ‖We undertake media monitoring and environmental assessment activities, as well as prepare analysis, it collects and analyze suggestions of the staff and customers and presents them to the senior leadership as an input to design possible solutions for the concerns of the public. ‖ (P007).

From the observation conducted to analyze available documents which show P.R. tools in the communication affairs office, the researcher summarized the following P.R. communication tools:

press releases, brochures, pamphlets, postcards, letters, posters, calendars and agenda books, audio and video messages which are conveyed at public forums, event creation and promotion materials, photographs and audio-videotapes sent for TV and radio stations and information desk activities.

From the information presented above, all the respondents participated in the interview rely very heavily on traditional media to communicate with their public. The most used tools in this category were TV, Radio, news releases and newsletters. Most interviewees had good working relationships with their local media which is Gambela regional TV and radio stations while a few revealed that the newspapers are pretty much print media where they release word-for-word. However, the communication office hardly used social media which is the most easily accessible media by the majority of the public. Many research findings also revealed that social media is a powerful tool and can be used by public administrators to help connect theories of administration and governance (Mergel & Greeves, 2013).

Data from professionals and officers of the Gambella Regional State Government Communication Affairs Office emphasize the importance of utilizing every possible tool in their P.R. activities. They explained that whenever they find a tool that can provide value in the P.R. activities they utilized it for the sole purpose of serving the public. Never the less, this was exceptionally true when the office engaged in campaigns which were not frequently utilized by the office. It can generally be said that they theoretically believed any of those tools 'importance but in practice they were never seen making use of the modern social media networks to communicate with the public.

What tools are used at what times varies between different branches of offices since most decisions are made at the regional level to best meet the local customers 'needs. However, at the wored level the office has prioritized an in house communication tool which as they thought would help the woredas to carry out locally planned P.R. activities. This function can be seen as a support for the woredas that not always hold PR knowledge and competence locally.

According to Mordecai Lee, Grant Neeley, and Kendra Stewart (2012), the government P.R. is under obligation to be responsive to the public. That is because their external relationships are not one dimensional, such as with customers or clients, and not even with stakeholders. Rather, for a

government P.R. office, everybody is a citizen. Even people who are not being served by a P.R. office have a claim on it. With this regard, the work of the Gambela regional government office use of such opportunities (P.R. tools) should increase the civic engagement, participation, and dialogue among the public and the government. However, due to low budget allocation for the P.R. department and informal office bureaucracy, the stated purposes were not realized no matter how hard they try to serve the public to that level where they make use of various modern P.R. tools to receive and monitor feedbacks from the strategic publics. Thus, the findings from the interviews support the fact that P.R. practitioners are not satisfied with the availability of resources and the use of only traditional P.R. tools.

With respect to the reason for using those traditional P.R. tool, the response from in-depth interview indicated that it was more of projection and improvement/shaping of government image and changing public perception of the government. However, many scholars suggested that one of the basic democratic purposes of public relations in government should be listening to the public on multiple levels. Active listening then leads to modified agency behavior so that it can do a better job and be more responsive to the public. This is different from being responsive for pragmatic and essentially marketing purposes (Mordecai L., Grant N., & Kendra S., 2012).

4.4 Public Relations Models in the regional state government communication affairs office

The question regarding to describe what types of public relations models they utilize in their daily jobs as indicate by one respondent that:

> **"**The office usually uses one-way communication with the public and other stakeholders for the purposes of positive spin, education, or awareness: grassroots member activities such as sending press release, posting information on websites, newsletter or originally authored e-mail, fax, postcard, or letter, or leaving a telephone message. ‖ (P008).

According to Grunig and Hunt 's (1984) classification of P.R. models, this view fits the press agentry/publicity model which are the cornerstones of traditional media relations programs. They

describe how P.R. practitioners communicate with their public via the media. Communication in both models flows in one direction: outward from the organization, through the media, to the public, clients and stakeholders.

Among the four models of public relations developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), Press Agentry/Publicity Model, Public Information Model, Two-Way Asymmetrical Model, and TwoWay Symmetrical Model – provide the most utilized frameworks for the nature of communication in the practice of public relations (Okay & Okay, 2008). From these four models, the public information model appears to be the most dominantly employed public relations model by the P.R. practitioners interviewed in Gambela regional government communication affairs office. Supporting this practice, other research findings show that the public information model is the most widely used model by government and public sector agencies (Wilcox, Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013).

The P.R. office has a model of how to work with the publicity. At occasions, the PR experts are engaged to do some PR works to track publicity in traditional newspapers, online newspapers (Gambla news) and Gambella TV and Radio. After the publicity has been tracked, it is reviewed by the head of office of regional communication to build a knowledge base where publicity has appeared and where there exists the need for taking further actions after receiving publicity. In relation with this view, the importance of effective communication with the public to establish ongoing, reliable and respected external communication process should be given priority (Wells & Spinks, 1999).

