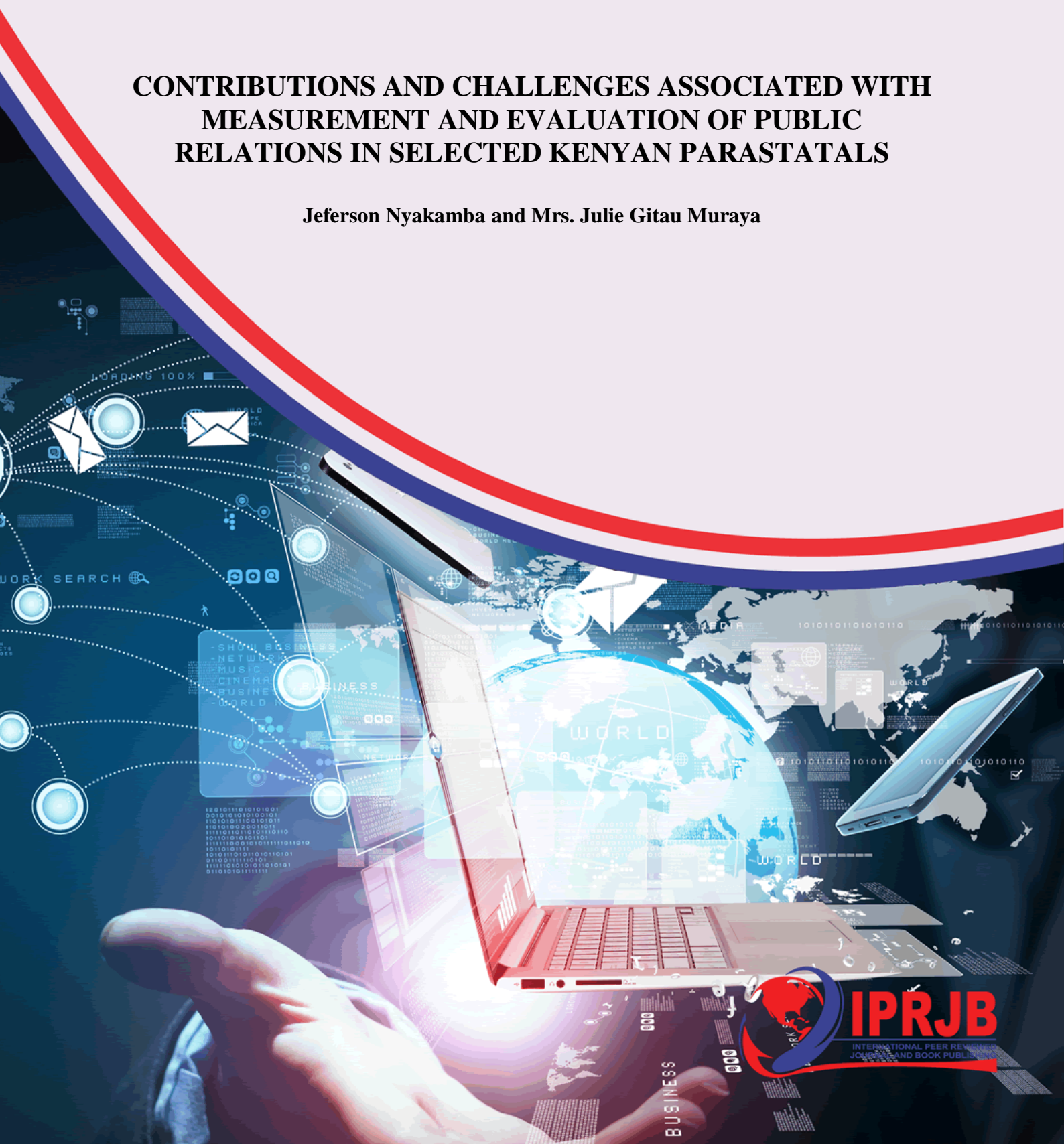


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CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SELECTED KENYAN PARASTATALS

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CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SELECTED KENYAN PARASTATALS

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Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of the study was to establish the contributions and challenges associated with measurement and evaluation of public relations in selected Kenyan parastatals.

Methodology: The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The target population for the study comprised of 187 parastatals with 119,689 employees. Purposive sampling was used. The sample size was forty-seven (47) employees of public relations departments and six (6) senior PR officers who are working in the three selected parastatals, totalling to fifty-three (53). The study used both questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data was interpreted using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data in this study was analyzed, recurrent themes identified, and patterns of relationship that exist among data-groups searched manually and were used to augment the quantitative data. Percentages and tabulations of variables were used to present data analysis in tables, bar graphs and pie charts. The data was analyzed by a data analysis software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 software.

