ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IN CORPORATE

VISIBILITY OF HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN TANZANIA

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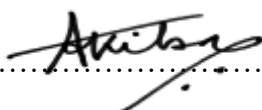A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN PUBLIC

RELATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND LIBRARY STUDIES

OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA

2025

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certify that they have read and hereby recommends for acceptance by the Open University of Tanzania a thesis entitled, **Role of Public Relations Strategies in Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania** in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) of the Open University of Tanzania.

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DECLARATION

I, **Kahenga Hillary Dachi,** declare that the work presented in this dissertation is original. It has never been presented to any other University or institution. Where other people's works have been used, references have been provided. In this regard, I declare that this work is originally mine. It is hereby presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Signature

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Date

DEDICATION

To my Source of Inspiration, my father, Dr. Hillary A. Dachi

To my Guardian Angel, my mother, Frida-Maria Mgweno Semiono (the late)

To my Source of Moral and Material support, my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply humbled and grateful to the Almighty God, the creator of Heaven and Earth, for His unwavering strength and grace that enabled me to undertake this research thesis, which significantly contributes to my profession and career. I also extend my warmest thanks to my supervisors, Dr Albert Tibaijuka and Prof. Deus Ngaruko. Their guidance, encouragement, commitment, devoted time reading my work, and tirelessly unlimited support has been instrumental in fueling my passion for this scholarly work.

I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to my dear husband, Dr. Furaha Julius; my father, Dr. Hillary Dachi; my daughters, Gracious and Genevieve; my sister, Magreth Kageya; and my entire family. Their continued moral and material support, understanding, and prayers have been the warm and loving pillars that have sustained me so far. I am also deeply indebted to the management of The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), Dr. Dunlop Ochieng, for their extended and invaluable support throughout my studies.

I also want to thank my Head of Department, Dr Henry L. Mambo, and all Department members of the Media and Library Studies of OUT for their invaluable support and encouragement while pursuing my studies. Their guidance, which ranged from academic advice to emotional support, has been crucial in shaping my research and academic journey.

Equally important, I am indebted to many colleagues and individuals who generously shared their insights and knowledge, and provided unwavering encouragement throughout my academic journey. Their support has been invaluable and I am deeply appreciative. I want to express my gratitude to the entire educational community for their continuous support. I must make a special mention of Dr Reuben Bihu from the School of Education, University of Dar-es-Salaam, my fellow Public Relations Scholars, Ms Rehema Muniko, Ms Zamda George, and Dr Paul Dotto Kuhenga from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Dar-es-Salaam.

ABSTRACT

Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania face challenges in enhancing corporate visibility despite employing various public relations strategies. A limited understanding of the effectiveness of public relations strategies raises concerns about their implementation and impact. This study assessed role of public relations strategies in corporate visibility of the higher learning institutions in Tanzania. Specifically, the study aimed to identify public relations strategies deployed in these institutions, analyse their implementation and assess the strategic public relations approaches' contribution on corporate visibility. A qualitative research approach, grounded in constructivist philosophical assumptions, was employed. Data were collected from 26 key informants from 8 HLIs and the Tanzania Commission for Higher Learning Institutions (TCU) through in-depth interviews and analysed thematically. Another source of data was a review of 14 relevant documents. The findings revealed that HLIs utilise public relations strategies, including public events and corporate uniqueness, to enhance their visibility. Effective implementation of these strategies requires collaboration with other institutional units and media engagement. Building stakeholders' confidence also emerged as a crucial mechanism through which strategic public relations approaches enhance corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania. The study concludes that public relations strategies alone are insufficient; targeted interventions and strategic investments must complement them. It recommends further research on optimising the deployment of public relations strategies for improved corporate visibility.

Keywords: *public relations, public relations strategies, corporate visibility, higher learning institutions, Tanzania*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAV   Association of African Universities

CBE   College of Business Education

CRDB   Cooperative Rural Development Bank

CSO   Civil Society Organization

CSR   Corporate Social Responsibility

DarTU   Dar-es-Salaam Tumaini University

DSM   Dar-es-Salaam

DVC-PFA   Deputy Vice Chancellor Planning, Finance and Administration

EA   East Africa

EPRT   Excellence Public Relations Theory

EXIM   Export-Import Bank of Bangladesh

FM   Frequency Modulation

GIOE   General Internally Organized Exhibitions

GoT   Government of Tanzania

HEET   Higher Education for Economic Transformation

HESLB   Higher Education Students' Loans Board

HLI   Higher Learning Institution

HoD   Head of Department

ICT   Information Communication Technologies

IOE   Internationally Organized Exhibitions

IRUD   Institute of Rural-Urban Development

ITV   Independent Television

JUCo   Jordan University College

MAXCUDA	Max Weber Qualitative Data Analysis
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MUHAS	Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences
MU	Mzumbe University
NACTVET	National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NMB	National Microfinance Bank
OUT	The Open University of Tanzania
PR	Public Relations
PRO	Public Relations Officer
PRP	Public Relations Practitioner/Professional
PRSA	Public Relations Society of America
SAUT	Saint Augustine University of Tanzania
SIOE	Small Internally Organized Exhibitions
SUA	Sokoine University College of Agriculture
TAWA	Tanzania Wildlife Management Authority
TBC	Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation
TCU	Tanzania Commission for Universities
THETP	Tanzania Higher Education and Training Policy
TV	Television
UDOM	University of Dodoma
UDSM	University of Dar-es-Salaam
UK	United Kingdom

UoA	University of Arusha
UoI	University of Iringa
URT	Uncertainty Reduction Theory
VC	Vice Chancellor
ZU	Zanzibar University

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Background Information

In an increasingly global competitive environment, higher learning institutions (HLIs) constantly endeavour to enhance their corporate visibility to attract and retain stakeholders who guarantee the sustainability and survival of particular institutions. These institutions have primarily relied on various public relations (PR) strategies that are essential in illuminating their corporate visibility, by highlighting corporate vision, mission, and values as strategic components. In Tanzania, specifically, the higher education sector faces several urgent challenges, including those associated with dissimilar image and reputation, resulting from the public relations strategies.

Over the decade, scholars have attempted to conceptualise Public Relations (PR), which is the field of study centred on promoting and protecting the image, reputation, products and/or services of the company and its policies in the eyes of the public (Ferguson, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Jelen-Sanchez; 2017; Seitel, 2017). It thus evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organisation that are in the public interest, and executes the programs of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

The concept of corporate visibility in this context can be perceived as the recognition and acceptability of the corporation such that the stakeholders can admire and support it. In the context of higher learning institutions (HLIs), corporate visibility is essential for attracting and retaining students, lecturers, and funders and keeping the

good work of the institution alive. It also attracts media coverage, which is critical in raising public awareness about the programmes and services the HLIs offer (Li, Morris & Young, 2019; Mgaiwa, 2018; Park, 2017).

In seeking to enhance corporate visibility, various institutions plan and execute PR activities (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando, 2018; Cronin, 2017) for the sake of maximising subscriptions and retention of stakeholders, including supporters and consumers of goods and services who guarantee the survival of the institutions. In the context of HLIs, adopting PR strategies has become imperative, especially in this current situation where the higher education system has constantly pressured colleges and universities to seek public presence. Effective PR strategies play a crucial role in addressing specific issues in HLIs, such as student recruitment, staff retention, and fund generation. According to excellence theorists Gruing (2002) and Dozier (1995), these strategies enable HLIs to engage with their stakeholders through two-way communication that builds strong, mutually beneficial relationships.

Effective public relations (PR) strategies, which produce high corporate visibility, have been considered essential means to mobilise human and financial resources for an institution's functionality, stability and survival. Notably, global higher learning institutions, such as Oxford, Stanford and Harvard, have successfully mainstreamed PR strategies in their organisational plans and operations to enhance their corporate visibility. These institutions have proactively proliferated PR strategies, including those, for example, associated with media engagement, particularly the digital media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter- "X" and Instagram to maintain their status as

higher education leaders. Their success stories stand as a beacon of hope, testifying to the potential of PR strategies to enhance corporate visibility (Salem, 2020; Birkholz et al., 2015).

According to Capriotti et al. (2023), with the rise of digital communication, social media has become an essential tool in shaping HLIs' corporate visibility, providing an avenue for HLIs to reach a wider audience and strengthen their brand position and reputation. In the case of Africa, higher learning institutions are tremendously increasingly adopting PR strategies to improve their corporate visibility and stand in the global market. Various HLIs, for example, in South Africa, have led the way by integrating several digital media platforms and adopting media engagement to enhance their status and reputation. This trend towards digital media presents a promising future for enhancing corporate visibility in the higher education sector (Farinloye et al., 2020).

The Higher learning institutions in South Africa also employ comprehensive PR strategies that focus on recruiting students and lecturers, research partnerships, and global visibility (Zeleza, 2022). Literature states that institutions that successfully manage their corporate visibility through PR efforts tend to attract more international students and secure funds for research, which is vital for HLIs' stability (Tran et al., 2024). While the PR strategies are evolving across the continent, many African institutions face limited financial and human resources challenges. Despite these constraints, some universities in Lesotho and Ghana increasingly utilise PR for community engagement and to foster partnerships, particularly in corporate social

responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Mathosi, 2022; Fusheini & Salia, 2021). This scenario underscores the urgency and necessity of PR strategies facing financial and human resource challenges.

In considering the vision of recognising the role of HLIs in producing professionals needed for the countries' development, the governments in East Africa (EA) endeavoured to promote PR strategies in its various institutions, especially in the public Universities (Munyi, 2021; Matongolo et al., 2018). However, several HLIs in East Africa face challenges that threaten their functionality, stability and survival. In Kenya, for example, some HLIs have experienced a drop in student enrollment and high employee turnout (Nduku & Ntabo, 2020; Sikubwabo et al., 2020; Nandain, 2018). In the case of Uganda, some HLIs have also experienced challenges related to unreliable funds and clients (Nduku & Ntabo, 2020).

Narrowing the focus, specifically in Tanzania, the government introduced the public sector communication initiative in the 2000s, which is currently under implementation (Mchome, 2011; Matumaini, 2010). Between 2005 and 2010, through Government Circular No. 12 of 2003, the Government of Tanzania (GoT) established Communications and Public Relations units in all public Ministries, Departments and Agencies. The impetus for their establishment was to inform the public about different government policies, projects, programs and endeavours (Kaali, 2022). Following the formation of such units, the government encouraged similar initiatives to be taken by both public and private HLIs in the country.

Various HLIs have established PR or communications units to animate the institutions to attract students, staff and funders (Kazinja, 2023; Matenda, 2022). However, those initiatives and the specific Public Relations (PR) strategies are yet to be qualified as being proper or successful in most organisations, including the HLIs (Kaali, 2022). It's important to note that the implementation of PR strategies in HLIs can also pose challenges. For example, the HLIs in Tanzania have been experiencing unevenly registered student numbers, lecturers and sources of funds (TCU, 2021; Mgaiwa, 2018). These challenges highlight the need for a comprehensive understanding of PR strategies and their potential risks in the context of higher education.

Furthermore, the PR challenges faced by some institutions in Tanzania have had a significant impact on their credibility. For example, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) banned 19 universities, including three international institutions, from admitting new students for the 2017-18 academic year due to poor quality education, inadequate infrastructure, and unqualified lecturers (Ligami, 2017). Among the affected institutions were Kampala International University (Uganda), Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (Kenya), Kenyatta University (Kenya), Eckernforde Tanga University, United African University of Tanzania, and the University of Bagamoyo. While these bans were primarily due to regulatory non-compliance, they also reflect underlying PR deficiencies. However, the implementation of effective PR strategies could have helped these institutions manage their reputations, communicate their improvement efforts, and maintain public trust. This highlights the potential benefits of strategic PR approaches in

enhancing corporate visibility and mitigating reputational risks, reassuring the audience.

The TCU's intervention, however, could not affect some other HLIs like Mzumbe University and The Open University of Tanzania (OUT). The TCU's uneven action suggests unequal status among the HLIs. This scenario coincides with dissimilar images and reputations (Mgaiwa, 2018; Ishengoma, 2017), which are products of PR strategies, especially those based on illuminating corporate visibility. In this regard, unequal status and image may cause the HLIs to attract dissimilar quantities and quality of inputs even when the institutions belong to the same owner (TCU, 2019; Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017).

Table 1.1 shows, for example, that the Institute of Rural-Urban Development (IRDP) and the College of Business Education (CBE) experienced fluctuations in the number of students admitted. There was also a gradual increase and decrease in students in academic years 2020/21, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. In contrast, the University of Arusha (UoA), University of Dodoma (UDOM), Zanzibar University (ZU) and Jordan University College (JUCo) suddenly decreased students' enrolment in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years. In contrast, Mzumbe University (MU), St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM), The Open University of Tanzania (OUT), Dar-es-Salaam Tumaini University (DarTU), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) and Muhimbili University of Allied Sciences (MUHAS) had their admission increased progressively in the three consecutive academic years as from 2020/2021 academic year to

2022/2023 academic year. The corporate visibility issue might have influenced that trend, even though some other factors may also be determinants of students' enrolment and admission in various HLIs. These include the number of programmes offered, cut-off points per programme, number of academic staff, accommodation capacity and discipline profile (Soares, 2021; Jooste, Cullen & Calitz, 2020). All these factors, however, are considered to be less influential compared to corporate visibility. The consideration is that corporate visibility animates the institutional image and reputation, which are central to boosting institutional products and services.

Table 1.1: Students' Admission Trend into Various HLIs in Tanzania

S/n	Institution	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
1.	College of Business Education	9,297	7,872	15,448
2.	Dar-es-Salaam Tumaini University	1,013	1,264	1,319
3.	Institute of Rural-Urban Development	4,162	3,764	4,058
4.	Jordan University College	724	263	231
5.	Muhimbili University College of Science	626	718	810
6.	Mzumbe University	2274	2921	3568
7.	Saint Augustine University	3,363	3,792	3,909
8.	The University of Dar-es-Salaam	14,166	15,715	16,080
9.	The University of Dodoma	41,642	41,405	37,766
10.	The Open University of Tanzania	3,778	5,042	6,735
11.	University of Arusha	524	201	174
12.	University of Iringa	4,775	5,117	5,262
13.	Zanzibar University	1,060	1,386	1,294
	Total	**87,404**	**89,460**	**96,654**

Source: HLIs facts and figures and TCU Reports on Higher Education Trend in Tanzania (2023)

The admission trends in Tanzania Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) highlight the role of public relations (PR) strategies in shaping corporate visibility and student enrollment. Institutions experiencing significant growth in admissions may reflect

the effectiveness of their corporate visibility due to effective PR strategies which encourage interactive communications, stakeholders engagement and investment on institutional resources such as fund as well as assurance of stakeholders confidence in terms of quality programs, quality tutors and students' supportive systems such scholarships, loans and intern among others.

