

The Practice and Challenges of Public Relations in Ethiopia: The Case of Government Universities

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ABSTRACT

The fields of public relations has dramatically grown to build the relationships between an organization and its key publics through effective communication. The study is conducted to assess the practice and challenge of Public Relations in government universities public relation offices in Ethiopia. The research used mixed approach which enable the researchers to use both qualitative and quantitate data and analysis. The main subject of the study were internal publics and external stakeholders. The researcher used questionnaire as a data gathering tool from the above subjects. The findings of the study depicted that professional Public Relations practice in the given 13 government universities are in difficult condition as the office is not professionally and structurally organized despite its key role is well recognized. The PR practitioners have not well understood the concept of Public relations especially its management function to create mutual understanding with the internal and external publics rather they are considered to stage the debate other than mediates. Lack of professional skilled human power, having minimal attitudes and lack of empowering the office, absence of adequate capacity building trainings, lack of infrastructure, inadequate assistance from the concerned leaders took the first line as challenges for the public relations practitioners.

Keywords: public Relations, Government Universities, Internal Publics, External Publics, Practitioners, Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

The ever changing demands of business environment influenced by the external forces of globalization and technology advancement become increasing very now and then. Public Relations characterized as an applied social and behavioural science that measures, assesses and deciphers the attitudes of the different pertinent publics. Moreover having a good relation is the most important factors to build a good relation with companies various publics Asemah (2011). Bruning, D. & Lambe, E. (2008) recommended the public realtions is management function which assesses attitudes of publics, recognizes the publics and methods of an individual association of activity to learn open comprehension and acknowledgment.

As to Banik(2006),Public relation (PR) is an effort to inter policies and programs of an organization with the objective to establish a bridge of understanding and good will between institution and its publics).Nevertheless, there is no single organization or containing around the world that is not affected by rapid changes

caused by global competition, customer's pressure and development in information technology. Therefore, the magnitude of public relation activities may differ due to size and nature, no matter what the philosophy the strategy and method is a like whether it is to the global understanding or to escalate relations with in the firms and its customers, agent's employees.

Among the communication strategies, Public relation has been identified as the effective way of delivering message to the targeted group, and the main objective of public relations is to convey information that will impact individuals Stokes & Rubei. (2010).The reason behind this assumption is considering PR as a tool to aware and save the public within the domain for mutual benefit on a mutual agenda. That is why; PR is defined as deliberate, planned, performance based, keep public interest, pursuit two-way communication and part of management function. With the advancement of technology, organizations have been implementing different communication strategies to reach the targeted public. This emanated from the ancient Romans coined

expression- "The voice of the people is the voice of the God." Therefore, listening the heartbeat of the concerned public has not been a matter of choice rather taking it as the only way to meet the interest of the public.

In accordance with the above point, public relations serves a wide assortment of organizations in the public eye, for example, organizations, exchange associations, government offices, intentional affiliations, establishments, healing centres, schools, universities and religious foundations. To accomplish their objectives, these institutions must create successful associations with a wide range of publics, for example, representatives, individuals, clients, shareholders, investors, and different organizations, and with society at large. The public relations specialist acts as an advocate to management and as a mediator, making an interpretation of private points into sensible, publicly acceptable policy and activity. In this manner, it is unmistakably clear that public relations assumes principal part in political, monetary, social and ecological measurements of the general public (Rensburg and Cant, 2009 Cutlip et al. 2000).

Particularly, government public relations plays great role in creating mutual understanding between the government and the public it serves. It works to ensure active cooperation of the public in government programs and foster citizen support for established policies and programs. It also informs the public about the public's business; improve the effectiveness of the organization operations through appropriate public information techniques; provide feedback to government administrators so that programs and policies can be modified, amended or continued.