Results: The study found out that PR practitioners are aware of the importance of evaluation research, but are not able to use the function to convince the upper management in the organization. Thus, they find it hard to get sufficient budget and support to carry out the function, which hampers their ability to examine the effectiveness of their PR programs and activities to see if their objectives and goals have been achieved and consequently are unable to assure management of the departments' effectiveness. The study revealed insufficient time, money and lack of standards as the main reasons hindering measurement and evaluation.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study recommended that PR practitioners should use research in planning, implementation and evaluation. They should use verifiable data to back up their funding requirements and flavor their arguments. This will in turn offer major benefits to PR and corporate communication practitioners in their pursuit of professionalism and acceptance as part of senior management, as well as at a practical level in gaining adequate budgets and support.

Key Words: *Practices, Approaches, Key Performance indicators (KPI), Return on Investment (ROI), Measurement and Evaluation and Public Relations*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Practitioners can outsource the component of measurement and evaluation and it can be costly to the organization. However, Macnamara (2005) offers a solution by stating that if outsourcing is beyond a practitioner's budget, there are also low-cost software tools that automate many of tedious processes of crunching numbers and generating charts and graphs for measurement. Macnamara (2005) further notes that US specialist in PR research and measurement, Walter Lindenmann advises that practitioners with limited budget can and should consider piggyback studies, secondary analysis, quick-tab polls, internet surveys, or intercept interviews.

Of particular importance in the pyramid model of PR research is the large number of measurement and evaluation methodologies available to PR practitioners which are at no cost or low cost. These include secondary data (existing research) which can be accessed within the organization or from websites or media research services; academic journals or professional organizations; existing databases; informal feedback; unstructured and semi-structured interviews; readability tests on copy; tabulation of distribution and circulation data (Theaker, 2004). This is an important point for PR practitioners to note as cost is frequently advanced as the reason for not undertaking evaluation.

A low rate of objective research for measurement persists despite clear management demand for accountability, numerous threats to PR budgets, and a continuing search by PR for status and recognition, PR practitioners commonly give three reasons. Lack of budget is the main reason given, followed by lack of time and some practitioners cite that it was not wanted by management (Macnamara, 2005). Gregory and Watson (2008) note that in organizations where PR is not regarded as a management function the practitioners would rightly fail to measure and evaluate their activities.

The main problems in the evaluation of PR activities are lack of time and money (Nikolic, Zoric, Terek, Glusac, & Cockalo, 2014). On the other hand, Macnamara (2005) notes that cost, lack of time, and lack of management demand are not valid reasons for not doing measurement. He further notes that there are a range of measurement methodologies that are low-cost or even no-cost and also a number that are quick and easy. A study by Gregory and Watson (2008) found out that lack of knowledge was a challenge to measurement and evaluation in PR. They further concluded that while the academic development of theory is important for the evolution of new practices, they argued that a greater effort to engage with practitioner initiatives will help bridge a large gap and pave a path for theory that is relevant to practice. It is for academics to change course and for the industry and practitioners to help support the research.

Statement of the Problem

According to a study that was commissioned by Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK), the Kenyan PR industry has continued to be defined based on the amount of media coverage provided to clients (Tikolo, 2011). However, PRSK's study only elaborates on the status of the practice of PR in Kenya and does not address the critical role played by measurement and evaluation as a bedrock for formulation of objectives and to reinforce or revamp communication to stakeholders, for the success of PR activities. PRSK's study established that measurement and evaluation of PR impact in Kenya is wanting. Muchilwa et al. (2014) exposes the need for an understanding of the role of measurement and evaluation in Kenya.

This study fills this gap, as it articulates the specific roles played by measurement and evaluation in achieving and auditing success of PR departments in KWS, KRA and NCA.

The study was informed by the fact that public relations measurement and evaluation is anecdotal and informal in Kenya. PR departments nowadays have a huge amount of accessible data with the introduction of new media and most are measuring their impact in output and not in actual outcomes of the organization. There is insufficient measurement and evaluation of PR activities. There was therefore an interest to explore the role of measurement and evaluation in achieving goals and objectives of public relations activities.