In contrary, those with declining enrollments could indicate weak visibility, reputational challenges or ineffective PR efforts. Stable institutions like the University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM) and Saint Augustine University (SAUT) suggest consistent PR efforts in maintaining public trust and competitiveness, ultimately enhancing corporate visibility. The fluctuations in student admissions underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and strategic PR approaches. Ultimately, HLIs that invest in PR and corporate visibility strategies are better positioned to attract and retain students in Tanzania's competitive higher education sector, emphasizing the importance and urgency of the issue.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

The role of higher education in national development is widely recognized, as HLIs are critical in producing skilled professionals for both government and private sectors, significantly contributing to a country's economic and social growth (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2020). In Tanzania's context, HLIs play an essential role in fostering human capital development and intellectual growth, which are crucial for the nation's transition to a knowledge-based economy. However, the ability of these institutions to fully achieve this mission often gets constrained by

limited corporate visibility, which directly affects their ability to attract and retain key stakeholders, such as students, lecturers and financial partners. The recent data from the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU, 2021) alarms as it indicates a declining international student population in HLIs of Tanzania, with an increasing number of Tanzanian students seeking higher education abroad. It underscores the critical need to improve the corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania and the global educational market. Public relations strategies play a crucial role in enhancing the corporate visibility of HLIs, enabling them to gain broader recognition, foster stakeholder engagement, and maintain a positive reputation. According to recent studies, institutions in more developed regions have effectively used PR strategies, such as South Africa, to improve their visibility and competitive positioning (Mathosi, 2022; Zeleza, 2022).

However, Tanzania's HLIs have been slow to adopt comprehensive PR strategies, a crucial step that could significantly enhance their ability to compete globally (Kaali, 2022). These strategies could include but are not limited to, digital marketing, media relations and community engagement. Despite ongoing efforts to enlighten corporate visibility, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the specific role of these PR strategies on the visibility of HLIs in Tanzania. This gap is especially noticeable compared to global and regional trends, where institutions that successfully employ PR strategies enjoy improved rankings and increased international student enrollments (Fusheini & Salia, 2021). Moreover, HLIs in Tanzania face challenges related to inconsistent institutional images and reputations, which affect their ability to attract diverse students and resources. This issue is

compounded by the fact that institutions within the same ownership structure often present dissimilar images, affecting their overall competitiveness (Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017; TCU, 2019). Therefore, the lack of effective PR strategies to enhance corporate visibility, if not addressed, risks further marginalization of HLIs in Tanzania in the global education sector. This risk cannot be understated, with long-term consequences for their sustainability and contribution to national development.

Existing studies on Tanzanian HLIs (e.g., Muniko & Akpabio, 2023; Masele & Rwehikiza, 2022; Amani, 2022; Tundui, 2020) have provided limited insight into how PR strategies can enhance corporate visibility. Most research focuses on general trends in higher education or institutions in more developed parts of Africa. It leaves a significant gap in understanding how HLIs in Tanzania can use PR strategies to improve their visibility and attract the high-level human resources needed for the country's development.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the PR strategies deployed by HLIs in Tanzania, assessing their role in corporate visibility and identifying actionable insights that can help these institutions enhance their global competitiveness and contribute more effectively to national development. The potential impact of this research on the global competitiveness of HLIs in Tanzania is significant, making this study a crucial step towards sustainable development.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are divided into general and specific as follows;

1.3.1 General Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to assess the role of public relations strategies in corporate visibility of higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

1.3.2 Specific Research Objectives

The study specifically intends;

i. To identify Public Relations Strategies deployed in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania to enhance their Corporate Visibility;

ii. To analyze the implementation of the PR Strategies designed to enhance Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania; and

iii. To assess the contribution of Public Relations Strategic approaches in enhancing Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania.

1.4 Research Questions

This study had the following research questions;

i. Which Public relations strategies are deployed in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania to enhance their Corporate Visibility?

ii. How are Public relations strategies implemented in HLIs in Tanzania to enhance Corporate Visibility?

iii. How do Public Relations strategic approaches contribute to enhancing Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The relevance of this study can be perceived empirically, theoretically and methodologically. Empirically, since the study endeavoured to identify the most

relevant PR strategies for enhancing corporate visibility, PR practitioners and policymakers can make informed choices on the effective strategies to employ in specific institutional contexts. Secondly, since the study also intended to examine the implementation of the PR Strategies for enhancing corporate visibility, the information about opportunities and challenges encountered during the implementation process was revealed to the PR practitioners and policymakers for possible interventions. The information might also be insightful to practitioners and policymakers regarding the means to overcome challenges and capitalize on opportunities for effective implementation of PR strategies.

Thirdly, since the study specifically intended to assess how the PR strategic approaches contribute in enhancing corporate visibility, the results were anticipated to highlight various modalities through which the PR strategies may function adequately. In addition, the findings add insights to institutional management on how public relations might be strategized for the flourishing of HLIs, which are essential in producing high-level human resources for the country's development and society.

Theoretically, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to existing corporate visibility theories, particularly the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) and Excellence Public Relations Theory (EPRT). Using employing URT, the study reinforces the idea that reducing uncertainties in communication enhances institutional image and reputation. It aligns with Berger & Calabrese (1975), who argue that Public Relations (PR) professionals play a crucial role in uncertainty reduction through strategic communication.

Furthermore, the study validates EPRT, which emphasizes the strategic and research-driven approach to PR for achieving optimal results (Grunig, 2002; Dozier, 1995). The findings highlight the importance of PR research, stakeholder engagement, and value-driven communication in enhancing corporate visibility. By integrating these theories, the study not only upholds their relevance but also enriches the understanding of how PR strategies contribute to the visibility of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. Lastly, the study extends these theories by demonstrating their practical application in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) to enhance corporate visibility.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was limited to Tanzania Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs), where data were collected from March 2023 to August 2023 from 8 HLIs both private and public. The research explored the public relations phenomenon through the lens of admission based on the Tanzania Commission for University's website and the specific HLIs reports. The study aimed to identify public relations strategies that HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility, analyze the implementation of the PR strategies, and to assess the contribution of Public Relations strategic approaches to enhancing the corporate visibility of specific Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania.

The reliance on key informants and qualitative data methods such as interview sessions provided broader data and support to research design and findings. The individuals involved in the interview sessions were those with headship and

background in the PR profession, the Top Executives in the HLIs, specifically the Vice Chancellors, the Presidents of Students' Associations and Officials from the Tanzania Commission for Universities, which is an advisory and regulatory body for HLIs in Tanzania. The findings of this study have practical implications for HLIs, providing insights into effective PR strategies for illuminating corporate visibility.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters, with the first chapter serving as a comprehensive introduction to the study and its contexts. This chapter not only presents the background of the research problem but also sheds light on the current status of higher learning institutions and the global deployment of public relations practices to enhance the corporate visibility of specific HLIs. It also introduces the statement of the problem, research objectives, specific research questions, and the study's significance, including its contributions to professionals and academic communities.

The second chapter delves into a comprehensive literature review, providing a detailed description, summary, and critical evaluation of works related to the research problem. The chapter commences with conceptual definitions, followed by a thorough review of relevant theories. It then transitions to an empirical literature review, covering a wide range of studies related to corporate visibility and public relations in higher education settings. The chapter concludes with the research gaps.

Chapter Three describes the study's methodological and philosophical assumptions. It specifies the kind of research philosophy that guided the study and provides

premises for its justification. The chapter is also premised on the research approach, strategy, design, and instruments deployed for data collection. The research population, study area, and how data was analyzed are emphasized in this chapter as well. Finally, the chapter concludes with a statement of research ethics after elaborating on the trustworthiness of the research findings.

In the fourth chapter, the research findings are presented, focusing on the first research objective that aimed to explore the PR Strategies deployed in the HLIs to enhance their corporate visibility. Similarly, the fifth chapter presents the findings and analyses for research objective two, which required the researcher to analyze the implementation of the public relations strategies in the HLIs to enhance their corporate visibility. The chapters also highlight the identification of implementation bottlenecks for the PR strategies in the HLIs.

Chapter Six presents the findings for research objective three with its guiding question, which requires the researcher to obtain answers about the strategic public relations approaches contribution to enhancing Higher Learning Institutions' (HLIs) corporate visibility in Tanzania. This chapter mainly reflects some issues that may be considered when HLIs attempt to enhance their corporate visibility. Then, Chapter Seven follows with a detailed discussion of data obtained from the field as presented in chapters Four, Five and Six. The discussion is based on the eight themes that emerged from the field.

Finally, Chapter Eight, presents a summary of key research findings, conclusion and recommendations drawn based on these findings. The chapter also highlights the

study's implications, which provide practical guidance for HLIs and stakeholders, its limitations, and recommendations for future research. Generally, this study adds to the knowledge about public relations and the corporate visibility of HLIs. This knowledge is essential to HLIs and stakeholders who aspire to understand how they would employ PR mechanisms to enhance their institutions' corporate visibility.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

A literature review is essential as it provides a description, summary and critical evaluation of the investigated research problem. This chapter begins with conceptual definitions, followed by the theoretical literature review. The theoretical literature provides a comprehensive information and discussion based on the relevant theories in studying the role of public relations strategies in corporate visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. These theories are the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) originally developed by Charles Berger and Calabrese and the Excellence Public Relations Theory (EPRT) by Gruning and Dozier. The chapter also presents the empirical literature covering various studies on corporate visibility and public relations in higher education settings. It then concludes with the research gap, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

2.2 Conceptual Definitions

2.2.1 Public Relations

A public relations (PR) review in textbooks and academic literature reveals a dynamic evolution of definitions, suggesting that no single definition exists. One of the founders of Public Relations, Bernays (1928), defines the concept as the attempt by information, persuasion and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution. While Bernays' definition provides a strong historical foundation and captures key PR tactics, it is somewhat outdated for modern PR, prioritising dialogue, ethics and strategic two-way communication. A more

contemporary definition would offer a more comprehensive and ethical perspective on PR, reflecting the dynamic nature of the field.

Also, Denny Griswold, the writer and editor of Public Relations News, provided her first definition of PR as it appeared in her writings; Griswold (1948) states:

> *"Public Relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance" (p.4).*

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) officially stated the modern definition of Public Relations in 2011/2012 to replace the definition adopted in 1982 by the PRSA assembly. In their statement, PR refers to a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their public. It is a simple definition focusing on the basic concept of public relations as a strategic communication process emphasizing "mutually beneficial relationships." The phrase "relationships" relates to public relations' role in helping to bring organizations and individuals together with their key stakeholders who have connotations of publicly traded companies (Wilcox et al., 2015).

The literature shows that definitions of public relations present three professional streams: public information or press agentry, communication management and relationship management (Grunig, 2002). While the PRSA (2011/2012) definition is more modern and widely accepted, and Grunig's (2002) streams provide a comprehensive classification, Griswold's (1948) definition is best suited for this

study because it explicitly captures PR as a strategic management function, focuses on institutional policies and highlights the role of PR programs in gaining public support. These aspects are crucial for understanding how PR strategies contribute to corporate visibility in HLIs. Therefore, this study adopted the definition of PR by Griswold (1948), emphasizing the importance of understanding public relations' impact on corporate visibility to research and the field at large.

2.2.2 Public Relations Strategies

According to Wilcox et al. (2015), public relations strategy involves a comprehensive plan and activities designed to manage and maintain a company's reputation. This comprehensive nature ensures that all aspects of the company's image and communication are considered, making the strategies thorough and effective. Effective PR strategies aim to create a positive public image, handle crises, and ensure consistent messaging across various platforms. It involves such activities as exhibitions, community and/or corporate social responsibilities, sponsorship and fundraising to influence public perception (Smith, 2020).

Dozier et al. (2013) define public relations strategies as activities geared towards managing communication between an organization and its key stakeholders, focusing on building and maintaining a positive corporate image. As defined by Wilcox et al. (2015) and Dozier et al. (2013), public relations strategies share a common focus on reputation management, public image, and stakeholder engagement. Wilcox et al. emphasize a comprehensive plan that includes exhibitions, corporate social responsibility (CSR), sponsorships, and fundraising, making it a broad and action-

oriented approach. However, this definition may lack a clear focus on communication management as a strategic function.

On the other hand, Dozier et al. (2013) define public relations strategies as communication-focused activities aimed at building and maintaining a corporate image, highlighting the importance of managing stakeholder relationships through consistent messaging. This definition was adopted in the study because it emphasizes communication as a core function of PR, aligns with the impact of PR on corporate visibility and focuses on long-term stakeholder engagement, which is crucial for higher learning institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania.

2.2.3 Corporate Visibility

Corporate visibility, a concept crucial for study understanding and practice, refers to the 'extent to which the phenomenon in a given institution can be seen or noticed' (Mateus, 2017). It can further be classified into *generic and domain-specific* (Marquis & Toffel, 2012). An organization with greater domain-specific corporate visibility has specific characteristics like labour relations, worker safety and environmental impact that expose the firm to greater public scrutiny. Contrarily, an organization with greater generic corporate visibility possesses characteristics such as high reputation, status and prominence, which make the firm widely known to society (Yu, Lo & Li, 2017).

The strengths of corporate visibility definitions include their ability to highlight institutional recognition and differentiate between generic and domain-specific

visibility, offering a nuanced view of how organizations gain public attention. These definitions link visibility to stakeholder perception, making reputation management and strategic decision-making crucial. However, it's important to be aware of the potential downsides like negative visibility, which many definitions neglect.

This study's definition of the corporate visibility concept, which implies the level of recognition and acceptability an institution attains, leading to admiration and stakeholder support, was used due to its relevance to higher learning institutions (HLIs). It focuses on building trust and reputation, which is critical for attracting students and establishing credibility. This definition also emphasizes that corporate visibility is not just about being noticed but also about being respected and valued by stakeholders, making it well-suited for studying how PR strategies contribute to the corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania.

2.2.4 Higher Learning Institutions

According to the Tanzania Education and Training Policy (THETP) of 2014 (revised in 2023) and the University's Act of 2005, as well as the University Charters, Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education (2019), the term 'Higher Learning Institutions' is used interchangeably with 'Higher Learning Education'. In broad terms, these terms refer to universities and non-university professional training institutions at different stages. Universities, as the highest level of institutions, are dedicated to the professional and intellectual development of humanity and society, with a focus on research, teaching, public service, or consultancy. On the other hand, non-university professional training institutions, which are at the intermediate level,

are focused on human resource development for the middle and intermediate levels of the occupational structure of society, with a concentration on the pedagogical mission of teaching, instructing, career teaching and role-modeling (THETP, 2023). This study adopts the THETP of 2023 definition for Higher Learning Institutions, which includes universities and non-universities as professional training institutions dedicated to developing professional and intellectual humanity.

2.3 Theoretical Literature Review

Several theories elucidate the intricacies of PR strategies within institutions. In this context, two theories provide an analytical framework to assess the role of PR strategies in the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions. These are the "Uncertainty Reduction Theory" (URT) by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese (1975) and the "Excellence Theory" by Grunig (2002) and Dozier (1995). The Excellence Theory, with its comprehensive and insightful approach, surpasses the Uncertainty Reduction Theory in explanatory power, as detailed below, providing a solid foundation for the study.