Moreover, it exhorts the management on how best to convey a choice or program to the nationals; fill in as an ombudsman by speaking to general society and tuning in to agents; and teach overseers and civil servants about the part of the mass media and how to function with them. To make these down to earth, government public relation organization must have the knowledge and ability to fabricate the scaffold among government and open for shared advantages Banik, G.C. (2006).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

History of PR in Ethiopian Context

Research practices on public relations in the African continent is for the most parts parse and disintegrated, a huge extent of it accomplished

on specific aspects of practice in distinct nations. There are lamentably few investigations that endeavour to regard Africa as an entity and from communication viewpoint. Nonetheless, the report "The Public Relations Landscape in Africa" (2006), performed by the UK-based consultancy Gyroscope, is one that cases a proportion of achievement in this pressing undertaking.

According to Solomon (2000), a practice more or less resembles modern public relations is believed to have been started in 1960's in Ethiopia. In fact, the emergence of the practice of modern public relations in the country came as a result of the establishment of the Ministry of Pen in 1940's. The then media organizations such as Radio, News Agency and Television services, were organized and administered under the ministry of Pen. After serving for some time, the ministry was replaced by the then Ministry of Information and tourism in 1950's with similar task of administering the media organizations in addition to carrying out the responsibility of culture and tourism related issues. Later in 1960's when the Ministry of Information replaced it, the responsibility of leading the media organizations was also transferred to the new ministry. The head of government public relations, around the final years of Emperor Haile Selassie, explained the practice at that time as routine occupied by activities, for example, gathering, and convention and, to some degree, caring for publications. In an interview about the public relations practice at that earliest time, the former head of public relations said that strategies about how to promote the country also, building agreement were unbelievable.

The practice of public relations that started to take shape during the 1960's continued for years without any change in form and content. The major purpose of the public relations then was merely serving the interest of the ruling class. As the public relations at those times was so unprofessional, it was unable to respond to the situations arising in those times. One incident that can be mentioned to substantiate the failure was the case of the devastating famine that occurred in 1974 Solomon (1998). Nothing was known to the nation as well as the whole world about the fatal famine. It seems that the system was convinced the story would remain untold forever; so it opted to focus on working how to hide instead of trying to manage the crisis.

Though it is not possible to find out when modern public relations have begun in Ethiopia

there is a belief that it might have been in 1960s (Solomon, 1998,p.20). Prior to this period, the beginning of newspapers since 1900's that provided advertisement space for business organizations together with the introduction of printing press, telecommunication and the rail way by Emperor Minilik II (MoI, 2003).

Now days, public relation activities are mainly considered as hub of developmental activities; thus, in each government offices, there is public relation office. Among these offices, the state (government) universities in the country have opened offices for public relations practices which aimed to promote and report the day-to-day teaching learning, research, community services and technology transfer issues to the internal and external publics.

Ethiopia's Political System

A country's political system influences its social structure. There is little doubt that public relations practice thrives on public opinion, which would lead one to conclude that only pluralistic societies offer an environment that is leading for practicing cardinal public relations. As the nation is a multi-ethnic and contains multi lingual societies whose political systems value public opinion, the nature of public relations is not sophisticated and tends to be one-way propagandistic in nature. Besides the political environment, which makes the country to be headed by one party system for three decades, the nature of public relations discipline tends to in propaganda way various government and private organizations.

Simon and Gartzke (1996) characterised between political situations on a bipolar continuum going from democratic based to tyrant one. Be that as it may, this classification is excessively oversimplified, making it impossible to give insights about the numerous subtleties and the different political and economic difficulties and encounters that numerous nations proof. The world has witnessed significant political changes in recent years. Thus, we should have a more accurate way to classify the political systems of nations. In fact, the 20th century has been a period of democratization of the world. According to the Freedom House, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was not a single country that could be labelled democracy! Even countries such as the United States and Britain were not true democracies because they did not have universal suffrage at the beginning of the 20th century.