Research Objective

The motive of this study was to establish was to establish the contributions and challenges associated with measurement and evaluation of public relations in selected Kenyan parastatals.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The target population for the study comprised of 187 parastatals with 119,689 employees. Purposive sampling was used. The sample size was forty-seven (47) employees of public relations departments and six (6) senior PR officers who are working in the three selected parastatals, totaling to fifty-three (53). The study used both questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data was interpreted using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data in this study was analyzed, recurrent themes identified, and patterns of relationship that exist among data-groups searched manually and were used to augment the quantitative data. Percentages and tabulations of variables were used to present data analysis in tables, bar graphs and pie charts. The data was analyzed by a data analysis software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 software.

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Demographic data

3.1.1 Distribution by gender

Among the respondents who participated in this study, 55.6% were female while 44.4% were male, indicating a close distribution of the sample in terms of gender. Figure 1 is a presentation of the data obtained on the distribution of respondents' gender.

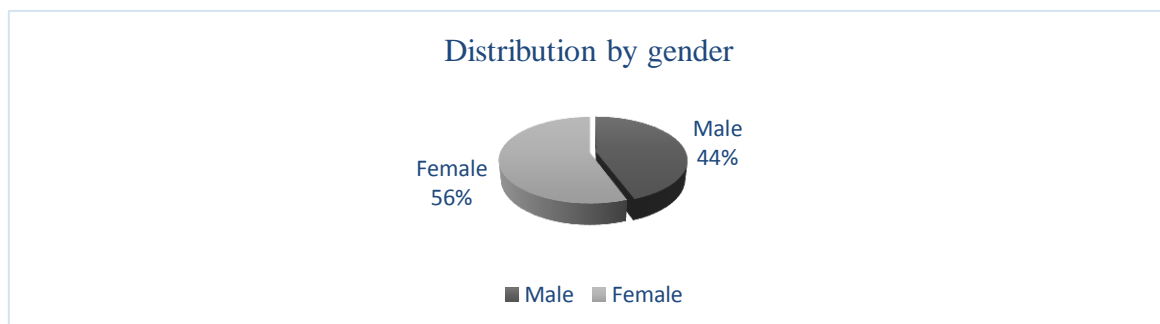


Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by gender

3.1.2 Distribution of respondents by age

The majority of the respondents, 66.7%, were between the age brackets of 26-33 years and 34-41 years as shown in table 4.2 below, as an indication that majority of the PR professionals are between the ages of 26 and 41.

Table 1: Age of the respondents

Age bracket	Frequency	Percent
18-25 years	9	20.0
26-33 years	14	31.1
34-41 years	16	35.6
42-49 years	6	13.3
Total	45	100.0

3.1.3 Distribution of respondents by highest level of education

Most respondents in this study, 71.1%, were holders of an undergraduate degree, while 11.1% were certificate or diploma holders. Respondents with master's degree holders were 17.7% as shown in figure 4.3. The study did not find any respondent with a PhD. These findings show that selected parastatals have most PR practitioners who have qualified with an undergraduate degree.

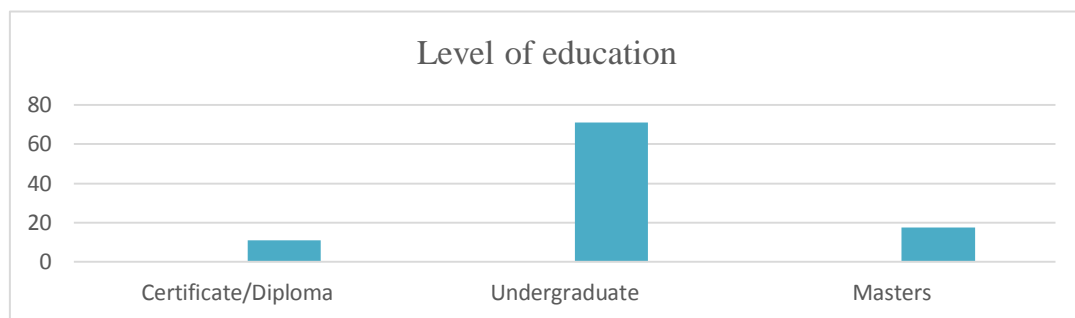


Figure 1: Level of education of respondents

3.1.4 Duties of the respondents

The study sought to establish the duties of the respondents in their departments. Majority of the respondents, 55%, participated in organizing events or were involved in internal communications. A further 40% of the respondents indicated that they also did media relations in the organization while 6.7% indicated they were involved in corporate social responsibility. Only 4.4% of the respondents were involved in managing websites and social media as shown in Table 4.3. This finding agrees with Christensen & Cornelissen (2011) who argue that the task of PR is to flesh out the profile of the organization and to mobilize support both internally and externally which are focused on the integration, coordination and orchestration of an organization's communications. However, Grunig (2006) differs with this finding by alluding that PR should not be practiced as a messaging, publicity, and media relations function but rather a strategic management function.