2.3.1 Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in 1975 propounded the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). The two theorists explained how individuals could use the power of communication to cope with uncertain environments, reduce uncertainties and increase predictability. According to Berger and Calabrese (1975), when individuals engage in communication, they seek to reduce uncertainty about each other to develop relationships. In the context of HLIs in Tanzania, this theory can

help explain how effective public relations (PR) strategies work to reduce uncertainties among key stakeholders, including prospective students, parents, alumni, and the general public.

Bryson (2018) and Nandain (2018) posit that public relations professionals can reduce uncertainties in their working environments through the creative use of language, regularly updating information, and strategically planned communication programs. In the view of Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2017), uncertainties in the HLIs have been inevitable because they experience expansion. The increasing competition and scrutiny by clients, the government, and other key stakeholders create a pressured environment for the HLIs to create corporate visibility.

Mgaiwa & Ishengoma (2017) further argue that the turbulent factors to HLIs' plans and operations include educational and regulatory structural changes, human and financial resources constraints, insufficient scholarships and lack of employee motivation. All these create discomfort, ambiguity and disorientation among students, staff and the public (Nandain, 2018). In this context, it becomes clear that the role of PR professionals is crucial. They are tasked with managing organizational communication problems and undertaking other key necessary measures to ensure peace, harmony, and beneficial relationships amongst the public to protect the image and reputation of the organization.

Also, when the HLIs execute PR activities such as promoting events like launching new academic programmes and other activities that would increase the HLIs'

presence in media, stakeholders usually tend to approach the institutions with high uncertainty. They may be unsure, for instance, about the institution's reputation, quality and/or social standing. Applying the URT in such instances can help HLIs provide clear, consistent and informative communication that reduces uncertainty (Nandain, 2018). For example, regularly updating the testimonials from ongoing students and alumni and presenting admission processes transparently can reduce stakeholder ambiguity and foster public trust.

According to Berger and Calabrese (1976), information seeking is a key behaviour in minimizing, if not eliminating, uncertainty. The HLIs can, for instance, strategically employ PR Strategies such as events and media engagement to offer stakeholders relevant information that would lead, for example, to informed decisions and choices of the programmes. The theory further emphasizes the importance of predictability and routine in reducing uncertainty. Consistent and regular PR activities like community outreach allow HLIs to build predictable communication patterns, contributing to better corporate visibility (Nandain, 2018).

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) construct that aligned with the study's objectives included such issues as information seeking, which was applied to the first study objective that sought to identify the PR strategies HLIs used to enhance corporate visibility. The PR strategies should focus on making relevant and accurate information easily accessible to reduce stakeholders' uncertainty and enhance corporate visibility. Also, the theory's emphasis on predictability could align with the second objective, which is to analyze the execution of public relations strategies.

This implies that predictable and consistent communication through PR strategies could create a more credible image of HLIs in the country leading to their corporate visibility. Last but not least, the construct is based on trust building where, as HLIs strive to create corporate visibility, the URT suggests regular two-way communications through, for example, social media to reduce the uncertainty that stakeholders might have on HLIs' quality and credibility.

The URT could be a framework for comprehending how stakeholders seek to reduce uncertainty through communication. Applying this theory to HLIs can help explain how clear, regular, and accurate information from PR efforts can attract students and improve HLIs' corporate visibility. The theory's focus on initial interactions provides useful analyses for first-time engagements with stakeholders, particularly for prospective students or international partners unfamiliar with Tanzania's higher learning context. Therefore, PR strategies that focus on reducing initial uncertainties can strongly impact corporate visibility. The potential of URT in explaining the impact of PR strategies is intriguing and warrants further exploration.

Although the theory is considered to be relevant in the context of corporate communication, it is criticized in many ways. Some scholars proclaim that uncertainty reduction is not the factor that always motivates communication or the flow of information among individuals. Other genuine desires exist to interact and seek information (Keller et al., 2020). Secondly, the URT was not designed for organizational public relations but focused on interpersonal communication (Keller et al., 2020). Hence, while it proves the ability to explain some aspects of PR

strategies to reduce stakeholders' uncertainties, it's not a comprehensive theory of understanding the problem under investigation. It is important to note that the URT has its limitations and may not fully explain all aspects of public relations and corporate visibility.

In addition, the URT has a limited scope; the focus on uncertainty reduction may overlook other critical aspects, such as branding, which is also essential in corporate visibility. Therefore, a more critical theoretical explanation was needed to investigate the impact of PR strategies on corporate visibility other than using or adopting the uncertainty reduction factor. Although the URT was not the primary theory for this study yet, it can be applied to explain how HLIs in Tanzania can use PR strategies to reduce uncertainty among their audiences, specifically during initial interactions, which eventually may contribute to increased corporate visibility.

However, the use of URT should be complementary to more organizationally focused theories, the essence of the Excellence Public Relations Theory by James Grunig (2002) and Dozier (1995) to be considered the primary theory for this study as explained hereunder. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework to fully understand the impact of PR strategies on corporate visibility.

2.3.2 The Excellence Public Relations Theory

Grunig (2002) and Dozier (1995) introduced the Excellence Public Relations Theory (EPRT), a theory that posits public relations' value in an organisation lies in its

ability to foster high-quality relationships with the strategic components of the organisation. In this study, EPRT uniquely applies to the context of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. It explains how PR strategies, when implemented, enhance the corporate visibility of these institutions and how they contribute to building mutually beneficial relationships among key stakeholders such as students, staff, donors, funders, and the general public.

One of the key EPRT principles asserts that PR should be integrated into organisational decision-making, emphasising the strategic nature of PR activities in HLIs. It implies that, in the context of HLIs, PR activities should be strategic and not reactive (Dozier et al., 2013). This objective could explore whether the HLIs in Tanzania have well-established public relations departments and are considered equally in management. It could also assess the systematic implementation of PR strategies to enhance corporate visibility.

Also, the theory suggests that two-way communication, which involves both sending and receiving messages, leading to better organizational success. It could suggest a study to investigate how the HLIs' PR strategies enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania. Also, based on the particular theory's principle, the study could examine whether PR strategies resulted in creating a positive institutional image and reputation, which are essential for attracting stakeholders and overall organizational visibility. Numerous constructs from the Excellence Theory align with the study's objectives. For example, two-way symmetrical communication was crucial for understanding how HLIs communicate with stakeholders to build positive

relationships vital to corporate visibility. The theorists posit that good relationships add value to organizations by reducing the cost of litigation, regulation, legislation and negative publicity caused by poor relationships with stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). Therefore, this construct of two-way communication focuses on dialogue and feedback between the HLIs and the target audiences, which is essential for long-term organizational success and visibility.

The second construct considers PR as a management function; it examines the role of PR in decision-making processes within the HLIs. This construct explored whether the PR professionals in specific HLIs in Tanzania influenced the senior management level and whether their strategies aligned with the intuitions' missions and values. It could also delve into the challenges they face in influencing these decisions and how they mitigate these challenges. Environmental scanning was the third key construct that helped analyze the trends of HLIs to monitor their external environment through research to understand public perceptions, media dynamics and market competition. It was essential in increasing the predictability of existing opportunities and threats that practitioners and policymakers may have encountered during and before the execution of the PR strategies in their specific locales.

The theory's strength lies in its potential application to studying the role of PR strategies on the corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania. It shines a light on issues such as ethical and strategic communication. The Excellence Theory advocates for ethical and transparent communication, which is crucial for organisations that aim to build stakeholder trust and credibility. Therefore, HLIs should strategically design

PR strategies that align with institutional goals and objectives to enhance their corporate visibility (Grunig, 2017).

The theory's emphasis on relationship building adds value, particularly in its focus on two-way communication. The two-way communication ideal benefits the HLIs as they seek to engage with diverse stakeholders, including students, potential partners, the media and the general public. Therefore, by fostering mutual understanding, HLIs in Tanzania can strengthen their reputation and corporate visibility (Grunig, 2017). Also, the theory's recommendation to integrate PR into organisational decision-making enhances its influence. Therefore, when such a recommendation is made in Tanzania HLIs, the institutions can make better-informed decisions that enhance visibility and align with broader institutional goals. Despite the relevance of the theory, the excellence theory is criticised in several ways; for example, PR, when it involves multiple stakeholders in dialogue, can have macro-social relevance but only in a market economy pluralistic society where the authorities do not dominate information flow, debates and market power, unlike or rarely in Asian and other developing countries (Kenny, 2016).

In this context, the application of the Excellence Theory in HLIs seemed to be causing some chaos; for example, the theory presumes that organisations must have resources to implement PR strategies for illuminating corporate visibility, while many HLIs in Tanzania face some limitations associated with such issues as fiscal and human resources. However, with the proper support and resources, the potential of the Excellence Theory in the Tanzanian context is promising, making it

challenging to realise its potentiality in the Tanzanian context (Mgaiwa, 2018). Also, two-way communication may challenge achieving desired results (Hung-Baesecke, 2021; Macnamara, 2012). In developing countries like Tanzania, where HLIs are slowly adopting PR strategies, specifically those requiring digital infrastructure or professional PR teams capable of handling complex feedback loops, its implementation concept may be complex (Muniko &Akpabio, 2023).

While numerous corporate communication studies (Makanai et al., 2022; Anggreni, 2018; Gezihagne, 2018) have applied EPRT, there is a significant gap in its application, particularly in the way the PR strategies enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania. Previous studies have examined the general adoption and application of PR in African universities. However, no study has thoroughly explored the relationship between PR strategies and corporate visibility in its broader context, particularly in Tanzania, especially with the use of the theory's constructs such as two-way communication and environmental scanning or research (Makanai et al., 2022; Anggreni, 2018 & Gezihagne, 2018). This study has, therefore, attempted to apply those particular constructs to assess the corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania, highlighting the urgency and significance of this research gap.

Generally, the Excellence Theory forms a basis for understanding issues about public relations and corporate visibility of HLIs. It describes the importance of handling communications strategically through a well-structured PR department to enhance corporate visibility. Moreover, for corporate visibility to be maintained and sustained, the excellence theorists emphasise relationship building among the public

and the importance of researching to understand the public's expectations better. The research helps analyse the target audience's trends, behaviour, and attitudes before rationally establishing planned corporate visibility programs. Kriyantono (2019) affirms that the EPRT is the most dominating theory in the field of study as it sets the standard for good PR practice.

Table 2.1: Summary of the Theoretical Framework on the role of PR Strategies

in Corporate Visibility of HLIs

Theory	Key Tenets
Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) (***Berger & Calabrese,1975***)	-Uncertainties create discomfort at both individual and organizational levels. **Implication:** Uncertainties of corporate communication in HLIs due to, for example, educational and regulatory structural changes, human and financial resources constraints, insufficient scholarships and lack of employee motivation among others create discomfort and ambiguity among staff, students and other key stakeholders.
Shortcoming of URT	-Uncertainty reduction is not the only factor in creating a free flow of communication among individuals (Keller et al 2020)
Relevance of the URT to a study	Reduction of uncertainties is essential for the display of a positive image and reputation gain.
	It explains how clear, regular and accurate information from PR efforts can attract stakeholders to improve the HLIs' corporate visibility.
General comment on URT	It does not have more explanatory power hence a need for another theory to aid the analysis of the study.
Excellence Public Relations Theory (EPRT) (***Grunig, 1992; 2002 & Dozier, 1995***)	-It proposes excellent characteristics of PR units; - PR loses its unique role in strategic management if it is sublimated to marketing or other management functions; - For an organization to be effective and generally create corporate visibility, it must solve problems and satisfy the goals of stakeholders. If it does not, the stakeholders will either pressure the organization to change or oppose it in ways that add cost and risk to organizational policies and decisions; and -It emphasizes research, two-way communication, strategically planned communication programmes, professional ethics, reputation and relationship building which are the basis of the PR profession.
Shortcomings of EPRT	- Two-way communication emphasis is not relevant in this digital era as currently, it's more possible than it was before (Waddington, 2018; Kenny 2017). -The other critique is based on the fact that PR when involves multiple stakeholders in dialogue can have macro-social relevance but only in a market economy pluralistic society where there is a free flow of information, debates and market power, unlike or rarely in Asian and other developing countries (Halff and Gregory, 2015).
Relevance of the EPRT to the Study	Generally, the EPRT aided the analysis of the study as it forms the basis for understanding issues about strategies of PR. It describes the importance of handling communications strategically through a well-structured PR department to enhance Corporate visibility.

Source: Author's construction, 2024

2.4 Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature reflects how HLIs integrate the public relations (PR) practice in strategic corporate plans to achieve their desired goals and objectives. More so, it shows the desire for HLIs to create and maintain their corporate visibility, necessitating mainstreaming the various PR strategies in their day-to-day endeavours. This section entails three sub-sections for clarity and ease of reference: the first entails general studies about PR and corporate visibility, the second is related studies in the African context, and the last describes empirical studies in Tanzania. The section not only addresses various issues related to corporate visibility and PR but also provides practical implications for HLIs, as exposed hereunder.

2.4.1 Worldwide Context Review of Public Relations and Corporate Visibility

Some scholarly work, for instance, portrays that the HLIs' corporate visibility depends on word-of-mouth (e-word of mouth and/or social media) programs to foster the interest of potential students, research funding and public support (Birkholz, 2016). Birkholz et al. (2016) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the potential connections between followers on social media, particularly Twitter "X", and organizational characteristics of HLIs. Their use of descriptive statistical tools and analyses, along with data from 137 UK Universities, provided a detailed understanding of the role of organizational characteristics in social media visibility.

The study's significant finding was that the organizational characteristics of HLIs play a crucial role in their social media visibility compared to their use. This insight informs us that organizations may successfully garner followers through their tweeter

activity, but the high number of followers is attributed to the organizational characteristics of size, status and reputation.

Birkholz et al. (2016) further argue that the rise of social media as a tool for communicating information to potential stakeholders has filled the gap in the information such that it assists those interested in an organization to acquire information that cannot be found on the website. The literature also found a significant relationship between social media usage and those platform users' motivation to apply to the Universities. In this regard, social media plays a potential role in HLIs' garnering corporate visibility. This potential of social media to enhance HLIs' corporate visibility is a reason for optimism. However, the above is not striking as HLIs have status, reputations and other attractive traits apart from messages disseminated through social media platforms. In general, the study's researchers focused on tools that PR use to disseminate the messages and not other aspects that may influence corporate visibility; this current study sought to fill the gap by adding to the knowledge about the role of PR strategies in corporate visibility of HLIs.

Also, Faraoni et al. (2024) conducted a study on the online reputation and visibility of the Spanish HLIs with a special focus on publicly owned Universities. The research aimed to assess the behaviour of universities in an online context and their repercussions in different kinds of online media, specifically Twitter, blogs, and websites. The main results showed that being visible to the universities correlates with research activity indicators such as publications, research impacts, awards, and

honours. From the results obtained, researchers recommended that the university management in public universities in Spain should improve institutional communications and focus on promoting specific message dissemination techniques to enhance the global reputation of the universities. One may argue that the above study's findings confirmed the gap in issues related to HLIs' corporate visibility and the strategies deployed to enhance the same. The study, therefore, benchmarks further research in the subject matter to fill the gap, whereas this study attempted to add literature on the topic.