Level of Economic Development

Closely linked to a country's political system, a country's economic development provides public relations professionals opportunities as well as challenges. There is little doubt that a more pluralistic political philosophy favours greater economic freedom. By extension, developed (market) economies tend to favour strategic public relations more than developing (managed) ones. However, public relations has yet to be widely considered a core organizational function in organizations of even developed economies. Instead, it languishes as a superfluous appendage in organizations around the world, including developed nations. As a result, the predominant mind-set is that scarce resources need to be spent on more pressing needs that are central to an organization's activities and bring tangible returns.

Various Studies show that that the more developed an economy is, the greater the number of organizational players and the higher the level of competition among organizations. These multiple suppliers of goods and services obviously need to compete for public attention, approval, and support—a prime reason to employ public relations professionals as in-house staff or as consultants.

As Ethiopia as a developing state, public relations' discipline has also a paramount importance so as to prophet and create as strong political, economic, social, cadmic ties with the internal or external organizations.

Statement of the Problem

Public relations practice is the art and science of dissecting patterns and issues of the organization, anticipating their result, guiding all the general populations of the association and actualizing arranged program of activity which will serve both the association and its publics Newsome (2004)Black (2003) stated that the use of public relation is to persuade internal publics that the organization is "right" for them and make people feel good about working in , or with or for an organization and persuade them to do their best.

As Scot Cutlip (2006) revealed an internal relation is communication inside an organization is arguably even more important the external communication because the association needs to work viably in accomplishing its objectives keeping in mind the end goal to serve, in shore " opportune, finish and exact association correspondence and up close and personal

administrative correspondence can anchor worker activity for organization. Though the above researchers view, Ethiopian government universities closely engage in with the internal as well as the external publics in teaching learning, research and community services activities, and the public relations' role in associating these internal and external stakeholders has a paramount importance. (PRMIFC, 2008).

Almost all Ethiopian government universities aspire to be among the top ten pre-eminent African graduates and research Universities in 2023 (twenty-twenties). Along these lines, essentially their visions is categorized into five sections of excellence, i.e.

1. Excellence in teaching- learning process: this underscores on creating capable graduates who meet the market demand and are equipped with entrepreneurial attitudes for better life opportunities. The ultimate result of these changes is to bring about customer/stakeholder satisfaction and improve the image of the Universities;
2. Excellence in research and technology transfer: This key topic involves fulfilling clients and partners through directing essential and in addition applied research and embracing and delivering knowledge that tends to recognized and organized societal problems;
3. Excellence in community Service, commitment and vital organization: In this topic participatory decisions and efficient community service delivery are considered as means of fostering sustainable growth and development in a community through several initiatives.
4. Excellence in establishing good governance and distinct management: This strategic theme underscores excelling in good governance, leadership and management at all levels in the universities in order to satisfy customers/stakeholders needs.
5. To create a technology transfer frame work which enables the building of national quality infrastructure development. These improvements also ensure the institutional transformation that the University aspires to attain.

However when the researcher evaluate the realities in five state universities with their visions, and the above scholars definitions of public relations, as well as the key pillars in

which universities are established and to carry out the given duties and responsibilities, the public relations offices of selected state universities seem unable to sell the organizational goal of the universities and to create sense of ownership among its internal and external publics.

To illustrate the matter, being as a public relations director for one of the government universities for couple of years and sharing experiences from other government universities public relation practitioners, the researcher also has witnessed that there are serious problems in which universities public relation offices have not yet exercising the real role of public relations practices in the teaching learning, research and community services programs in an in-depth and consistent and framed manner in the university.

Although the state universities in the country aspire to be among the top ten pre-eminent African graduate and research universities in (in the twenty-twenties), as the researcher made and collected some data from the internal and external publics, however the universities have likely mentioned many problems and critics from the internal and external publics.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous traditional communication theories have tried to annotate how effective a message from a source will be transmitted to the medium in order to creat a positive response. Given the current communication revolution created by information communication technology, a lot has been changed on ways and speed of receiving and transmitting messages (Jethwaney, 2000, Seitel, 2011, Joshi, 1999, and Lomme & Russel, 2010).