One of the higher official in the communication affairs office remarked that she follows the public information model to get the information out to the public through dialogue and sample survey. In certain circumstances, the nature of the issue to be communicated determines the kind of P.R. model to be followed. According to the reflection forwarded by another respondent during in-depth interview, the following statement support claim:

‖The public relations model she uses depends on the sensitivity of the issue in the society. If the issue requires a public involvement process, then the public feed has to be gathered and reflected up on by the concerned body. During such circumstance, public relations model that fits with the purpose at hand - two-way communication has to be used by the P.R. practitioners. ‖ (P009).

From the information reflected from the respondents, it is possible to conclude that the most commonly used model of public relation was the press agentry model of public relations. However, as Jim Grunig and Todd Hunt (1995) press agentry got their clients into the headlines, and that's what mattered. Press agentry is alive and well in the entertainment business to this day but not in public administration which is completely different areas. Thus, since press agent invests no time in research and even less in the discussion of ethics, the aim is behavior manipulation which is not recommended to be practiced in government offices.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMNEDATIONS

In this study, the researcher has tried to explore the practice of P.R. practitioners and tools being used at Gambella Regional State Government Communication Affairs Office. The P.R. model and PR tools used to serve the general public, clients and stakeholders have also been investigated. The in-depth interviewees all agree that the communication affairs office is hardly practicing the fundamental P.R. activities in the region. Besides, the result of document analysis and observation shows the one-sided and biased nature of reporting of the public which are press agentry/publicity model. Thus, the research questions are answered by collecting data from the in-depth interview and documentary analysis.

5.1 CONCLUSION

Based on the interview response, the reporting relationship with the top level management is dominated by tight control of authorities as can be describes as one sided. The practice does not allow the P.R. practitioners to serve the public interest by following the guiding principle of social responsibility.

With regards to planning and decision making process, the in-depth interviewees revealed that it does not involve the PR practitioners and general public at Zonal and Woreda level. The practice of Gambela regional government communication affairs office PR department did not make use of fundamental PR process including, researching, planning, communicating and evaluating of the public relations practices. Based on this research, it is possible to conclude that the practices of P.R. practitioner 's in performing their duties are not satisfactory and suffering from credibility in genuinely serving the public.

Based on the in-depth interview held, there are no adequate support such as providing necessary logistic, services and financial aids provided for the P.R. practitioners to discharge their social responsibility duties. Thus, despite the belief of the whole employees in the communication affairs office that they should serve as a bridge for the government and the public, their practice indicated

that all their activities were serving only the government. The practitioners strongly believe that they can contribute a lot if they were given enough budget and resources instead of serving only the interest of the government. The fact that research was not their part of P.R. practice was partly because there is lack of capacity and understanding in conducting research. In addition, the commitment of the communication affairs office in listening and responding to publics` interest observed as weak. Based on this summary, the researcher concluded that the office suffers image and credibility problems. Thus, these results led the researcher to summarize that the top management/ higher officials were not facilitating conducive environment for effective functioning of the P.R. objectives.

On top of these, in Gambella regional government communication affairs office has no established system of participating strategic publics` on planning and decision making process. Thus, a plan without the general public 's participation is hardly credible. Besides, there were no framework at central level used for planning and implementing the overall P.R. activities. It was the woredas communication office that was working with the actual activities. In addition, there was no evaluation framework that is used to evaluate P.R. efforts. There is a consensus among the regional communication affairs office workers that the efficiency of P.R. activities is evaluated centrally since woredas P.R. department probably do not manage PR activities with full knowledge and expertise. Most importantly, the outcome of effective P.R. activities is seen in the increasing amount of customers or stakeholders. At all, there is no specific evaluation practice of PR activities at regional office level.

With regards to the PR tools in the regional state government communication affairs office, Gambela regional TV agency was commonly used for the agency has two programs per week to reach the majority of audiences. Besides, newsletter, press release, radio, face to face, meetings, letter, phone calls were used as secondary P.R. tools. At the woreda level, the office has prioritized an in house communication tool which as they thought would help the woredas to carry out locally planned P.R. activities.

In summary, Gambella regional government communication affairs office does not study the information needs of their strategic publics, no dialogue and interaction on the activities of the office.

Publics` participation in the research, planning, communication and evaluation phases of the public relations process is totally nonexistent.