The above study about accelerating the online reputation of the University by Faraoni et al. (2024) coincides with the study results of Bituleanu and Dascalu (2021), which focused on empirical analysis of how public Higher Education Institutions may increase their corporate visibility in the University of Eastern Europe. Using the Faculty of Engineering as a case study, the researcher interviewed important university structures, particularly faculties, student associations, and Erasmus programmes. The researcher also employed a survey to add insights into students' perspectives. The findings revealed a necessity for increasing the HLIs' corporate visibility in various ways while considering technological factors in this digital era. The researcher also proposed the efficient cost of digital marketing for HLIs.

The findings of some authors such as Faranoni et al. (2024), Bituleanu and Dascalu (2021) and Birkholz et al. (2015) position social media as a strategic PR segment for making stakeholders interact with the university and make it more visible in terms of

their acceptance and recognition. The aforementioned insights may differ in studies conducted by other scholars, such as Capriotti et al. (2023), who studied the influence of social network posting strategy on the public's engagement regarding reactions to messages, conversations, and messages going viral. The authors measured the level of HLIs' activities and the type of presence on three popular social networks: Facebook, Linked and Twitter. Results showed that universities, in general, do not correctly analyze the characteristics of followers or perhaps do not respond to users' interests.

Nevertheless, their study concluded that a higher level of activity by universities on social media does not necessarily lead to higher engagement; the lower the volume of posts, the higher the interaction rates, with inevitable slight nuances among the various social networks. This implies that the social media engagement strategy is not the only necessary factor in making HLIs visible. Therefore, more needs to be done to add insight to the topic. The need for further research is urgent and important to fully understand the factors influencing HLIs' corporate visibility.

Feyen et al. (2016) maintain that the corporate visibility of HLIs depends on the number of publications a particular institution makes. In their comparative study between Ecuador's leading higher education production activity and the publication of similar in universities of South America and Western Europe, the importance of improving publications and suggestions on remedial strategies that focus on adjusting the profiles and activities of Ecuador's HLIs were highlighted. In parallel, Torres-Samuel et al. (2018) studied the corporate visibility of universities in terms of

publications. Using Latin American countries as cases, researchers deployed descriptive statistics and correlation methods to identify factors of corporate visibility in the universities. The findings revealed that research helped make universities visible. In contrast, in the recommendations, the researchers believed that for a university to be generally visible, its products should be framed in the country's government policies and be associated with institutional strategies.

Concerning the above studies by Feyen et al. (2016) and Torres-Samuel et al. (2018), the present study presumes publications and citations could be the interest of a particular group of people, for example, those belonging to academic while others, including non-scholars or non-academics, may be interested in for instance, to join the University or support it in other different ways. Generally, citations are not the only factor in making institutions visible; there is a need to assess some other factors for illuminating institutional corporate visibility, such as the PR strategies.

Also, researchers such as Warren (2017) investigated the visibility of individuals within the context of HLIs. Warren (2017) specifically examined how academicians struggle to enhance their visibility while the political economy of higher education imposes measurable ways to regard one as a responsible academic. In return, the academicians are caught up in the pool of academic stress. Warren's (2017) study is similar to McCune's (2019) study, which focused on assessing how academics in the current global higher education system make metrics of research activity and income generation projects a priority in maintaining their identity. Using thematic narrative analysis of interviews, the results of the study showed important ways that can be used to make academic individuals visible in their careers and workplaces.

Yu, Lo and Li (2017) examined the relationship between organizational corporate visibility and corporation environmental responsiveness in China. They examined whether this relationship is mediated by stakeholder pressure and whether the strengths of the relationships among organizational corporate visibility, stakeholder pressure and corporate environmental responsiveness are mediated by the type of enterprise ownership. Based on responses from 131 enterprises, the study suggests a potential positive and significant correlation between organizational corporate visibility and corporate responsiveness in China. This study suggests the importance of organizational corporate visibility and maintains that it depends on the organization's managerial characteristics. From that viewpoint, the study examined several determinants of corporate visibility and scanty in terms of PR. In general, this study about the role of public relations strategies in the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions is intended to fill the literature gap.

2.4.2 Public Relations and Corporate Visibility Studies in Africa

There is much literature concerning public relations (PR) and corporate visibility in Africa. Scholars such as Anani-Bossman (2022) examined the nature of public relations management in Ghana education institutions, specifically in public universities. His study mainly intended to determine the degree to which PR practitioners in Ghanaian HLIs practice excellent PR to achieve organizational goals. Using a qualitative approach to gather information from 14 practitioners, the findings showed that in an attempt to execute their roles, the PR specialists in Ghana HLIs are mainly premised on the technician roles and minimal on managerial roles. Their institutional communications are based on a one-way approach, and the PR

specialists in the given HLIs do not have much influence on the decision-making process. The practical implication is that PR cannot be highly valued and recognized to play a significant role in enhancing the corporate visibility of institutions unless it plays the dual role of technical and managerial.

The above study concurs with Hadji (2022), who explored the role of senior-level communication practitioners in strategic planning within the context of HLIs. Using purposive sampling, several South African public universities were approached to participate; however, seven agreed with their communications specialists to engage in the study. The results were thematically analyzed, and results showed that most university communications departments were based in VC's office, and those that were located in other offices wished to be moved to VC's offices. It was also revealed that communication practitioners were consulted when the university strategy was developed, although the process was condemned to be top-down.

The results of Hadji's (2022) study also showed that the participation of communications specialists in the HLIs' management was limited to creating awareness and organizing strategic planning sessions, particularly on the communication strategy. The study recommended that PR Practitioners be trained in general management with a particular focus on strategic risk management to add value to the strategic planning process. This study implies that if the PRPs are not well equipped and trained, they will not efficiently and strategically perform their duties, particularly in enhancing institutions' corporate visibility.

Suppose the studies done by Anani-Bossman (2022) and Hadji (2022) offer similar insights to studies conducted by scholars such as Letlasa (2022), who assessed the extent to which HLIs use communication strategy to implement their strategic plans in three HLIs in Lesotho with the basic aim of engaging with internal and external stakeholders. Following triangulation as a data collection and analysis method, a sample of three HLIs with their internal and external stakeholders was identified through a multi-dimensional strategy. It included a survey for stakeholders, interviews with the senior managers, and content analysis for strategic plans. Results indicated the importance of institutions in developing communication strategies with organizational culture, identifying potential stakeholders, and using suitable communication platforms to disseminate messages to stakeholders. These studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of PR and corporate visibility in African HLIs, which is crucial for the development of the current research.

This study also identified a gap in the deployment of PR strategies in HLIs, particularly in the context of Communication Strategies. These strategies provide the general rules, principles, and guidelines on how communication issues should be handled in organizations. However, as per Letlasa's (2022) study findings, there is room for improvement in the envisagement of communication strategies. This suggests that more can be done to enhance the practicability of PR practices within the contexts of HLIs. The study also set the stage for further research into the role of PRRs in the corporate visibility of HLIs, adding to the existing body of knowledge about PR in higher education.

Furthermore, drawing from literature, scholars such as Ansoglenang et al. (2018) explored how Higher Education Institutes could promote their corporate identity and reputation in response to the changing competitive educational environment in the World. They highlighted several areas that need attention in the corporate world, one being corporate identity and management. Their study underscored the need for commitment and active participation to ensure a suitable visual element for the HLIs. This active involvement is crucial in creating and enhancing the corporate visibility of the HLIs. However, the researchers also stressed the importance of prioritizing quality control standards in implementing academic programmes. This suggests the need for further investigation into corporate visibility and Higher Learning Institutions to understand the potential for active participation in enhancing visibility.

The above study by Ansoglenang et al. (2018) coincides with Nyamwaya and Muchunku's (2021) study results on the corporate identity of the HLIs. The researchers studied how the Kenyan community could recall the brand of Multimedia University following the rebranding of the given university. Using the interview method for the sample size of 31 key informants of the corporate visibility activities of the University, the findings indicated that people could recognize the university due to its corporate visibility activities such as faculty-level clubs that did community outreach activities and extracurricular activities like drama and sports. Also, students' activities include participating in academic activities such as academic competitions that took them to Malaysia. Nevertheless, the other activities that increased corporate visibility for the university include research activities that led to several academic staff earning research grants while attending conferences and

innovation activities. Also, researchers such as Anani-Bossman and Mudzanani (2023) intended to determine how PR was employed in the HLIs, particularly in Africa, to enhance their competitive edge.

In this study, he developed a framework for excellent PR practice in the HLIs. He used some selected African countries as a case. He interviewed 20 practitioners from 9 countries where the study found that PR is not fully empowered to perform its role effectively despite its perceived influence level. Based on the study results, he developed an integrated framework to guide PR practitioners to excel in their roles. Based on this study's results, the gap still exists in the roles the PRPs can play to enhance the corporate visibility of the organizations in this context, the HLIs. This adds value to the rationale behind this current study about the role of PR strategies in the corporate visibility of HLIs.

2.4.3 Public Relations and Corporate Visibility Studies in Tanzania

In the case of Tanzania, the literature on public relations and corporate visibility of the HLIs is still in its early stages, presenting a wealth of opportunities for further exploration and growth. Some scholars, such as Masele and Rwehikiza (2022), have begun to investigate the implications of social media in promoting activities among the HLIs. Guided by Phenomenological Philosophy, a multi-case study was conducted with four HLIs ranging from public to private institutions. The findings revealed that there is still limited use of social media among the selected HLIs, where the dominance of traditional media over social media was observed to engage HLIs with stakeholders and make the particular HLIs visible.

This coincides with Muniko and Akpabio's (2023) observation about various organisations' use of social media in Tanzania. The authors argue that PR practitioners in Tanzania have a positive attitude towards social media even though some are not comfortable using it. They, therefore, recommend training institutions and PR continuing education programs to fill the gap. Therefore, studies of this nature also provide a benchmark for further exploration of social media deployment in organisations, mainly in the HLIs, as among the PR strategies to enhance institutional corporate visibility.

Amani (2022) also made a significant contribution to the field by examining university and social community identification in influencing university brand evangelism when mediated by a sense of belonging. The study, which collected data from 606 alums of 15 HLIs in Tanzania and analysed it using structural equation modelling, revealed a practical implication-most alums engage in university brand evangelism when they are highly identified with their University and its entire social community.

Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that HLIs' management focus on building social and personal identification to stimulate a sense of belonging, which in turn fuels alums' intent to engage in university evangelism. The study further suggests that HLIs invest in their PR strategies to build good relationships among stakeholders and create a sense of stakeholders' engagement towards institutional goals and endeavours. This gap in the literature, therefore, presents a clear opportunity for further research and practical application.

Similarly, Tundui (2020) made a significant contribution to the field by exploring the general strategies that can improve the performance of HLIs in Tanzania. The study, which involved 39 purposively selected participants and used an interview guide for data collection, identified several key strategies. These included the observance of ethics by the management and staff, use of competent lecturers, production of best graduates, development of a sound learning environment, connecting with different stakeholders, being socially responsible, undertaking marketing efforts and struggling to attain a high reputation.

The study concludes with clear recommendation-HLIs that need to prosper in the current environment must put proper strategies in place. This current study, therefore, is an attempt to add to the literature about the strategies that HLIs may deploy to improve their performance, focusing on their visibility and public relations mechanism. However, it also highlights the need for further research in this area, particularly in understanding the practical application of these strategies in the Tanzanian HLI context. In general, the study about the role of public relations strategies in corporate visibility of higher learning institutions has a significant contribution to the general body of knowledge about public relations and corporate visibility, with a special focus on the HLIs in Tanzania.

2.5 Research Gap

From the review of the literature, a large part of the empirical evidence is focused on organizational corporate visibility and its facets, especially the social media deployment followed by publications, corporate identity and management, as well as

individual branding within the context of HLIs (For example, Faraoni et al., 2024; Bituleanu & Dascalu, 2021; McCune, 2019; Vásquez, 2018; Warren, 2016). Therefore, most studies seem to limit their focus, especially on assessing the more significant part of PR, in this case, its strategies. This study is but one way of attempting to fill the gap. The researcher of this study presumes that if the gap remains unfilled, some scholars and practitioners may fail to be strategic enough to identify and implement effective strategies for enhancing HLIs' corporate visibility. They may also not have the relevant knowledge on the various modalities through which PR strategies impact on HLIs' corporate visibility. As a result, the HLIs may suffer the consequences of being invisible to the extent that their functionality, stability and survival may be jeopardized.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

The methodology provides a path suitable for conducting research studies and reports the findings. In this chapter, the methodological and philosophical assumptions of the study about the role of public relations in the corporate visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania will be presented. The chapter specifies the research philosophy that suited the study and the premises for its justification. It further describes the methodology that guided the research study, including the whole data collection process with its research approach, strategy, design and instruments deployed for data collection. The research population, study area, and how data was analyzed are emphasized in this chapter as well. Finally, the chapter concludes with a statement of research ethics after the elaboration of the trustworthiness of the research findings.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Jelen-Sanchez (2017) defines research philosophy as the development of research assumptions and their knowledge and nature. The assumption is perceived as a preliminary statement of reasoning, but it is based on philosophizing a person's knowledge and insights resulting from intellectual activity (Jelen-Sanchez, 2017). Empirical evidence provides several research philosophies; however, as far as this study is concerned, the *interpretivism* research philosophy was adopted. Advocates of this philosophy believe in interpreting others' actions through the researcher's understanding (Xu & Zammit, 2020). This philosophical assumption was considered

an integral part of the study because it enabled the researcher to conduct a thorough and comprehensive exploration, gathering rich and detailed information on the subject.

Also, the information obtained, literally known as thematic cases, emerged from people with experience on the topic in the field, including the audience of this research. In addition, the interpretivism philosophical assumption enabled the researcher to examine from interpreters' methodological perspectives the way stakeholders, including the audience, attach meaning to public relations and whether or not it added value to HLIs' corporate visibility. More so, it aligned well with the study's aim of exploring the role of PR strategies in HLIs' corporate visibility in Tanzania.

Moreover, the interpretivism approach was particularly suited to the unique socio-cultural environment of Tanzania. This approach facilitated a deep exploration of how PR activities are perceived and interpreted by different groups, including students and administrators. It also allowed the study to uncover the underlying motivations and factors that led to the implementation of PR strategies by HLIs in Tanzania. The approach supports the idea that reality is socially constructed, suggesting that the role of PR in corporate visibility is not a fixed or objective phenomenon but is somewhat shaped by the subjective interpretations of stakeholders (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Furthermore, the interpretivism approach aligns with the study's qualitative nature, as it likely involved in-depth interviews to gain rich insights into the practices, challenges, and perceptions surrounding PR strategies

in the higher education sector. By adopting interpretivism, the study was able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between public relations and corporate visibility in Tanzania's higher education institutions, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics at play. Nevertheless, it enabled the researcher to add insights into the institutional management engulfing the HLIs in Tanzania. For instance, it enabled the researcher to understand how the public relations mechanism was strategized in the HLIs to maximise their functionality, stability, and survival.