As a result of this phenomenon, communications scholars have turned to develop communication theories that give emphasis on audiences. Among such audience centric theories one is constructivism (Butterick, 2011, p. 16). "Constructivism communication theory proposed that knowledge is constructed not transmitted" (Seitel, 2011, p.81). According to this theory, for effective communication it is important to have some information about the receiver such as beliefs, predictions and background.

When we convey essentially through discussion we build our very own social realities of what is happening and what sort of activity is suitable. We, have our own "Stories" of life experience

which we share with others in conversation. When we connect, say the creators of this hypothesis, we endeavour to "Facilitate" our own beliefs, ethics, and thoughts of "good" and "bad" with those of others then a shared result may happen (Seitel, 2011).

The whole point of this theory emphasizes the fact that communication is not a simple task of transmitting message. Instead it is a complex interconnected series of interaction where the participants affect each other (Seite, 2011).

In the contemporary theories of public relations of communications, it might be difficult to find a widely discussed theory than that of the four models of Grunig and Hunt (Seitel, 2011, Jetwaney & Sacar, 2006, Stokes & Rubin, 2010). Of course notwithstanding contemporary theorists are believed to have opened new ways of thinking about public relations; still a lot remains to be done. Almost all public relations text book writers have borrowed theories from the adjacent disciplines of communication, such as psychology, sociology and organizational studies; even Grunig's model itself is not purely an independent one (Mackey, 2003).

As to Mackey (2003), at the end of the twentieth century, J. Grunig's four model concept of public relations was the contemporary modern theoretical methodology that could be said to have commenced from within public relations scholarship. Indeed, even J Grunig point of view is established in political hypothesis yet the 21st century's blossoming basic and expert enthusiasm for ethical public relations has delivered a whirlwind of control particular hypothetical activities (Mackey, 2003).

Press a-Gentry (Publicity)

The focus this model of communication is on sending message from the source to the receiver. Relatively it is an old form of communication model where one way traffic is assumed to be productive. As Seitel (2011) put it, "This model is basically one way communication where messages will be sent from a source to a beneficiary with the express aim of winning great media consideration." This model was marked by manipulation, exaggeration and deception (Sriaramesh,K and Vercic,D ,2009).

Public Information Model

The early 1900's, was a time when huge business organizations were under serious attack from the media on issues of corruption and other forms of injustice. This situation has forced private organizations to establish public

relations offices and hire practitioners. This period was marked with a communication model known as public information (Grunig, 1992).

This is another early type of one way communication planned not really to influence yet rather to inform. Both this and the press a gentry's model have been connected to the common notion of public relations as publicity (Seitel, 2011).

Indeed, this stage was identified as public relations practice having a significant influence on public opinion that may have its own contribution to prevent policy changes of social significance. During this time the principle of Lee which promotes telling the truth is the best way to effective public relations was a widely accepted way of doing public relations business.

Two - Way Asymmetry

This model seems to be a bit complicated compared to the two models discussed previously. The idea of two ways communication was introduced as a result of looking for a feedback for information disseminated that began to be considered as part of the communication process. However, the purpose of seeking feedback wasn't to change position that has been seized by an organization, instead the feedback was to be used to introduce another form of persuasion so that the audience would accept the interest of the organization (Seitel, 2011). This third model of public relation is known as the period of propaganda and persuasion. It is also a period when some social science research such as opinion polling, random sampling and organized feedbacks and the likes were introduced to the public relations practice.

Two - Way Symmetry

This model advocates present it as the preferable model of public relations. As indicated by Seitel (2011) the symmetric model promotes for free and equal information transfer between an organization and its publics based on common understanding. This model of public relations will provide practitioners a balanced relationship with the public whom they serve as a mediator to their organization. The major advocate and founder of this model James E. Grunig mentioned that it would be difficult to exactly identify when this model came into being. Nonetheless, he underscored that those men who are considered to be the founders of modern public relations Lee and Bernarys used

to council their clients in a way both the organization and the public mutually benefit from each other's interaction (Grunig, 1992).