Table 2: Duties of the respondents

Category	Responses	Percent of cases
Internal communication	25	55.0%
Organizing events	25	55.0%
Media relations	18	40.0%
Corporate social responsibility	3	6.7%
Managing websites and social media	2	4.4%

3.1.5 Respondents distribution by specialization

The study sought to establish the distribution of respondents by their specialization in education and how this impacted on the use of measurement and evaluation.

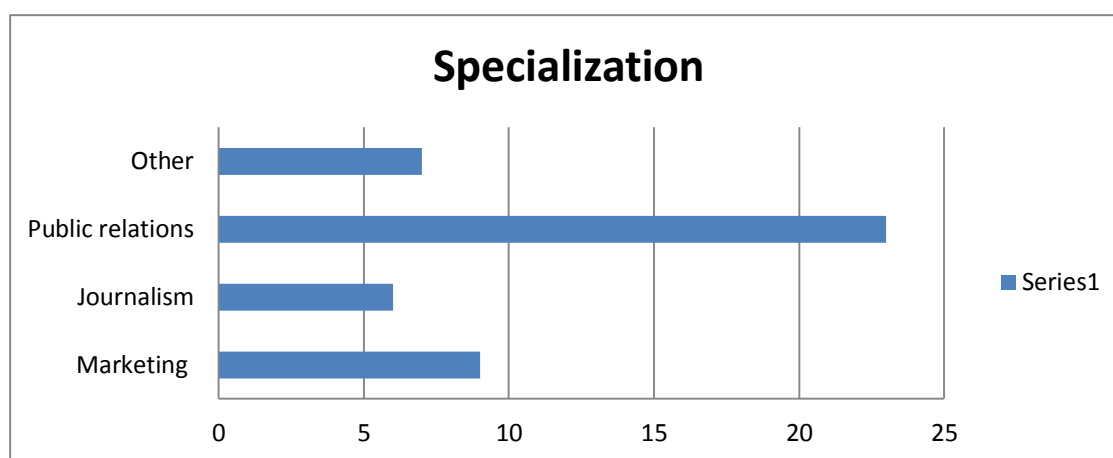


Figure 4: Respondents' specialization

The majority of the respondents, 51.1%, have specialized in public relations in their training. Journalism and marketing represented 33.3% in the study as shown in figure 4. This shows that slightly more than half of the respondents have detailed training and expertise in PR. This updates the findings of Gregory and Watson (2008) in a study that indicated that lack of knowledge was the main reason practitioners did not make worthwhile use of PR measurement and evaluation.

It was necessary to show further, by use of correlation, how many of the respondents from each of the academic specializations used measurement and evaluation to demonstrate performance. Majority, 88.9%, of the respondents with a career specialization in marketing, 55.6% in public relations, 16.7% in journalism used measurement and evaluation to demonstrate performance as shown in figure 4.5. This finding shows that practitioners with a concentration in marketing appreciated the most the function of measurement and evaluation to show performance. This endorses Thorson, et al. (2015) who stated that research and measurement plays a more central role in fields such as advertising and marketing, and throughout business fields there has been a highly visible turn toward data-driven decision making.