3.3 Research Approach

The study employed an inductive approach called inductive reasoning, a systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data. This approach allows the analysis guided by specific research objectives, observations, and measured phenomena (Wu & Molnár, 2018). The researcher worked inductively in a more exploratory manner to draw a wide range of inputs and revise them accordingly. The rationale for employing inductive reasoning was the need to offer more insight on the debate about the role of PR strategies in corporate visibility of HLIs.

After gathering such information, the researcher scanned the data broadly and searched for patterns. The patterns helped the researcher find commonalities, differences, and similarities in participants' statements to create themes and categories before analyzing and discussing the data. Moreover, the inductive approach not only allowed knowledge to emerge but also emphasized the value of repeated review as the researcher became more familiar with research data by scanning and reviewing it several times throughout the research process.

3.4 Research Design

Huntington-Klein (2021) defines research design as the framework researchers use to integrate various study elements coherently and logically, ensuring that the research problem is effectively addressed. It serves as a blueprint for the entire process, encompassing data collection, measurement and analysis (Huntington-Klein, 2021). Given that constructivism posits the existence of multiple realities and views knowledge as being derived from experience (Žukauskas et al., 2018), the researcher's expertise led to the selection of an exploratory research design for this study. This design enabled the researcher to assess the role of public relations strategies in the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions by drawing insights from participants. Additionally, the exploratory approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of PR practices within Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs), providing new insights into their role in shaping corporate visibility in Tanzania.

3.5 Research Strategy

A research strategy is a structured plan of action that guides research activities and helps achieve the study's objectives (Kriyantono, 2019). This study primarily employed a qualitative research strategy, focusing on the thematic approach. The qualitative strategy enabled the researcher to design appropriate methods for exploring and understanding the meanings participants attached to the subject matter. Thematic analysis, as described by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), is a systematic process that allows for identifying patterns within data and examining relationships between concepts. This study used the thematic approach to establish connections between public relations (PR) and corporate visibility by systematically analyzing

the gathered data. The flexibility of this approach facilitated multiple interpretations, aligning with the study's interpretative philosophy.

3.6 Research Population

This study's population included officials and students from Tanzania's public and private Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs). It also involved the regulatory, advisory, and supportive body for HLIs, namely the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), from which the researcher obtained supportive data.

3.7 Area of the Study

The study area constituted (2) higher learning institutions (HLIs), namely the University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM) and Dar-es-Salaam Tumaini University (DarTU), both located in Dar-es-Salaam. It also involved the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) in Dar-es-Salaam. The study also constituted the University of Dodoma (UDOM) located in Dodoma, two (2) HLIs, namely Mzumbe University (MU) and Jordan University Collage (JUCo), both located in Morogoro region. It also constituted two (2) HLIs located in Mwanza, namely Saint Augustine University (SAUT) and the Institute of Rural-Urban Development Planning (IRUD). The study also involved Zanzibar University (ZU) in Zanzibar.

The selection of these HLIs was a meticulous process, guided by their significance to the higher education context in Tanzania and their geographical distribution. The total number of the HLIs involved in the study was (8), with four (4) regions from the Tanzania mainland and one (1) from Zanzibar, making a total of five (5) regions.

The aforementioned HLIs were chosen based on selection criteria per Tanzania Higher Education Admission Trends for various HLIs in the country (Refer to Table 1.1). This rigorous selection process ensured that the study's findings were representative of the higher education system in Tanzania. Besides, the particular HLIs are in the administrative zones of the country, which are also rich in the number of HLIs, both private and public-owned (TCU, 2023).

3.7.1 Features of the Higher Learning Institutions Engaged in the Study

The higher learning institutions (HLIs) involved in this study were founded on diverse academic disciplines that not only contribute to the critical examination of human knowledge but also play a crucial role in societal development. These institutions, through their academic pursuits, reflect human beings' capacity to address and manage various challenges encountered in daily life and within the broader global context, inspiring hope for a better future. The HLIs included in the study not only specialized in disciplines such as education, social sciences, and business but also served a crucial regulatory, advisory, and supportive function. These institutions, including one that oversaw and guided other HLIs in the country, played a significant role in maintaining the quality and standards of higher education, providing reassurance to all stakeholders.

Table 3.1: Features of the Institutions Engaged in the Study

Features	HLIs									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	Total
Regulatory, advisory and supportive function feature	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Based on Multidisciplinary	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	5
Based on the Education discipline feature	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Based on Social Sciences disciplines feature	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Based on the Business discipline feature	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Source: Field data, 2023

3.8 Sample and Sampling Technique

Like other scientific studies, the study about the role of public relations strategies in the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions in Tanzania also adhered to the sample selection rules and procedures. Smith (2020) refers to sampling as selecting a population segment for investigation, whereas sampling techniques are methods used to select individuals or elements of a population to form a sample. The sample size for this study was (26) participants, which comprised a diverse mix of individuals with administrative positions, students' leadership and professionalism in public relations, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Those with administrative roles included the top management of the higher learning institutions, of which (2) were engaged from both public and private higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The other group of individuals was the heads of PR departments (HoDs), of which (6) were involved. Also, (7) public relations officers from the HLIs, (2) Tanzania Commission for Universities' officials and (9) Students Associations Presidents. Therefore, the different cohorts involved in the study

signified a broad generalization and realization of the matter that sought to be understood. It also ensured that the data collected was rich, meaningful and directly related to the topic under investigation. The study used the following techniques to select the sample.

3.8.1 Sampling of Higher Learning Institutions

A purposeful sampling technique was used to select the eight Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) based on the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) report about the trend of higher learning institutions in Tanzania (Refer to Table 1.1). Categories of institutions, those that experienced fluctuations in the number of enrolled students, those that had their enrolment decreased, and those that had their enrolment increased progressively, were utilized as samples. Importantly, the technique ensured equal participation of public and privately owned HLIs in the country, demonstrating the study's commitment to fairness. The number of selected HLIs was conveniently obtained due to the nature of the study and the projection based on the researcher's inductive thinking before conducting the research.

3.8.2 Sampling of Study Participants

This study primarily employed purposive sampling, a method chosen to obtain data from specific participants with unique and profound expertise, experience and perspectives related to public relations (PR). According to Muellmann et al. (2021), key informants should be individuals whose social positions grant them specialized knowledge of people, processes and events, which was a key consideration in this study.

The informants were carefully selected based on their deep knowledge of the PR topic. Emphasizing the value of individual perspectives, as per constructivist views (Xu & Zammit, 2020); purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this study. Participants from top-level management, such as Vice Chancellors and Provosts from public and private Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs), were chosen for their ability to provide strategic insights of paramount importance on corporate visibility and the implementation of PR strategies. Heads of Communications/PR departments were also included for their direct experience with PR strategies and their role in shaping the institutions' visibility. Additionally, Presidents of Students' Associations were selected to offer their unique perspectives on how PR strategies impact the student community and the overall corporate visibility of the institutions. Their insights were valuable in assessing how PR strategies influence student perceptions and the broader image of the HLIs in Tanzania.

Officials from the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) were included due to their regulatory role in accrediting and overseeing universities. Their perspective, which was crucial in understanding the broader context of higher education in Tanzania, provided a broader view of enrollment and graduation trends, offering insights into how PR strategies may influence prospective students' decisions and, ultimately, the corporate visibility of HLIs. The selection process ensured a diverse range of perspectives, adding value to the study by incorporating different ages, work experiences, managerial positions and professional backgrounds. This diversity was assured by employing purposive sampling, where participants were selected based on predefined criteria to ensure a balanced representation, enriching the findings and

offering a more comprehensive understanding of how PR strategies affect corporate visibility.

Also, the study adopted theoretical sampling, a technique guided by empirical and theoretical insights on qualitative interviews. In this approach, the number of Participants was not predetermined; instead, participants were continuously and actively selected based on emerging data in a thorough and ongoing process until theoretical saturation was reached. Saturation occurred when no new insights or themes emerged during the last five interviews (Marschlich & Ingenhoff, 2021). The researcher continued seeking additional participants to enhance understanding of the public relations (PR) phenomenon within higher learning institutions (HLIs) until no further discoveries could be drawn from the data, at which point data collection was concluded.

3.8.3 Snowball Sampling of Study Participants

In certain instances, the researcher employed snowball sampling, where initial participants, such as Vice Chancellors, Provosts, or Principals, were asked to recommend potential interviewees. This technique was beneficial for reaching top executives who, due to their busy schedules and institutional responsibilities, may not have been readily accessible. These key individuals often suggested other participants with specific characteristics who could provide relevant insights on their behalf, especially when it was challenging for the researcher to identify or approach potential interviewees directly, a task that can be particularly difficult in certain research contexts.

3.9 Data Collection Methods

Data collection, a crucial step in research, involves gathering, measuring and analyzing accurate data from various sources to find answers to research problems (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Data collection plays crucial role in ensuring the quality of work and maintaining the research integrity. The study primarily employed key informants interviews to collect data from participants and the documentary review, as explained in subsequent sections.

3.9.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to collect information from PROs and the Vice Chancellors of various HLIs, of which a total number of fifteen (15) participants were involved in this kind of interview. These participants were contacted, introduced to the study and asked for their consent, availability and willingness to participate. The semi-structured interview was suitable because it allowed for a thorough and deep examination of some important issues related to PR practice, ensuring that the audience is well-informed. For instance, interviewing the Heads of PR departments enabled the researcher to get an answer to research question number one, which inquires about the strategies deployed in HLIs to influence corporate visibility. It also enabled the researcher to answer research question number two, which required how the Public relations strategies were implemented in the HLIs to enhance their corporate visibility.

3.9.2 Unstructured Interviews

This approach was also used to collect participant data using a one-to-one interview, chosen for its ability to delve deeply into individual perspectives. The interview

sessions enabled the researcher to capture the direct voices of participants' experiences and opinions on the subject matter, specifically how the PR strategies were carried out and whether or not they added value to HLIs' corporate visibility. This approach was used to interview nine (9) presidents for students' associations and two (2) TCU officials, thus resulting in a total of eleven (11) interviewees.

The approach allowed the participants to freely explain their views on HLIs' PR strategies deployed to enhance corporate visibility. The one-to-one interview approach also enabled the researcher to overtly acquire the reality of the subjective feelings towards the topic, without the potential influence of group dynamics that can occur in group interviews. Unlike the group interviews, where pre-empty ideas can sometimes occur or participants may copy from others or the previous interviewees, this was avoided in the one-to-one interviews.

3.9.3 Documentary Reviews

The documentary review, a comprehensive method, was employed to gather data from the field (Refer to Appendix I). The steps explained below were meticulously followed to ensure a systematic and precise selection of the documents to be reviewed. This was done while articulating the research objectives and the research guiding questions of the study. In doing so, it helped the researcher acquire proper guidance on setting the criteria for documents to be reviewed. The researcher commenced the process by identifying relevant sources where the documents of interest were likely to be found. Then she identified the following: online sources, i.e. websites of the HLIs involved in the study, libraries and reputable news sources

to acquire information about particular HLIs' announcements and news. Thereafter, the researcher, fully dedicated to the project, established specific criteria for selecting documents that align with research objectives, whereas the focus was mainly on their relevance to the research topic. As explained earlier, the primary sampling method the researcher deployed was purposive sampling.

The researcher, therefore, identified documents with admission trends in various HLIs in Tanzania and documents with specific information about the HLIs, such as their Strategic Corporate Plans, Almanac, and information about HLIs' corporate events, among others. Purposeful sampling was helpful in the process of reviewing the documents because it enabled the researcher to capture a diverse range of perspectives and acquire documents that were of topic interest, as established above. The method was indeed more reliable when information about such issues as PR Strategies and particularly their implementation was sought.

Nevertheless, in some instances, reviewing the documents was done using snowball sampling, where a small set of documents was obtained, and from the same, more relevant documents were referred to within the initial set. In this case, for example, the admission trends of the various HLIs were obtained from TCU reports, and the sample was expanded and complemented using facts and figures from relevant HLIs.

Wills (2022) posits that this method is helpful for discovering obscure or hard-to-find documents, in which, for this case, admission trends for specific HLIs were also obtained using this method while considering the trustworthiness of qualitative

research, which will be explained in detail in this same chapter. The researcher then meticulously screened the documents to ensure they met the established criteria and whether they were suitable for inclusion in the research sample. Those documents that seemed to be of low quality or those that did not add much insight were excluded. It thus made the reviewed documents fourteen (14) out of over thirty (30) accessed.

To recap, the researcher browsed various online sources, including the official websites of the selected HLIs, to acquire information about aspects of corporate communication based on activities like exhibitions, speaking engagement forums, scholarships and Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) through news releases, news flashes and announcements. Nevertheless, the online promotional materials such as banners, flyers and advertisements were systematically reviewed every quarter to extract information about implementing Public relations strategies to influence corporate visibility. Also, TCU being part of the study, its publications with relevant information about the admission trends of the various institutions were reviewed throughout the study. The publications enabled the researcher to solicit information on the Public relations strategies and how they were implemented to enhance HLIs' corporate visibility.

3.10 Participants' Profiles

The first interview question was designed to collect demographic information from the participants, including gender, qualifications, experience in the public relations field, and their managerial roles within Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in

Tanzania. This demographic data provided valuable insights into the composition of the target population, helping to contextualize the study. By diligently understanding the participants' backgrounds and expertise, it enabled thorough assessment of how these factors might influence their perspectives on the role of Public Relations strategies in enhancing corporate visibility at HLIs. The demographic information is presented in the subsequent sections.

3.10.1 Participants' Distribution by Gender

The gender distribution of participants was a key demographic factor in the study, as it helped assess the level of participation of each gender in both the public relations profession and managerial positions within Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. Analyzing gender representation allowed the study to uncover potential gender imbalances in leadership and decision-making positions within the PR field at HLIs. This information was crucial for understanding how gender dynamics may influence the implementation and effectiveness of PR strategies, particularly in terms of corporate visibility.

Table 3.2: Participants' Distribution by Gender

Gender	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Female	20%	25%	0%	67%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	27%
Male	80%	75%	100%	33%	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	73%

Source: Field data, 2023

Insights drawn from Table 3.2 provide potential behavioural changes and performance disparities between male and female participants. These disparities are

particularly evident in their roles in enhancing corporate visibility. For instance, the study found that males tend to be more assertive in their communication styles, which could influence the development and implementation of PR strategies. It also highlighted that females often demonstrate higher levels of empathy, which could affect how these strategies are perceived. Additionally, the disproportionate representation of males in top managerial roles (such as Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, and Heads of Departments) was an important finding, suggesting potential barriers or challenges for female representation in leadership positions.

Analyzing the gender distribution allowed the researcher to assess how gender might impact the strategies employed to achieve the organizational mission and values of HLIs. By comparing the proportions of male and female participants across various organizational levels, the study could explore how these factors relate to the overall goal of enhancing corporate visibility.