Following the Second World War professionalism in public relations has begun to take shape as public relations offices flourished almost everywhere. The emergence of professionalism, the demand for further refinement and expansion of professionalism together with consolidation of research work in quality and quantity plus public relations education, created favorable environment for the popularization of the symmetric model of public relations (Grunig, 1992, Seitel, 2011). "The fourth model of public relations was better conceptualized by Scott Mcutlip and Allen center in their first edition of "effective public Relations", 1952 used the term "PR" to describe the principles and practice of communications employed to build good relationships with the public." (Solomon, 1998). In their serious conceptual analysis of symmetric public relations model, the two scholars have noted what characterizes this model.

As J. Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations and specifically their advocacy for the symmetric model over the others was a very recent phenomenon, obviously there will continue a lot of arguments and counter arguments on the symmetric model. In due process public relations might have chances of getting other new theories. Be that as it may, other theoretical frameworks such as dialogic theory of public relations, rhetorical theory, relationship management and the like with their much resemblance to the symmetric model and to the extent of considering them as subset of the two way symmetric models they have been left untreated independently, under this topic.

This research is conducted based on the two way symmetric public relations model, where public relations departments give equal emphasis to the interest of the public as that of the institutions. Especially in a country where the government is claiming to be not only developmental but also democratic, the best model for such a system is the two way symmetric. The two - way asymmetry which best serves the interest of the institution employing persuasion and propaganda as the main strategy of public relations. Moreover, the two- way symmetry model of public relations is the most progressive and ideally the one that might serve the interest of an institution as well as a country.

Objective of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of this research is to study Ethiopian state universities public relations practice and the challenges which encountered there in the view of the internal and external publics.

The study also has the following specific objectives:

- (i) To examine Stakeholders' Perception towards Public Relations.
- (ii) To assess the Public Relations offices of the selected universities to reach the public in image building.
- (iii) To identify the challenges which inhibit the practice of public relations in universities

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

The basic research questions in line with the objectives of the research should be studied with an appropriate design that can avoid ambiguity on the research findings. Thus, the researcher employed mixed research approach so that it could extract the findings in line with the objectives of the research.

Data Source and Sampling Technique

The researcher used primary data sources, and subjects of the study were public relations practitioners, internal publics of 'Second Generation' state universities and external publics. Purposive sampling was employed for the public relations practitioners and sector offices whereas simple random sampling was employed for the internal publics and external publics of the universities respectively. Accordingly, from thirty-five First, Second and Third Generation government universities in the country, thirteen universities were selected purposively as the researcher noticed this peculiar problems of public relation practices are manifested on and from each PR offices three PR practitioners were taken, and 10 internal publics (teachers, students and administrative (supporting staffs) and 6 external publics (stakeholders) from each universities were selected randomly using lottery method.

Data Collection and Analysis

A questionnaire data gathering techniques was employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from the PR practitioners in universities, internal publics, i.e. teachers, administrative (supporting) staffs of the universities and external stakeholders of the universities. As a result, among the distributed questionnaires 37 out of 39 from the PR

practitioners, and all questionnaires 130 & 78 from both the internal publics in the selected universities and external stakeholders were chosen accordingly. Following the compilation of the data collection, PR practitioners, internal publics in the universities and the outside stakeholders, responses were coded and entered in SPSS version 20 software for statistical analysis, and quantitative data analyses were carried out using simple and relevant statistical methods such as average, percentage and frequency distributions, and the qualitative data were analysed through organizing the information in line with the quantitative. The analysis of the data was accompanied by thematic coding based on the objectives and questions of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Perception of Stakeholders’ towards Public Relations

Table1. *Response of PR Practitioners’ perception on the significance of PR offices in the universities*