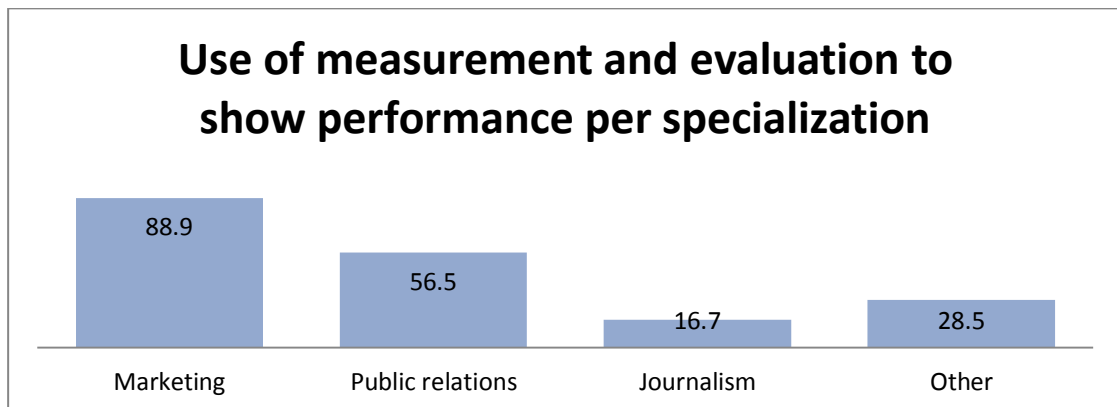


Figure 2: Measurement and evaluation to show performance per specialization

3.1.6 Distribution of respondents by years of service in the organization

Majority of the respondents, 59.9%, have served in the organization for over 6 years, 15.6% had served less than 2 years and 24.4% between 3 and 5 years as indicated in figure 6. This indicates that majority of the respondents had more than 6 years of experience in the organization and as such were well placed to give reliable information on the practice of measurement and evaluation in their parastatals.

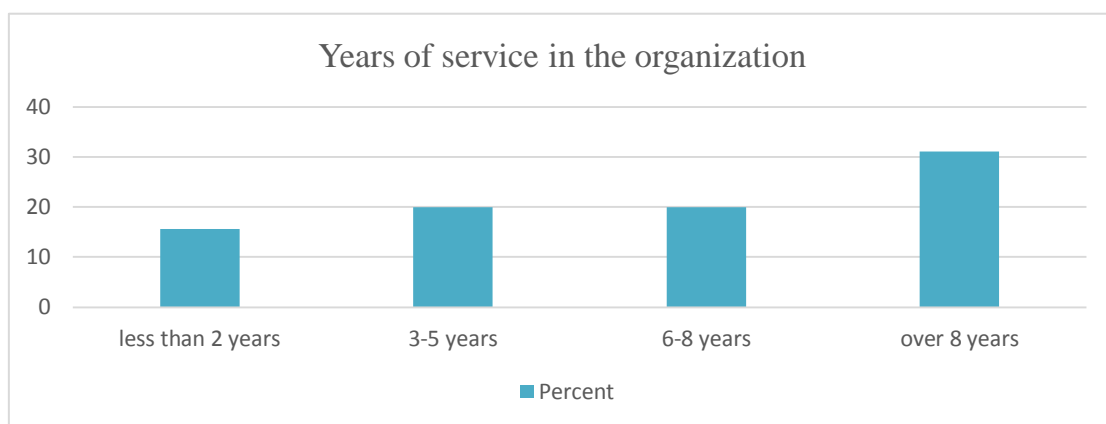


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by years of service in the organization

3.1.7 Respondents distribution by general PR work experience

This study was also interested in establishing the general experience in PR work by respondents since this was considered an influencing factor when it came to providing insightful data on trends of measurement and evaluation among PR practitioners in selected parastatals. The study findings show that 80% of the respondents had general work experience in the PR sector ranging from 3 years and above; while 20% had experience of less than 2 years as shown in figure 7. This implied that the respondents' answers to the questions asked could include experiences gained in other PR departments of other organizations, a positive factor when it came to generalization of the findings.