The unequal gender distribution of participants (73% male and 27% female) was a potential limitation in the study, as it may reflect broader societal trends and gender inequalities within higher education and the PR industry in Tanzania. This information was crucial for interpreting the data, understanding its implications on gender dynamics, and suggesting further discussions on how these dynamics might influence the effectiveness of PR strategies. It also highlights the need for more research in this area. Regarding data presentation, the study used anonymized codes for participants (e.g., P1HLIA, P2HLIG, etc.) to ensure privacy while still maintaining the ability to present meaningful patterns in the gender distribution

across different HLIs. This approach allowed the analysis to remain objective and unbiased, focusing on the trends rather than individual identities. It instills confidence in the reliability of our findings.

3.10.2 Participants' Distribution by Age

It was also necessary to acquire the participants' distribution by age, as this expands one's understanding of the target audience. It also helps one understand how the PR strategies were perceived and implemented by participants at various stages in their careers.

Table 3.3: Participants' Distribution by Age Category

Age Group	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
40 and above	40%	25%	67%	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%	50%	35%
36 to 40	40%	0%	0%	0%	33%	50%	0%	50%	0%	18%
31 to 35	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	50%	12%
26 to 30	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
21 to 25	20%	50%	33%	33%	33%	50%	50%	50%	0%	35%

Source: Field data, 2023

An analysis of data presented in Table 3.3 showcases the unique perspectives of senior participants, aged 40 and above, who held top managerial positions, constituting 35% of the total. Their roles as Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors and Heads of Departments were instrumental in shaping long-term PR strategies and influencing corporate visibility at an institutional level. The 35% of participants aged 21 to 25, who held leadership roles in student associations, provided invaluable insights. Their perspectives on how public relations strategies

(PR) strategies impact the student community and contribute to the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions (HLIs) were crucial in understanding the resonance of PR efforts with the student body and their influence on the institution's perception. Respondents aged 36 to 40 (18%) held important roles in PR departments within the HLIs. Their responses were crucial for understanding the practical challenges and opportunities of PR strategy implementation. Their insights, based on hands-on experience were informative, enriching the study's findings.

The age distribution also allowed the exploration of how age-related differences might influence the implementation and effectiveness of PR strategies. It helped identify whether younger professionals, particularly those involved in student associations, have different perceptions and expectations of PR strategies than those in senior management positions. Additionally, this data highlighted any generational gaps in leadership, decision-making, and strategic planning within the HLIs. Thus, the age data was crucial for concluding how different age groups engage with and contribute to the corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania. The incorporation of age as a variable enabled a comprehensive analysis of how PR strategies might be perceived or executed differently by individuals with varying levels of experience and responsibilities within the institution.

3.10.3 Participants' Distribution by Work Experience

The work experience of participants was another crucial factor in this research, as it allowed gaining a comprehensive understanding of the role of public relations (PR) strategies on the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions (HLIs) in

Tanzania. Investigating the duration of participants' tenure in their current positions made it possible to analyze how different experience levels influenced their perspectives on PR practices and strategies. This understanding of the work experience of participants, who represented a diverse range of career stages, was instrumental in exploration of how individuals from various points in their professional journey approach PR challenges and contribute to shaping the corporate visibility of their respective institutions.

Table 3.4: Participants' Distribution by Work Experience

Years	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
16 to 20	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%
11 to 15	20%	0%	0%	33%	33%	50%	0%	50%	0%	19%
6 to 10	0%	0%	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%	0%	50%	8%
1 to 5	60%	100%	100%	68%	33%	50%	100%	50%	50%	69%

Source: Field data, 2023

Evidence from Table 3.4 provides a deeper understanding of the varying levels of expertise present within the study. For example, most participants (69%) had 1 to 5 years of experience, predominantly consisting of student representatives who held leadership positions in student associations. This group's responses offered valuable insights into the perspectives of those relatively new to leadership but actively involved in shaping student engagement with the institution's PR strategies. Their responses were critical in exploring how PR strategies impact the student community's perception of corporate visibility. The 19% of participants with 11 to 15 years of experience held senior positions within PR departments, such as Heads of

Departments and Senior PR Officers. These participants provided a more seasoned perspective on how PR strategies are developed, implemented and adjusted to improve the visibility of HLIs. Their insights were essential for understanding PR's strategic and operational aspects and how long-term experience shapes decision-making and effectiveness.

The 8% of respondents with 6 to 10 years of experience, representing a mid-career group, played a crucial role in the study. Their insights provided a balanced viewpoint, bridging the perspectives of seasoned experts and newer professionals. This group's contributions were instrumental in understanding how mid-level experience shapes one's approach to PR, compared to those with less or more experience. Their unique position allowed them to offer valuable insights into the evolution of PR strategies.

Finally, the 4% of respondents with 16 to 20 years of experience, including Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors, represented the most senior management level in the HLIs. Their extensive work experience contributed to high-level, strategic perspectives on how PR impacts the institutional mission and corporate visibility at the highest levels of management. This group was key to understanding the long-term vision of PR strategies and how such strategies evolve to enhance institutional branding and visibility.

Therefore, the analysis of the work experience data was essential in understanding how experience influences one's role in shaping PR strategies and contributing to the

corporate visibility of HLIs. This analysis allowed for a comparison of strategies employed by individuals with varying experience levels and an assessment of their impact on the success of PR efforts. The data was essential for understanding the evolution of PR practices within the institutions and their alignment with institutional goals over time.

3.11 Trustworthiness of Research Study

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in qualitative research including the thematic analysis, the trustworthiness of the study is measured through the four criteria which serve as qualitative parallels to the concepts of validity and reliability employed in quantitative research studies. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. They were established following the popularity gain of qualitative research studies in the early 1980s which urged the need to ensure the qualitative findings were both rigorous and reflective in terms of the reality being investigated (Lincoln&Guba, 1985).

In demonstrating that the study about the role of public relations in corporate visibility of higher learning institutions was conducted in a precise, exhaustive and consistent manner through the whole process of recording, systematizing and disclosing the thematic methods of analysis; this study assured trustworthiness of the work specifically on the findings based on the above mentioned four criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The first criterion, namely credibility which is parallel to internal validity in quantitative studies refers to the extent to which the dataset is complete and accurate; the truth value of qualitative data is measured on

this criterion (Connelly, 2016). Transferability which parallels the concept of external validity in quantitative studies, implies the degree to which the findings can be generalized or transferred to other locales, whereas, dependability which closely corresponds to reliability measures the extent to which the same study may be repeated in another research with similar methods and participants and yet reveal the same findings (Shenton, 2004).

The last criterion is conformability parallels objectivity in quantitative studies, it focuses on ensuring findings are shaped by participants' experiences and not the researcher's biases. In other words, with conformability reference is made to the objectivity of study findings based on constructivism where the data is confined to participants' responses and not otherwise, meaning that the responses are not based on the influence of the researcher or personal biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Based on the above-mentioned four criteria, this study ensured the trustworthiness of the study which in a quantitative context could be regarded as validity and reliability in the following ways.

3.11.1 Credibility of Study Findings

The data emerged from the proposed methodology that brought together professionals and students to explore public relations and corporate visibility concepts in higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The use of multiple sources and prolonged engagement with participants (triangulation) instilled confidence in the research process and assured credibility (Shenton, 2004). The MAXQDA2022 Data Analysis Software, used for transcription and coding, further ensured the study's

credibility. Its design allowed participants' voices to be replayed and their transcripts revisited regularly, thereby ensuring the originality of the data from participants.

3.11.2 Dependability of Study Findings

When it comes to the dependability of the study, the methodology used here could be adapted to various other contexts with similar conditions. However, it's important to note that it can be challenging in terms of participation. To address this, the researcher of this study was not just keen, but diligent in ensuring the focus was maintained during the interview sessions. This diligence was a key factor in obtaining the required data without any other contextual interference on the topic, reassuring the quality of the study.

3.11.3 Transferability of Study Findings

The intensive interview sessions in eight (8) HLIs across the country from March 2023 to August 2023, which were conducted with great thoroughness, enabled the researcher to gather and produce detailed findings on the role of public relations in the corporate visibility of the HLIs. Considering the various locales in which data was collected, it can be assured that the same data may be applied in similar contexts other than Tanzania.

3.11.4 Conformability of Study Findings

The researcher is conversant with the study area because she has been in public relations field for over ten years. However, she considered reflexivity and reported objectively because she wanted the generated data to help future academics,

professionals in the industry and other interested communities around the World. Nevertheless, the researcher's experience improved the capacity to analyze the data while maintaining participants' voices because she understood the findings would solely be used for scholarly purposes and not otherwise. Last, the pilot, which was a small-scale trial run of the research, before actual research enabled the researcher to gain better experience dealing with participants of various calibres in the HLIs.

3.12 Data Processing

Maguire and Delahunt (2017) emphasized that the thematic method of data analysis, unlike other qualitative methodologies, is not bound to a specific etymological or theoretical perspective. This inherent flexibility makes it a versatile tool for qualitative research (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The adaptability of thematic data analysis, which was the basis for its selection in this study, was demonstrated in the use of the MAXQDA2022 Analytical Pro for processing and analyzing the data. The data on public relations strategies' role in corporate visibility of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) was initially processed by organizing the obtained data, including transcribing and importing relevant documents into MAXQDA Analytics Pro.

Jelen-Sanchez (2017) highlights that familiarization of data helps determine the number and types of themes that emerge throughout the study; it also helps guide further steps that the researcher may need to carry out for data analysis and in a more appropriate way. Hence, after being contented with the transcript data, the second step was to upload the transcripts into the system. The data were then grouped into

specific categories, specifically in this case, the specific HLIs and categories of individual participants: the Vice Chancellors, Heads of PR Departments, PR Officers, TCU officials and Presidents of students' associations. The first entry category of HLIs and their profiles with features were successfully uploaded, followed by the category of participants. It should be noted that every first participant in each HLI study was a Public Relations Professional and was given the code number one (1). Then, transcripts other than those of Public Relations Professionals were uploaded with coded numbers from two (2), three (3) and so forth for each HLI. The transcripts belonging to the same HLI were compiled to simplify the transcription process. This organization allowed for clear comparisons regarding commonalities and differences between the various groups' perspectives.

After importing, a coding framework was created based on relevant concepts of the topic, such as PR strategies and corporate visibility. The initial codes were defined and expanded within the coding system, which enabled the identification of key data insights. In-vivo coding was also applied, capturing key phrases to ensure participants' perspectives were accurately presented. Alongside coding, the memos were written down to capture reflections as the analysis continued. Following the coding process, the use of software tools to explore and interpret data provided a robust and reliable method for data interpretation.

In analyzing the data, the code frequency analysis tool within MAXQDA software was used to identify commonly emerging themes. Then, the Code Matrix Browser was used to compare how categories of participants, such as the heads of PR

departments, discussed the themes while highlighting the commonalities and differences in their perspectives. This helped in understanding the various perspectives of stakeholders on the topic under investigation. The visualization tools, particularly the crosstabs, were used to present data more meaningfully. The crosstabs, for example, allowed for making comparisons of specific themes, such as the implementation bottleneck of the PR strategies across the varied participants' categories. It also helped to compare the perspectives of the students' leaders on the way they perceive the influence of PR strategies on their specific HLIs.

The insights gained from the visuals were then integrated into the final analysis, which offered a more transparent and broader picture of PR strategies' role on corporate visibility of HLIs in Tanzania. It should also be noted that inductive coding was mainly done in a way consistent with the themes that emerged during the data collection process. Lastly, the themes were mapped into patterns of responses, ensuring a confident and reliable analysis before tallying the themes with research questions.

Table 3.5: Transcript Coding and Participant Identification in the HLIs

HLI	Participant	Date of Interview	Age	Work experience	Audio Length	Pos, Range	Gender
A	1	27th March 2023	40s	16	32	0012-0057	F
	2	31st March 2023	40s	15	41	0058-0095	M
	3	9th May 2023	40s	16	28.9	0096-0124	M
	4	3rd May 2023	21	1	23.3	0125-0154	M
	5	22nd Aug 2023	Above 55	Over 20	17:41	0155-0189	M
B	1	27th March 2023	35	2	38	0005-0046	F
	2	10th May 2023	Above 55	Over 20	14:39	0047-0071	M
	3	10th May 2023	20s	1	15:37	0072-0101	M
	4	10th May 2023	20s	1	15:50	0102-0124	M
C	1	4th April 2023	40s	16	42	0013-0056	M
	2	14th April 2023	40s	16	21:12	0057-0093	M
	3	5th Aug 2023	20s	1	26:26	0094-0124	M
D	1	23rd May 2023	40s	Over 10	15	0015-0044	F
	2	14th July 2023	30s	2	16: 12	0045-0067	F
	3	15th July 2023	20s	1 year	10:47	0068-0095	M
E	1	12th May 2023	40s	More than 15	16:10	0005-0044	F
	2	22nd Aug 2023	40s	More than 7	16:22	0045-0060	F
	3	5th Aug 2023	20s	1	10:47	0061-0088	F
F	1	25th May 2023	38	Above 10	42:21	0005-0043	M

	2	17th June 2023	20s	1	20:50	0044-0066	M
G	1	12th July 2023	30s	2	27:21	0007-0046	M
	2	5th Aug 2023	20s	1	21:43	0047-0077	M
H	1	25th May 2023	38	12	52:21	0010-0061	M
	2	17th June 2023	20s	1	20:50	0062-0084	M
I	1	19th April 2023	35	7	16:44	0025-0054	M
	2	19th April 2023	40s	More than 10	10:51 Minutes	0055-0082	M

Source: Field data, 2023

3.13 Ethical Consideration

Adhering to ethical principles is crucial when planning, conducting and evaluating research (Flick, 2018). The researcher upheld the following ethical standards, which are generally acceptable, especially in social science research. Initially, the researcher requested an introduction letter from the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies of the Open University of Tanzania. Subsequently, she made self-introductions and official requests for permits before visiting the data sources. During data collection, the researcher ensured to debrief the informants about the study's intent before each interview (refer to details of the consent form in Appendix I). A key aspect of the ethical conduct was the voluntary nature of participation in the study. Participants who were willing to contribute filled out the consent form, respecting their right to choose. The researcher also respected the respondents' privacy, ensuring their anonymity by using name codes instead of actual names in the final reports. For instance, participants were identified by numbers 1, 2, and 3...and the HLIs were identified by alphabets A, B, C, etc.

Nevertheless, the research report did not include the respondents' relevant personal information, demonstrating a strong adherence to ethical guidelines. The citations and references followed the latest version of the American Psychological Association (APA) Referencing Style (version seven) as per the OUT-research guidelines in the prospectus on the University Website. Similarly, the data sources were shown, and other authors were acknowledged as per the guidelines set by the university. The researcher also cited the data sources in the field accordingly; for example, the researcher showed the type of HLI, Date of Interview, Participants, Date, Gender and

the period for the interview session. Above all, the researcher also ensured that no participants demanded incentives during the entire research project process.