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	34	91.98
2	No	3	8.1
Total		37	99.9

As it is depicted in the above table, 34(91.98 %) of the practitioners thought that their PR offices has a key role in the activities of the universities because the PR offices is the one in a position to build a positive image towards the universities teaching learning process, research and community services and technology transfer through expanding its magnificent activities being as a bridge between the universities and the people (stakeholders).Therefore, it can be said that the practitioners are confident enough about the inevitability of PR offices in the overall footprints of the universities. Basically, Public Relations is essentially about image and it assumes a part in conveying organizations image to the different publics to which we relate.

Table2. *Response of internal publics (teachers, students, administrative staffs) on rating the significance of PR office to reach the public in image building*

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Very High	20	15.4
2	High	51	39.2
3	Medium	46	35.4
4	Low	13	10
Total		130	100

Table 2 reveals that from the 130 internal publics (teachers and administrative staffs, and

students of the thirteen Third Generation state universities respondents, 20(15.4%) said Very high, 51(39.2%) responds High”, and 46(35.4%) and 13(10%) responds medium, and Low respectively to the item which let them to reflect about their stance towards the Public Relations office. At this point, the conclusion could safely be reached that most of the internal publics (teachers, administrative staffs and students) recognized with a significant number in the range of Very High and High the office’s role to their offices daily activities. In addition, when they were questioned their reason for the above mentioned response, most of the respondents stated that they look after the public Relations office for publicity purpose merely. Despite some political activities are entertained in the universities, in most cases the main pillars of education and mission of the universities like teaching learning process, research and community services, technology transfer activities are being prevailed. In fact, knowingly or unknowingly the office is considered as a mouthpiece of the university and a media outlet which neglects the office’s unreserved and all rounded commitment as expert Prescriber, Problem-Solving facilitators, and correspondence facilitator separated from correspondence expert part, yet its primary part ought to be selling the image of the university to external publics and becoming the real guardian of the institute. In line with the finding, Vivan (2003) states that misconceptions about public relations has limited its area and been considered as a one way street for institutions and individuals to communicate to the public; however, public relations own a vast area which improve the functioning of democracy and good governance by encouraging the exchange of information and thoughts on public matters.

Table3. *Response of the PR practitioners on understanding concept of PR*

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	28	75.7
2	No	9	24.3
Total		37	100

As can be seen from table 3, 28(75.7%) of the practitioners replied ‘Yes’ and 9(24.3%) ‘No’, and this implies most of the practitioners think that they are well familiar with the concept of Public Relations. As the researcher requires their qualifications except the experts and audio-visual experts, the directors’ profession is beyond media and mass communication disciplines, yet they are doing their jobs in unframed manner. Besides, as he inquired them

to tell him about the concept of PR, they have enumerated the key aspects of PR, but they have never touched the management function of PR which clearly recognizes its part on strategic planning and decision making. Thus, it can be concluded that the PR office is not involving in such activities which are among the key roles and responsibilities of the profession. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) characterize public relations as a management functions that sets up and keeps up commonly valuable connections between an association and the publics on whom its prosperity or disappointment depends.

Table4. *Response of external publics on rating PR office's effort to create mutual understanding*

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Very High	15	19.2
2	High	19	24.3
3	Medium	18	23.07
4	Low	16	20.51
5	Very low	10	12.9
Total		78	99.98

Table 4 states that from the 78 external stakeholders 15(19.2%) said 'Very high', 19(24.3) disclosed 'High' 18(23.07%), 16(20.51%) and 10(12.9) responded 'Medium', 'Low' and 'Very low' respectively to the question which let them to rate the effort made by the PR office on creating mutual understanding with the external stakeholders of universities. This shows us that responses of external public with regard to PR offices in creating mutual understandings b/n the universities and them are quite medium, however it is not possible to say the external stakeholders' relations with the universities are very low. As community services is one of the pillars of the universities mission, a lot of interwoven work is done b/n the universities and the external publics hence the PR offices play pivotal roles in promoting and the links which their universities have created with the communities which the universities are cited . Searchers like Berhanu (in Nigusse, 2008) revealed the above findings as "The idea that public relations is a process of forging closer understanding between an organization and its publics runs through the teachings of the discipline ,one of the pillars of which is the art and science of Communication."