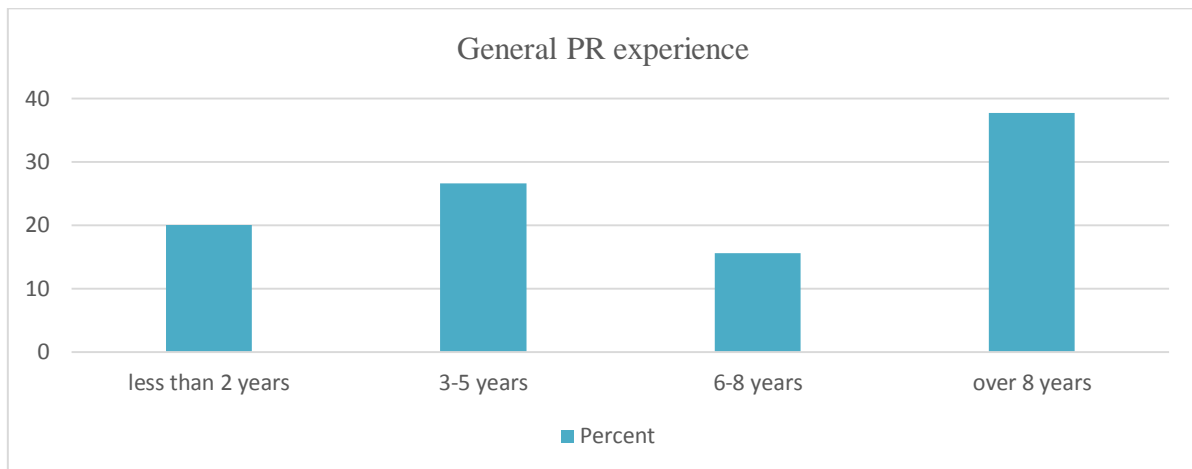


Figure 7: Respondents distribution by general PR work experience

3.2 Measurement and evaluation contributions

3.2.1 Measurement and evaluation to demonstrate performance

As stated in the literature review, measurement and evaluation plays a vital role in achieving the success of PR programs. It was therefore sought to establish whether respondents used measurement and evaluation to demonstrate performance of their departments. 46.7% of the respondents did not use measurement and evaluation to demonstrate performance of their departments as shown in figure 8. This finding reinforces Macnamara's (2015) study that stated that despite experimentation with measurement and evaluation for more than a century and intensive focus since the 1970s most practitioners continue not to measure and evaluate activities.

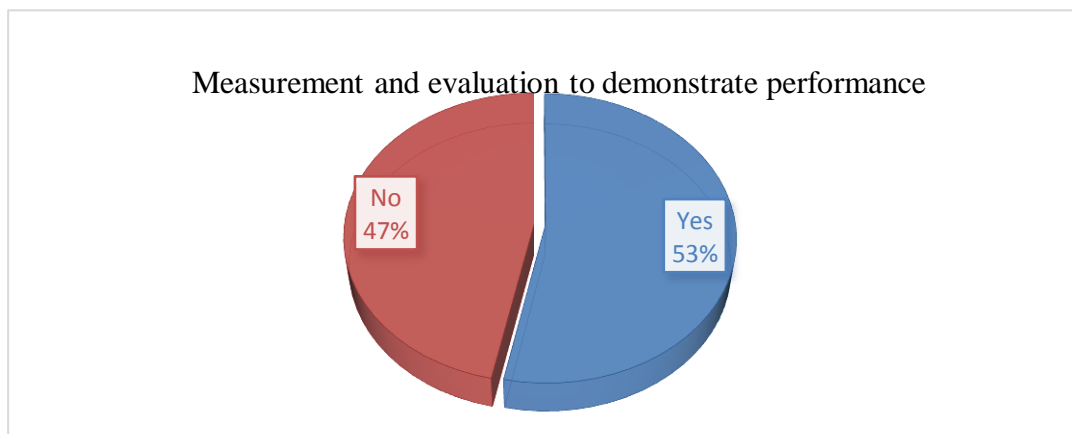


Figure 8: Measurement and evaluation to demonstrate performance

3.2.2 Measurement and evaluation in the strategic plan

From the findings of the study, a majority (80%) of the respondents were satisfied with the use of measurement and evaluation in their organizations with only 20% indicating they were not as shown in Figure 9. When probed further the ones who agreed mentioned that their strategic plan had a section of measurement and evaluation but did not articulate the specific indicators to use. This finding reinforces what Michelson & Stacks (2011) found in America that most of the measurement and evaluation techniques were not standardized.

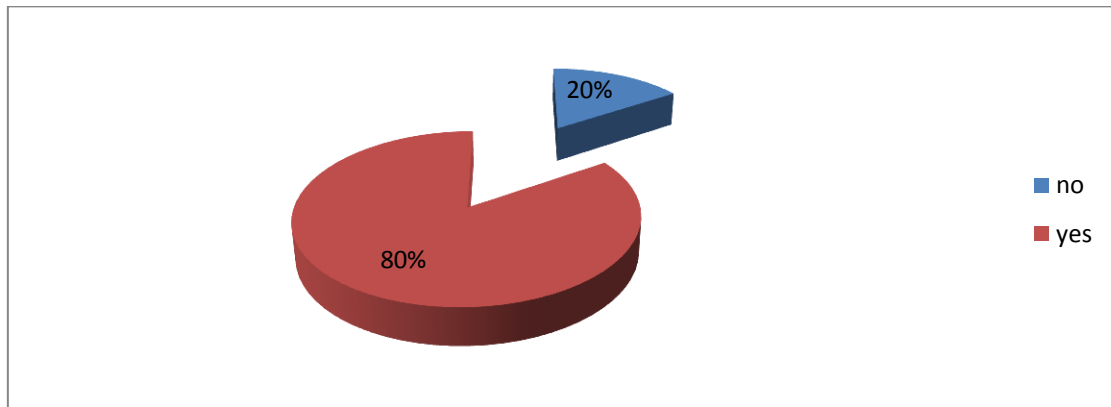


Figure 9: Satisfaction with use of measurement and evaluation

Majority of the respondents (93.3%) did not attend meetings where they are required to show performance of the PR department. These are professionals in the PR department and do not have a management role.