When reviewing documents, the researcher strictly adhered to ethical guidelines. This included proper citation and attribution of sources, respect for intellectual property rights, and obtaining necessary permissions for accessing copyrighted materials from particular HLIs (see, for example, Appendix VII). This commitment to ethical guidelines ensured the integrity of the research process. In the following chapters, namely chapters four, five and six, the focus will be on data presentation, analysis and interpretation of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

CORPORATE VISIBILITY STRATEGIES USED BY HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents, analyzes and interprets the research findings related to the first specific research objective, which seeks to identify the corporate visibility strategies used by higher learning institutions. The chapter is structured to clearly understand HLIs' different approaches and initiatives to enhance their visibility and public image. It begins by presenting the key strategies identified from the field data, followed by an analysis and interpretation of how HLIs apply these strategies. The findings discussed in this chapter link to the literature reviewed in chapter two, where the study examined the theoretical and empirical studies on corporate visibility and strategic communication. Moreover, the strategies discussed in this chapter provide a basis for comparison and further discussion in chapter seven, which provides a roadmap for the study's conclusions and recommendations in the final chapter.

4.2 Public Relations Strategies in Higher Learning Institutions

To achieve the goal of research objective one with its specific research question, the researcher posed a second interview question about the strategies public relations practitioners deploy in their working places to enhance their HLIs' corporate visibility. Table 4.4 presents about 21 themes that emerged from Participants' responses. The number of mentions (N) or frequency for the answers is also provided in the tables.

Table 4.1: Strategies used to enhance HLIs' Corporate Visibility-Thematic Analysis

PR Strategies	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Marketing and Advertising Activities	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	3	10
Standard Customer Care	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Project initiatives and management	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Collaborations and links	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
Internationalization	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
Alumni relations	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Institutional representation Internationally	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4
Institutional representation Nationally	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	6
Branding, corporate logo and brand manual	6	4	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	10
Social media engagement	3	2	4	5	4	2	4	5	0	29
Mainstream Media	1	1	4	4	2	1	0	1	0	14
Public Relations and Protocol Etiquette	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Media Relations	10	1	5	2	0	0	2	1	0	22
Public Relations Materials	0	6	2	4	1	0	1	6	0	20
Research	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Public Events	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Sports Bonanza	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	6
Ceremonials & other internally organized parties	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Relations	10	2	4	0	2	2	1	2	0	24
Exhibitions	13	6	3	2	8	2	2	2	3	38
Strategic Communication	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 4.1 summarises a series of PR strategies HLIs use to enhance their corporate visibility. It also shows the number of mentions (N) of each theme provided for a specific strategy in the HLIs.

4.2.1 Alumni Relations and Internationalization

An analysis of data presented in Table 4.2 reveals that some HLIs utilize alumni relations and internationalization to enhance their corporate visibility. In some cases,

these functions are managed by the public relations unit, while in others, they are handled independently by a directorate or office related to internationalization matters.

Table 4.2: Alumni Relations and Internationalization

PR Strategies	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Internationalization	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
Alumni relations	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3

Source: Field data, 2023

However, regardless of the approach, the involvement of public relations professionals is crucial. Their expertise and strategic thinking play a significant role in managing these matters. For example, some public relations professionals noted:

> *"We also work with the Directorate of Internationalization. In other Universities, it is within the Communications Directorate, but here, with its vast responsibilities, it has to be an independent Directorate. It deals with Internationalization issues, Alumni and Advancement (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 3, Male, May 9, 2023)"*

Findings also showed that some HLIs position independent public relations professionals in the Alumni and Internationalization office. The professionals deal mainly with alums and internationalization issues and handle matters related to international public relations. One of the public relations officers was, for example, quoted as;

> *"Having the public relations officer in place at the Alumni Relations and Internationalization office means that they play a*

> *role in ensuring the University is widely known locally and internationally" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023).*

The quotation by P1HLIA highlights the strategic role of public relations (PR) in illuminating corporate visibility within higher learning institutions. By integrating PR expertise into alum relations and internationalization efforts, the institution ensures a structured and professional approach to reputation management, stakeholder engagement and global outreach. This reflects an understanding that visibility is about local presence and maintaining a strong international profile through targeted communication strategies. The structured approach of PR in reputation management provides a sense of security and confidence in the institution's operations.

Furthermore, this statement underscores the importance of alum networks and international partnerships in promoting the university's brand. Alums serve as ambassadors who extend the institution's influence beyond its geographical boundaries, while internationalization efforts such as collaborations, student exchanges and joint research help position the university as a globally recognized institution. A PR officer in this office plays a crucial role in ensuring that these engagements are strategically communicated. Their expertise in PR maximizes visibility, attracts prospective students and partners, and reinforces the university's credibility in the global education system.

> *"Regarding internationalization, PR-related activities are being undertaken apart from other projects related to international issues. For example, the unit organizes events like a 'welcome party', 'dining with the VC' and tours for foreign students.*

These tours, which take students to different places in the city and beyond, are not just for sightseeing but also to provide a deeper understanding of the University and its homeland. They are a valuable educational experience for international students" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023)

PIHLIA's statement indicates that by organizing social and cultural events, the institution ensures that foreign students feel welcomed and integrated into the academic environment, strengthening its reputation as a globally friendly and inclusive institution. These activities also serve as a branding tool, positioning the university as an attractive destination for international students.

Furthermore, these PR initiatives significantly enhance the institution's global engagement by fostering a positive student experience. This, in turn, leads to favourable word-of-mouth promotion and alums' advocacy. The inclusion of key figures like the Vice Chancellor in these events not only adds prestige but also reinforces the university's commitment to international students. Moreover, city tours and cultural immersion programs play a crucial role in familiarizing students with the local environment and, importantly, in deepening their connection with the institution.

In the same theme, the public relations professionals from some higher learning institutions explained that, although the alums and internationalization offices are separate entities in some institutions, they work closely and collaboratively because the goals to be achieved by both offices are almost the same. This collaboration

fosters a sense of unity and shared goals, as they both deal with the public and mainly work to enhance the corporation's corporate visibility.

> *"When one temporarily steps away, the other seamlessly takes over, fostering a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility. This close working relationship is a testament to the inclusive nature of our field" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant 1, Male, May 25, 2023).*

The statement by PIHLIH underscores the strategic nature of PR. When effectively integrated into organizational plans and operations, it becomes a powerful tool for achieving goals, particularly in enhancing the corporate visibility of respective organizations or institutions. This strategic engagement is at the heart of our work.

Table 4.3: Institutional Representations

PR Strategies	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Institutional representation	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Internationally	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4
Nationally	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	6

Source: Field data, 2023

As shown in Table 4.3 Institutional Representation was among the strategies used in some HLIs to enhance HLIs' corporate visibility. Public Relations Professionals in HLIs, for example, said:

> *"Our VC is a member of the Board of Association of African Universities (AAU), Deputy Vice-Chancellor Planning, Finance, and Administration (DVC-PFA) is a Board member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Worldwide. So, when they participate*

in such activities, we, as the University, get exposure. We also have alumni positioned in various institutes as appointees, judges, ambassadors and the like" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 2, Make, March 31, 2023)

The findings highlighted the strategic use of institutional representation in illuminating corporate visibility. Participation in academic and professional gatherings is a platform for higher learning institutions to showcase their expertise, network with stakeholders, and reinforce their brand presence. One of the public relations professionals, for example, said:

"We usually participate in conferences and seminars to increase our publicity" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Male, July 12, 2023).

The institutional representation approach aligns with public relations strategies, emphasising thought leadership, knowledge dissemination, and institutional credibility. By engaging in such events, institutions gain recognition and position themselves as key players in the higher education sector. Moreover, this finding underscores the importance of external engagements in shaping institutional reputation. Conferences and seminars allow institutions to interact with potential students, partners, and policymakers, expanding the influence of HLIs

However, the effectiveness of this strategy is not solely dependent on the institution, but also on the active participation of the audience. Their engagement and feedback are crucial for the success of the strategy. Furthermore, the exchange of programmes

was a key benefit, ensuring corporate visibility in countries other than Tanzania. This

was particularly noted by Public Relations Professionals in some HLIs, who stated:

> *"We also have exchange programmes for students who perform well. For example, we have two students who are in Germany and two are in Finland" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant 1, Male, May 25, 2023).*

P1HLIH's statement indicates that academic excellence is a key criterion for student

exchange opportunities. The mention of Germany and Finland as destinations

suggests active international partnerships that enhance student mobility. Such

programs contribute to the institution's corporate visibility by showcasing its

commitment to academic excellence and global engagement. Moreover, they are

highly attractive for prospective students and stakeholders, offering them a unique

chance to experience quality education with international opportunities. Also, some

HLIs also participate in global ranking competition to assure corporation

representation globally which is essential in their corporate visibility illumination

among the communities worldwide. One of the Vice Chancellors in HLIs for

example, said:

> *"We participate in the global ranking competition, which is of two kinds; there is data-based and website-based. In data-based competition, we do submit data related to our research and lecturers' profiles, while in the case of websites, they have their way or criteria of assessing them. Therefore, it helps in ensuring corporate visibility. Our commitment to attracting international collaborations is a key driver of our participation in these competitions" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 5, Male, August 22, 2023).*

P5HLIA's response highlights the institution's commitment to attracting international collaborations through ranking systems, which involves comprehensive research data submission and faculty profiles, thereby contributing to its reputation. The use of independent criteria in website-based rankings further underscores the importance of a strong digital presence. The institution's emphasis on rankings is in line with its efforts to enhance institutional recognition and improve competitiveness in the higher education sector.

4.2.2 Corporate Identity Management

As shown in Table 4.4, some HLIs highlighted the strategic use of institutional branding as a key approach to enhancing corporate visibility. One participant explained that the institution had previously faced challenges due to inconsistent branding, where different colleges and schools operated with separate logos.

Table 4.4: Corporate Identity Management

PR Strategies	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Branding	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Corporate logo	2	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	7
Brand manual	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Source: Field data, 2023

To address this, a unified branding strategy was adopted, as expressed by one public relations professional:

> *"We strategically use our brand to enhance corporate visibility, a significant shift from the confusion of the past where each college and school had its logo. To reinforce this, we collectively decided to develop a single strategic slogan, 'One*

company, one logo.' Recently, all schools and constituent colleges have adopted the primary corporate logo in all their printouts, including uniforms like t-shirts and all other official documents" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023).

P1HLIA's statement underscores the institution's efforts to create a cohesive corporate identity, ensuring consistency in communication and public perception. By adopting a single corporate logo across all affiliated units, the institution strengthens its brand equity and enhances stakeholder recognition. The integration of this branding into uniforms, official documents, and promotional materials further reinforces corporate visibility, making the institution more recognizable and reputable. This approach aligns with best corporate communication practices, where branding uniformity fosters trust, credibility, and a strong institutional image. The institution's unwavering commitment to this branding strategy instills a sense of security and confidence in the audience about the institution's direction and future success.

In the same process of ensuring the public embraces the corporate logo, some HLIs provide memorabilia to people, a practice that significantly impacts their corporate identity. They also brand all their working facilities and materials, such as documents and uniforms like T-shirts. One of the PROs, for example, said:

"Whatever assistance we provide in tangible form, whether desks or any material we ensure is branded to communicate our identity, in this sense, the logo..." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023).

This responsibility often falls on the shoulders of our Public Relations Officers (PROs), who play a crucial role in ensuring our branding efforts are consistent and effective. In addition, some HLIs have even gone further by putting in place the brand manual, which stipulates how the logo and other matters related to branding should be used and presented to the public to maintain uniformity when doing institutional representation. For example, public relations professionals in some HLIs said:

> *"The brand manual provides guidelines on how and where the logo should be used. It also gives descriptions of the colours, both primary and secondary colours; it gives explanations on the type of colours to be used, for example, on t-shirts; it also explains what colours should be used in University sign boards and the like.."(Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023)*

P1HLIA's statement underscores the significant role of corporate identity management, particularly branding, in enhancing the visibility of organizations, especially HLIs, to the public. The data suggests that the use of a brand manual is crucial for maintaining the standard set for branding a particular University, thereby increasing its visibility.

4.2.3 Media Deployment

Media deployment, detailed in Table 4.5 was one the PR strategies HLIs use to enhance their corporate visibility. This indicates that media is essential in disseminating key messages to the target audiences. They serve as the mouthpieces of the HLIs and are also used as a means to acquire feedback from the public.

Table 4.5: Media Deployment

PR Strategies	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Media Deployment	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
Social media engagement	3	2	4	5	4	2	4	5	0	29
Mainstream Media	1	1	4	4	2	1	0	1	0	14

Source: Field data, 2023

Some participants explained the following about media engagement in the activities of HLIs:

> *"We often use several radio stations: East Africa, Radio Free Africa, 'Sauti ya Injili' in Kilimanjaro, Safina FM in Arusha, Chai FM and especially Clouds FM. For the case of TV, we use ITV and sometimes TBC1 (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023).*

The statement by P1HLIB reveals a comprehensive media strategy employed by the institution to enhance its visibility and reach a broad audience. By utilizing a variety of local radio and TV stations, the institution effectively taps into different regional and demographic audiences, ensuring that its messages are communicated to prospective students, parents and the broader public. This multi-platform approach allows the institution to maintain consistent public engagement across diverse media channels, demonstrating its unwavering commitment to reaching and engaging with all population segments, thereby making everyone feel included and valued.

Moreover, prominent stations like Clouds FM and ITV highlight the institution's focus on assuring well-established, widely recognized media outlets to build credibility and trust. Such media partnerships are particularly beneficial in boosting

brand recognition, generating awareness of academic programs, and promoting institutional achievements. This media outreach strategy helps the institution establish a strong local presence and inform the public about its developments. To optimize the effectiveness of this strategy, the university could integrate its media efforts with social media campaigns and digital platforms, extending its reach to a broader, digitally engaged audience. Nevertheless, on the same theme, one of the Vice Chancellors in the HLIs had also explained media deployment in their HLI, as quoted here under:

> *"In the three days of the research exhibition, the Communications Specialists invite media personnel for events coverage; media such as TBC, Azam and others get involved...and we are responsible for explaining this research. So, you can see how we cannot avoid corporate communication in our endeavours...." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 5, Male, August 22, 2023).*

P5HLIA's statement underscores the role of corporate communication in enhancing institutional visibility and promoting academic initiatives. By engaging media outlets such as TBC and Azam, the institution ensures widespread coverage of its research exhibition, extending its reach beyond the event and attracting public attention to its academic achievements. This aligns with a broader PR strategy that emphasizes media partnerships to showcase institutional capabilities and expertise, making the audience feel proud and supportive of the institution's achievements.

More so, the responsibility of communications specialists in explaining research to the media reflects the necessity of clear, consistent messaging to ensure accurate and effective dissemination of information. This highlights the critical role of PR

professionals in translating complex academic work into digestible formats for the general public, ensuring that the research is understood and appreciated by a wider audience. PR professionals play a crucial role in simplifying complex academic jargon, highlighting the significance of the research, and making it relatable to the public.

The statement also reinforces the idea that corporate communication is essential to the success of institutional events, as it helps bridge the gap between academic accomplishments and public recognition. To maximize the impact of such initiatives, the institution could further amplify its media coverage by utilizing social media platforms, press releases, and online publications, creating lasting visibility and engagement with its audience. Based on this theme, it ascertains that Media is a broad concept and since several Participants mentioned the media, the researcher of this study conceived an idea of exploring further categories of media that were used mainly by the HLIs in disseminating their institutional messages.