5.2 RECOMMENDTIONS

Based on the above conclusion, the following recommendations were forwarded:

- Since P.R. has become a crucial tool for the governments in order to address public concerns (problems), the Gambela Regional Government Communication Affairs Office should avoid the one sided reporting or improve the two-way relationship building mechanisms.
- The top level management should also work closely with the P.R. practitioners and avoid the practice of domination or tight control of authorities. In doing so the P.R. practitioners would be able to serve as a bridge between the government and the public.
- The Gambela regional government communication affairs office P.R. department should make use of fundamental P.R. process including, researching, planning, communicating and evaluating of the public relations practices. Public concerns should be investigated in a scientific approach so that timely and effective solution can be provided thereof.
- The system of participating strategic publics during planning and decision making process should be established by the regional government communication affairs office. Doing so would make the general public trust every decision rendered, action taken and policy implemented could be reliable.
- Gambela regional government communication affairs office should use public relations at full level to assist the news media coverage of their activities. In the due process, the regional government should realize the public's right of access to information since it is essential for realizing democracy and good governance. Following these process would enable the regional government to open up for public concerns, be responsible citizens, make informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation.
- The office should start recruiting experienced PR professionals and provide professional development trainings for the existing PR practitioners so that they start to fill knowledge gap among the workers. Doing this, can help the office serve as institutional strategist

instead of being a mere spokesperson. Thus, they should adhere to strategic management function of P.R. than publicity and informational function to serve truly both interests.

- The practice of using traditional P.R. tools is becoming so unproductive nowadays. Thus, the regional government communication affairs office should start to use modern P.R. tools, which are proven successful and productive in terms of money, time, effort, coverage and accessibility to the public.

- Concerning the kind of P.R. model used by the regional government communication affairs office, the researcher recommends that they should totally minimize, if possible, stop acting as press agent who invests no time in research and even less in the discussion of ethics. Rather, they should start focusing on asymmetrical communication model which is two-way communication approach, the goal is anything but balanced persuasion to trigger a transaction, thus its popularity with the publics, stakeholders and marketers. Even though it seems utopian model, the researcher still recommends the regional government communication affairs office to use the 2-way symmetrical model where the P.R. practitioners' communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its public(s).

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Appendices

**JIMMA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

A Questionnaire to be filled for partial fulfilment of M.A degree in Public Relations and Corporate Communications

Dear employees and management of Gambella regional state government communication affairs office, the objective of this inquiry is to collect data on the Practice of Public Relations and Tools used by the Gambella regional state government communication affairs office.

Your responses are very important to achieve the intended objective of this study. Therefore, we kindly request you to give your genuine responses by marking ($\checkmark$) on the spaces Provide for each item.

Therefore, your responses will be used for achieving the objective of this study and you will not be expected to write your name or sign the paper. The questionnaire may Probably take 45 minutes to finish and your kind participation is very helpful for the researcher. Thank you for your cooperation.

Part I: Sociodemographic information

1. Sex   Male   ☐   ☐Female

2. Age   18-25 ☐   26-☐33

☐
34-41

☐
above 41

3. Educational status 10th complete ☐   Preparatory school (11-12) ☐

Certificate ☐   Diploma ☐   1st degree and 2nd degree ☐

4. Work Experience 1-5 years

6-10 years ☐

11-15 years ☐   16 years and above ☐

Part II: In-depth Interview Questions

Hello, the researcher is from Jimma University postgraduate class conducting research on ‗Public Relations P.R.actices and Tools at GRSGCA office'. Now, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding your experience of Public Relation activities. But first of all, I would like to inform you that, no informants (interviewee) name is needed. It is with systematic code your idea will be used. However, both as an incentive and confirmation of your P.R.ivacy, a copy of executive summary of results of the research will be sent to you. Thank you for your time and willingness! Can we begin?

1. **How do you see the P.R.actice of public relations in your organization? P.R.obes:**
    - What kind of media, when and with which target audience you launch a P.R. campaign?
    - What are the P.R. activities you P.R.actice mostly? (Operational Vs Communicative)
    - Why do you engage in P.R. P.R.actice? Advocacy, publicity, marketing, etc.)
    - How do you plan/implement P.R. P.R.actices? (researching & P.R.ioritizing of information gap or audience attitude, behavior or action) ─ formal Vs informal researching
    - How do you analyze your audience? (Age, education, culture, political party, general public, etc.)
    - Can you tell me; the key publics your P.R. P.R.ogram is targeting most? (internal Vs external)

2. **How do you arrange a P.R. campaign? P.R.obes:**
    - When and at what circumstances you engage in P.R. activities? (eventual Vs planned)

- How do you implement, monitor and receive feedback from audiences? (P.R.opaganda, manipulation, persuasion, or negotiation/mutuality)

3. **How do you describe the relationship of management with the P.R. department?**
   P.R.obes:
   - Does the P.R. manager involve in decision makings? (P.R. as a mediator, mouthpiece, marketing P.R.omoter Vs as a management body)

4. **Do you have a mechanism to create/establish new clients/relationships? (Boundaryspanning)**

Part III: Observation Checklist

P.R. Activities	Tools/medium Used	Internal	External		Expected outcome/goal
			General public	**Target audience**	