Table5. *Response of the practitioners (attitude) on PR office's professional structure*

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	17	45.94
2	No	20	54.05
Total		37	100

As the table indicates that out of the 37 practitioners, 17(45.94%) said 'Yes', and 20(54.05%) 'No' when they treated the question. The reason stated behind most respondents said encompasses both the materialistic and humanistic aspect which shows lack of professionals who are close to the profession, and having scarce resource to prepare PR tools (both print and broadcast). As many respondents stated the PR position as a director is given for teaching staffs. Directors who are assigned to this office are entirely working as teachers either in various disciplines. So, there is dual responsibilities of the work. And some PR practitioners and the experts in the given offices are not close friends of journalism or media studies, literature and other related fields to the practice. In addition, the office is considered as spokesperson's or reporters office and the directors in the offices are not given due emphasis by the university presidents and vice presidents. They need only to utter what they personally want and to report what teaching; earning process, community services, and research and technology transfer activities are being held. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the office is not structured and organized professionally as well as it is not fully empowered.

Table6. *Response of the internal publics' attitudes on PR office professional structure*

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	54	41.53
2	No	76	58.46
Total		130	100

From the table it could be said that, the out of the respondents 76(58.46%) said 'No' and 54(41.53%) responded 'Yes'. From the respondents result it is possible to deduce that the PR office is not erected professionally and skilfully and they justified that the people who assigned to the office are passive, not well trained and know how to work in PR offices. As their primary responsibility is teaching and engage in teaching profession they are not usually acquainted enough with the knowledge of PR and they hardly have the skills. Based on table 5 and 6, it can be said that both the PR practitioners and internal publics have similar stance on the professional practice of the public relations office. In this regard, Harrower (2007) underlines that qualified human power is highly needed because public relation activity is a combination of different disciplines which carefully understand what PR is.

Attempts of the Public Relations Office to Reach the Public

Table7. Response of the practitioners on the frequency of reaching the public

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Seldom	14	37.83
2	Sometimes	7	18.9
3	Always	3	8
4	Usually	13	35
Total		37	100

According to the above table, from the total respondents 14 (37.83%) reported ‘Seldom’, 7 (18.9) respondents disclosed ‘sometimes’, and 3(8%) said ‘Always’ and the rest 13(35%) responded ‘usually’ with regard to on the frequency of PR activities reaching to the internal and external public. Perhaps presence of misunderstanding the mission of the office can be considered as the key setbacks on the efforts made to reach to the public. The exceptionally unacceptable thing delineated in the table is that extensive number of the respondents said only seldom. In this regard, the conclusion never escapes from stating that there is a gap that has to be narrowed as to enhance mutual understanding between the internal and external public. PR practitioners role in mediating the internal publics (teachers, students, administrative staffs) and the external stake holders seem little and, and the PR has neglected the hub of public relations because public relations greatly helps to create a conducive environment which keeps mutual understanding for mutual benefit, and this emanated from the very reason of public relations for development (Vivan, 2003).

Table8. Response of employees on the frequency of the PR office help their office to reach its public

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Seldom	42	32.3
2	Sometimes	48	36.8
3	Always	18	13.84
4	Usually	9	6.92
5	Never	13	10
Total		130	100

As it has been shown in the above table that from the total respondents, 42(32.3%) replied ‘Seldom’, 48(36.8%) ‘Sometimes’, 18(13.84%) disclosed that ‘Always’, 9(6.92%) said ‘Usually’ and 13(10%) counted ‘Never’. Besides, among the respondents who said ‘Never’ accompanied the reason with their passive attitude which emanates from being careless and assuming the practitioners would not do any difference that can significantly take

one step ahead the relation they have with their clients. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the PR office is not helping the sector offices to reach their publics on regular basis which misses among the basic components of Public relations. According to the Public Relations Society of America, PR practitioners should have a planned activity with a community to maintain an environment that benefits both the organization and the community, which is not described in the finding of the research.