3.3 Challenges in undertaking measurement and evaluation

3.3.1 Satisfaction with the use of measurement and evaluation

Most of the respondents 64% were not satisfied with the use of measurement and evaluation in their parastatals as shown in figure 10.

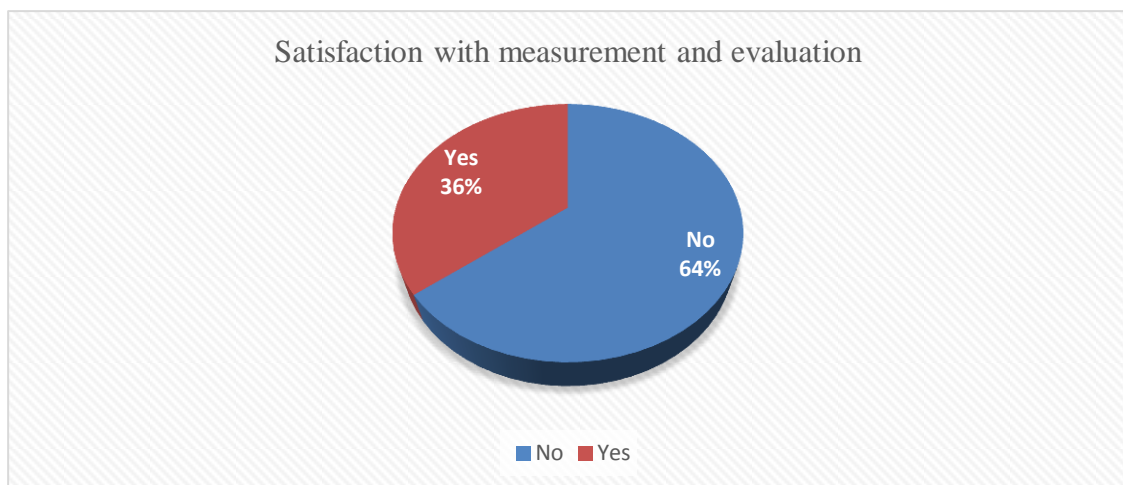


Figure 10: Satisfaction with use of measurement and evaluation

This finding was almost identical by another survey by Macnamara (2005) of communication directors in the United Kingdom in 2000 who found that only 28 per cent were satisfied with the level of evaluation of their public relations, compared with two-third or more who said they were not satisfied with measurement and evaluation.

3.3.2 Challenges of measurement and evaluation

Respondents who indicated that they were not satisfied with measurement and evaluation in their parastatal were probed to indicate why. Majority, 79.9%, indicated that PR measurements are too expensive to carry out, and too time intensive (79.9%). Respondents

further indicated that there is lack of standards (55.6%) as shown in table 4.6. This finding was reflected almost similarly with Macnamara's (2005) and Nikolic et al (2014) studies that found out that lack of budget, lack of time and not wanted by management are the leading reasons that practitioners cite.

Table 3: Challenges of measurement and evaluation

Category	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
Expensive	68.8%	11.1%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Time consuming	68.8%	11.1%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%
Management does not want	17.8%	0.0%	64.4%	0.0%	17.7%
Lack of standards	17.8%	37.8%	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%
Resistance from practitioners	13.3%	0.0%	57.8%	11.1%	17.8%
Fear of being measured and evaluated	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	88.9%
Lack of knowledge by practitioners	17.8%	0.0%	51.1%	0.0%	31.1%

All the respondents, 100%, disagreed that fear of being measured and evaluated was a challenge in measurement and evaluation while a further 51.1% were undecided whether lack of knowledge by practitioners was a challenge.

Most informants were not satisfied with the levels of measurement and evaluation in their organizations. They agreed to do research before embarking on a campaign and to benchmark with other organizations. When asked whether they do evaluation after a campaign most of them stated lack of time and human resources in their departments to be able to carry out this function. Worth noting is the second informant who noted that their stakeholders are many and therefore to demonstrate performance is not easy. When asked about standards most of them agreed not to have standards of measurement and evaluation with the fourth informant saying that "with traditional media and the introduction of new media it is difficult to know what to measure and what not to measure".