Table9. Response of the practitioners on having PR tools

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	34	91.9
2	No	3	8.1
Total		37	100

From the table above, it possible to deduce that the majority of the respondents 21(95.5%) underlined that their office has a PR tools. Therefore, it could certainly be said that most of the practitioners produce public relation tools such as printed and graphic communication, audio-visual equipment and broadcast media in the form of news release. However, due to budget constraint all communication tools are not used by the practitioners regularly. There are a number of communication tools that the public relations practitioners use to address the different publics that they have.

Challenges while Practicing PR

Table10. Response of the practitioners on having challenges

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	35	94.6
2	No	2	5.40
Total		37	100

As could be observed from the table, most of the practitioners 35(94.6) boldly said they have indeed challenges in practising PR in their institutions which indicates that the practitioners are close friends of the challenges. As to them, the main challenges stated by the practitioners are: Lack of skilled human, power (professionals);passive attitude towards the office (belittling) especially from the top leaders; absence of adequate capacity building trainings ;structure of the office (personnel);lack of logistics(electronic) and financial constraint; absence of professional leadership; infrastructure (to reach village publics) □ reluctance of sector offices; and inadequate assistance from the president and dean or Head of the departments in the universities.

Therefore, at this point it is possible to conclude that this bulky of challenges are threats to the practice of professional public relations and public dissatisfaction on the daily activities which may lead to lack of good governance. Agee (1985) says “public relation practice-at its best affords genuine opportunities for meaningful service to the society.

Table11. Response of the practitioners on presence of attempts to overcome challenges

S/N	Alternatives	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	14	37.83
2	No	23	62.16
Total		37	100

The above table shows, 14 (37.83%) of the respondents said ‘Yes’ whereas 23(62.16%) replied ‘No’. The respondents even stated the university management body has not seriously been trying to bring a perpetual remedy to empower and to help effectively and efficiently the offices. They neglect the office as it is not an essential entity for the university. Most of the respondents pressed that their commitment has shown them a way to try to do their best despite negligence and lack of support come from the university management body including the president offices. To sum up their responses, the professional practice of the public relations is somehow questionable. Most of the leaders (presidents, vice presidents, deans, department heads, office directors and officers) in the universities do not understand what PR is, and some of those who even familiar with the concept are not ready to give full time employment and/or due emphasis.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to investigate the practice and challenges of public Relations practices in government universities in Ethiopia. The finding of the investigation uncovered that the PR specialists, internal publics in the colleges and the external publics trusted that the Public relations office has a key role in the overall activities of the universities whereas the internal publics limited the role to publicity which is one part of the Public relations function. Similarly, most of the PR practitioners have not perceived the management function of Public Relations i.e. the PR office has not involved in creating mutual understanding with the external publics regarding the mission of the universities towards the external communities As Bruning, D. & Lambe, E. (2008) stated the role government PRs is to create favourable attitudes in the minds of the people to

implement government policies and strategies and addressing societal need of the public. However, the main role of the universities public relations offices are not well understood by the university community as well as the external publics. Meanwhile, the PR offices were not structured and organized professionally which emanates from belittling its role especially from the top leaders. Yet, the PR practitioners are trying their best so as to solve the problems which face both from the internal and external publics by themselves.

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Citation: *Tesfaye Bezabih Gezihagne "The Practice and Challenges of Public Relations in Ethiopia: The Case of Government Universities". Journal of Advertising and Public Relations, 1(2), 2018, pp. 27-37.*

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