In relation to challenges, most of the informants agreed that insufficient funds have been the main hindrance to the practice. The second reason mostly mentioned by the informants is lack of standards, which state clearly what is to be measured and evaluated and at what stage. Though measurement and evaluation is mostly mentioned in their strategic plan, specifics on how to measure and evaluate are lacking. They agreed that measurement and evaluation has greatly improved in their parastatals in the recent past, though it has not marched international standards.

4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Despite the almost universal positioning in key texts of public relations as a management function contributing to organizational goals (like Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011, Argenti, 2006, Watson, 2012), a number of the respondents, 46.7% do not use measurement and evaluation to demonstrate performance. This leaves the departments to concentrate on outputs rather than outcomes, without evaluating the specific contributions of the department

to the organization. Distributing press releases, newsletters, and updating the website is one part of producing outputs and practitioners should go beyond this and validate the value to the organizations KPIs and KRAs. If the demonstration of achievements against organizational goals is not the focus of public relations measurement and evaluation, the significant focus on outputs becomes easier to explain as this level of evaluation focuses on the tangible artefacts of public relations campaigns and programs, rather than on the impact such activities have on stakeholders and publics.

The pyramid model of research and the PII model separated outputs from outcomes and offered a large number of methodologies at each level and communication is considered in overall organization effectiveness (Macnamara, 2005). An organization's investment on communication should help set smarter objectives, develop better strategies and employ more engaging tactics (Grunig, 2006). PR should learn to measure what matters and what contributes to the success of the organization. When goals are clear, results are clear. Most respondents are not satisfied with the use of measurement and evaluation in their organizations. Beyond the common excuse of lack of budget stated by most respondents (78.9%), at least three answers to this question posed earlier emerge from this analysis. There is lack of time, lack of standards and lack of knowledge by practitioners. Macnamara (2005) in his study found lack of management demand to be a major reason, which was a major contradiction in this study as that was mentioned by few respondents (18.4%).

The industry is stalled in terms of adopting credible and reliable measurement and evaluation because: measurements and evaluations are time consuming; and there has been a lack of engagement by practitioners with PR academic researchers including the latest attempts to develop standards, which has resulted in insular debates and simplistic solutions. These factors have been exacerbated by a lack of budget and lack of time. The pyramid model of research identifies measurement and evaluation methodologies at the communication practitioner's disposal from basic to advanced. Some evaluation is possible in every activity that a PR department undertakes. With this approach, there is no excuse for having no measurement and evaluation (Macnamara, 2005). Both the PII model and the pyramid model of research separates inputs, outputs and outcomes and clearly stipulates what should be measured and evaluated and at what stage and has broken measurement and evaluation into manageable levels. From the findings, practitioners are yet to apply the approaches and tools used at each stage.

Conclusion

The study concludes that PR practitioners are aware of the importance of evaluation research, but are not able to use the function to convince the upper management in the organization. Thus, they find it hard to get sufficient budget and support to carry out the function, which hampers their ability to examine the effectiveness of their PR programs and activities to see if their objectives and goals have been achieved and consequently are unable to assure management of the departments' effectiveness.

The study revealed insufficient time, money and lack of standards as the main reasons hindering measurement and evaluation. There are approaches and tools that are at no cost or low cost and departments with low budgets should consider this. Therefore, cost should not be the main reason of neglecting measurement and evaluation but rather looking at the bigger picture of demonstrating value. In a similar context Australian PR practitioners are frustrated by the lack of proper evaluation tools. Nevertheless, they realize that evaluation is important

as it enables them to justify their budgetary requirements (Macnamara, 2005). PR needs to set and meet measurement and evaluation standards if it is to become and be recognized as a profession and gain credibility and respect in Kenya. PR departments need to have parameters that will enable achieve goals relative to the organization's objectives. Standards need to be focused on the programs being implemented and to the type of organization. Internationally standards have been developed to measure not only traditional media impact, but also for digital and social media as well as a variety of goals inherent to the communication lifecycle.

Recommendations

The study has contributed to the area of PR is that measurement and evaluation plays an important role in achieving goals of the department. Professionals should develop specific measurement and evaluation tools and approaches for each aspect of their campaign; they should measure the right things, at the right time with the right tools. For example trying to show effectiveness of a campaign by number of messages sent and received is not adequate but measuring and evaluating outcomes as related to organizational goals is important.

PR practitioners should use research in planning, implementation and evaluation. They should use verifiable data to back up their funding requirements and flavor their arguments. This will in turn offer major benefits to PR and corporate communication practitioners in their pursuit of professionalism and acceptance as part of senior management, as well as at a practical level in gaining adequate budgets and support.

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