This could determine the most relevant media used to enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs. 'Corporate visibility' here refers to the public's awareness and perception of the institution, which is influenced by the media used for communication. The findings revealed that both main media categories were used despite their dissimilarities in terms of preferences; as indicated in Table 4.5, social media, which belongs to the online media category, acquired a significant number of mentions where (N=29) whereas the Mainstream media acquired (N=14). Participant 1 from Higher Learning Institution H highlights the role of social media in engaging the audience. He states for example:

> *"Social media is the most efficient form of communication because it is easy to conduct evaluations. When I post my advert, I can see how fast it goes viral. I can also get to know the number of people who like my advert and have shared or commented on it. I can also get feedback instantly...This emphasis on social media's interactive nature makes the audiences feel connected and involved in the institution's activities"* (Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant 1, Male, August 22, 2023).

The statement by P1HLIH indicates that the media have proved to be an effective means of ensuring the public acquires proper information about HLIs. The PROs have been using media, particularly social media, to keep society informed about the issues that concern HLIs.

4.2.4 Media Relations

An analysis of data presented in Table 4.6 reveals Media Relations as among the PR strategies used in the HLIs through the Public Relations and Communications Offices to enhance corporate visibility. It implies coordinating directly with media personnel responsible for producing the news, features and other media-related outputs in the media houses.

Table 4.6: Media Relations

Strategy Media Relations	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Media interviews	2	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	8
Networking	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Press conferences	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	5
Press tour	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Source: Field data, 2023

One aspect of media relations that most participants mentioned to be using was media interviews, which had (N=8) compared to other sub-themes under media relations, which were press conferences (N=5), networking (N=2) and press tours (N=2). Concerning the leading sub-theme under this category, some Public Relations professionals said:

> *"We also prepare documentaries and conduct media interviews during events like Sabasaba (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant1, Female, 27th March, 2023)*

P1HLIB's statement illustrates the institution's strategic use of multimedia, including videos, infographics, and podcasts, to enhance its visibility and communicate its involvement in significant events. By preparing documentaries, the institution creates a lasting visual record of its activities, ensuring that key messages and institutional achievements are captured and shared with a broad audience. This visual content can be a powerful tool for reinforcing the institution's brand, showcasing its impact and increasing engagement with current and prospective stakeholders.

Additionally, conducting media interviews during high-profile events like Sabasaba further amplifies the institution's presence in the public domain. Media interviews allow the institution's representatives to communicate their perspectives directly, highlight key initiatives, and address public inquiries in real time. These engagements are not just about enhancing credibility, they also serve to connect us directly with the public, fostering a sense of engagement and connection with our stakeholders.

Data also showed that HLIs ensured issues like networking and conducted press tours to ensure their relationships with media houses and media personnel flourish. Public Relations Professionals in some HLIs, for example, said the following:

> *"We do it in terms of 'internal training', organizing press conferences where necessary and media coverage… (Interview; Higher Learning Institution F, Participant1, Male, May 25, 2023)*

According to the P1HLIF statement, media relations are vital for HLIs as they help in maximising the positive reach of the target audiences in the communication channels. This underscores the crucial role of PROs in establishing good relationships with media personnel, which in turn, can help HLIs reduce their advertising costs. Chapter seven of this thesis report will explore this role of Public Relations Officers (PROs) in the context of media relations for HLIs.

4.2.5 Publications

An analysis of the data presented in Table 4.7 reveals that publications are among the strategies HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility. Two sub-themes emerged in this category: the public relations materials and research.

Table 4.7: Publications

PR Strategy	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Public Relations Materials	0	6	2	4	1	0	1	6	0	20
Research	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5

Source: Field data, 2023

Public relations materials had many mentions (N=20) compared to research publications (N=5). About this strategy, some participants, for example, said:

> *"We also visit the religious states 'majimbo' at central zones, specifically in Dodoma and Kondoa, also around the Lake zones, where we provide them with official letters and other publications, including advertisements, flyers of the programmes and services we offer (Interviews; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant1, Male, May 25, 2023)*

The quote by P1HLI H indicates that materials helped the HLIs to be visible among the public, especially those they target. Concerning the research publications, one of the Vice Chancellors in the HLIs said, for example:

> *"We tend to reveal the research findings to communities, and we use the Communications Department to disseminate the results and specifically the key messages of the findings...the department has helped us a lot in making sure research results reach the public" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Male, August 22, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIA indicates that publications, including PR materials, have played a crucial role in the expansion of HLIs. These materials, along with research, have helped to raise public awareness of the services and contributions of HLIs to society. This suggests that research activities are not only important for HLI expansion but also for enhancing corporate visibility.

Other public relations strategies that HLIs employ to enhance their corporate visibility among the public include marketing and advertising activities, standard customer care, project initiatives, and management. The invaluable insights and

efforts of public Relations Professionals from some Higher Learning Institutions, for example, are instrumental in this regard:

> *"For example, this year, we acquired about 92 projects. In these projects, the Communications Department helps us disseminate the results, winner categories and the like" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

The statement by P5HLIA underscores the crucial role of institutional communication in bolstering corporate visibility. The Communications Department, through its proactive efforts in disseminating project outcomes, achievements, and recognitions, ensures that the institution's contributions are acknowledged by key stakeholders, including students, researchers, funding bodies, and the general public. This aligns with strategic public relations practices that emphasize the power of storytelling, transparency, and stakeholder engagement in crafting a robust institutional reputation.

Furthermore, the statement suggests that visibility is not only about participating in projects but also about effectively communicating their impact. When institutions share success stories, research findings, and recognition, they enhance their credibility and attract potential collaborators, donors, and prospective students. However, the effectiveness of this strategy is contingent on the methods used, be it through traditional media, digital platforms, or direct stakeholder engagement, each playing a crucial role in reaching the target audience. A well-structured communication strategy ensures that these achievements contribute to long-term brand recognition and institutional prestige in the competitive higher education

sector. The 'other participant', who is a key figure in the field of institutional communication, also said the following regarding project initiatives and management as among the PR strategies HLIs use to enhance their corporate visibility among the public.

> *"We have a very popular project called HEET. In that particular project, we are recognized as communication experts, and our primary role is to do publicity"* (Interview, Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 3, Male, May 9, 2023).

Based on P3HLI A's statement, it underscores the strategic role of public relations in enhancing institutional visibility through project-based communication. By taking on the responsibility of publicity in the HEET project, the institution not only reinforces its expertise in communication but also strengthens its brand as a leader in the field. This demonstrates the institution's strong expertise in communication, which can serve as a platform for positioning the institution as an authoritative voice, increasing its recognition among stakeholders and instilling confidence in its capabilities.

4.3 Public Relations Strategy with Broader Activities

The findings exposed one of the Public relations strategies with broader activities. The strategy, namely public events, had emerged with several sub-themes mentioning extracurricular activities: sports bonanza, ceremonies, corporate social responsibilities (CSR), community relations, and exhibitions. The frequencies for each sub-theme are in the table below:

Table 4.8: Public Events

PR Strategy	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Public Events										
Sports Bonanza	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	6
Ceremonials	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other Internally Organized Parties	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Graduation	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Relations	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Teaching	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Public Service	4	2	2	0	2	2	1	2	0	15
Research	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Exhibitions	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Internally Organized	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	7
Small Exhibitions	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
General University Exhibitions	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Externally Organized	4	1	3	2	3	2	1	1	3	20

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 4.8 summarises the sub-themes that fall under the category of public events. It indicates that HLIs invest heavily in public events and that it adds significant value to corporate visibility. The PROs in the HLIs said, for example:

> *"We invite public speakers within and outside the country to discuss issues paramount in the current global economy and the like. Moreover, we offer a unique opportunity to delve into the intricacies of Pan Africanism ('Majumuiyo ya Africa') in our twice-yearly events: in June and when we commemorate Mwalimu Nyerere in October every year" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Prticipant2, Male, March 31, 2023).*

Since the public event theme had several sub-themes, the researcher conceived the idea of presenting the findings of each specific sub-theme for HLIs included in the study. They are as shown in the subsequent sections.

4.3.1 Ceremonials

As shown in Table 4.9, ceremonials are among the strategies deployed in the HLIs to

enhance their corporate visibility.

Table 4.9: Ceremonials

PR Strategy	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Ceremonials										
Other Internally Organized Parties	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Graduation	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Source: Field data, 2023

Some participants, for example said the following about the theme:

> *"We also use the opportunity of graduation as a strategy to make the institution visible to the public. The graduation ceremonies make us meet our various stakeholders; including the politicians who are influencers and decision-makers...we also meet parents of students in such events…" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution C, Participant2, April 10, 2023).*

The data indicate that the ceremonials and other internally organized parties, such as

the students' bashes, were not just events, but necessary components in helping the

HLIs establish good relationships with the public. This may make stakeholders refer

to chapter two of this report on the premises of the excellence theory. The discussion

about this strategy, however, will be further examined in chapter seven of this thesis

report.

4.3.2 Corporate Social Responsibilities

Evidence from Table 4.10 suggests that Corporate Social Responsibilities was among

the strategies HLIs use to enhance their corporate visibility. Some PROs, for

example said the following about the strategy:

"We take our science teachers to schools to teach science subjects...Also, we do invite the students to see our laboratories at the University" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 2, March 31, 2023)

Table 4.10: Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR)

PR Strategy	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Relations	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Teaching	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Public Service	4	2	2	0	2	2	1	2	0	15
Research	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4

Source: Field data, 2023

The statement by P2HLI A indicates that teaching was employed as a way of sharing expertise with communities that needed the service. It may also guarantee the preparation for HLIs' prospects in future. In the sub-theme of public service, some important quotes were noted, as shown below:

"Another example is an earthquake in Bukoba where, in the same scenario, our psychologists' experts were taken to the area to counsel people affected by the disaster" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant2, Male, March 31, 2023).

The statement by P1HLIA underscores the central role of higher learning institutions in community engagement and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as part of their visibility strategy. The institution's proactive involvement in societal issues, such as deploying psychological experts to support disaster victims, is a clear demonstration of its unwavering commitment to social impact. This commitment not only enhances

its reputation beyond academics but also reassures our professional colleagues and stakeholders, strengthening their trust and confidence in the institution.

Furthermore, this initiative illustrates how expertise-based interventions contribute to corporate visibility. Using its academic and professional resources to address real-world challenges, the institution fulfills its social responsibility and gains positive media coverage and public recognition. Such engagements create a strong institutional identity linked to humanitarian efforts, making the university more appealing to potential students, partners, and funding organizations.

The data also shows the role of higher learning institutions in community development and public relations-driven outreach initiatives. Supporting infrastructure projects such as building schools, hospitals, or community centers demonstrates the university's commitment to societal well-being and strengthens its public image as a socially responsible institution. One of the public relations professionals said:

> *"In Kilwa Kisiwani, the University, in support of regional municipal, the latrines were constructed; the essence of 'Magofu Marathon' in Kilwa…" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023).*

The statement by P1HLIA indicates that by supporting infrastructure projects such as latrine construction in Kilwa Kisiwani, the university demonstrates its unwavering commitment to societal well-being. This not only strengthens its public image as a socially responsible institution but also reassures the stakeholders of its dedication to

the community. This aligns with corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, which address community needs, enhance institutional visibility, and foster positive stakeholder relationships.

Additionally, the mention of the Magofu Marathon suggests using creative and engaging events to promote heritage and institutional branding. When associating with cultural and developmental initiatives, the university not only expands its reach to diverse audiences but also inspires optimism about its role in regional development. Such activities contribute to corporate visibility by reinforcing the institution's presence beyond academic spaces, positioning it as a key player in regional development. Another PR professional said the following regarding the strategy of Corporate Social Responsibility.

> *"Our students participate in events like the "Weka Fukwe Safi"*
> *project at Coco Beach, Oyster Bay, to clean the environment"*
> *(Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant 1,*
> *Female, March 27, 2023).*

P1HLIB's statement implies that when HLIs offer public services to surrounding communities, it fosters a sense of togetherness; it also makes the HLIs feel like they are part and parcel of society. Additionally, it provides an avenue for HLIs to create good relationships with the communities; that way, they might be accepted and eventually supported in various ways. This part makes stakeholders reflect on the premises for the excellence theory, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis report. On research projects as part of CSR activities in the HLIs, some PROs of particular HLIs, for example, said the following:

"For example, one of our scholars established his project, 'urithi wetu', operating in Kilwa and Bagamoyo to empower women entrepreneurs in those areas. Through the University's support and other partners like TAWA and one of the Universities in the UK, we constructed the museum for handmade products in Bagamoyo" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023).

The statement by P1HLIA highlights the university's active role in supporting community empowerment initiatives and enhancing its corporate visibility through impactful partnerships. By backing projects like 'Urithi Wetu', which empowers women entrepreneurs, the institution not only contributes to societal development but also reassures the audience of its commitment to addressing community needs. This initiative reflects the university's unwavering dedication to fostering gender equality and promoting sustainable economic development.

Moreover, the collaboration with partners such as TAWA and a UK university exemplifies the importance of building international partnerships to enhance the university's global presence. The museum's construction for handmade products in Bagamoyo not only solidifies the university's role in preserving cultural heritage but also instills a sense of pride and connection to the institution's values. Through such initiatives, the institution can generate positive media coverage, enhance its brand image, and attract local and international attention.

The data above clearly indicate the significant benefits HLIs can gain from participating in CSR activities. These initiatives are not just about corporate social responsibility, but also about integrating HLIs into society. They create a sense of belonging and foster good relationships, which are the essence of the PR Profession

as highlighted by PR gurus (please refer to chapters one and two of this thesis report). The discussion about this strategy will be extended in the following chapters, specifically in chapter seven of this report. The researcher presents the other PR strategies HLIs deploy in the following section to enhance their corporate visibility. That strategy is an exhibition.

4.3.3 Exhibitions

Table 4.12 presents the Exhibition as one of the PR strategies used in the HLIs to boost their corporate visibility. The table shows that the exhibitions were of two types: internally organised and externally organised. Each type will be comprehensively discussed in chapter seven, ensuring that the audience gains a deep understanding of these strategies.

Table 4.11: Exhibitions

PR Strategy	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Exhibitions	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Internally Organized	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	7
Small Exhibitions	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
General University Exhibitions	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
Externally Organized	4	1	3	2	3	2	1	1	3	20

Source: Field data, 2023

The respondents, in general, described the following as examples of exhibition activities:

> *"During admissions, we exhibit on more populated grounds like 'Stone Town' and Kisonge (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant1, Male, July 12, 2023)*

The quote by P1HLIG highlights a strategic public relations approach to corporate visibility through targeted outreach. By choosing high-traffic exhibition locations, the institution maximizes exposure to potential students, parents, and other stakeholders, ensuring broader engagement. This approach values the role of audience in the strategy, reflecting a proactive marketing strategy to increase enrollment and strengthen institutional recognition in competitive higher education markets.

Moreover, this approach demonstrates the importance of location-based visibility in student recruitment efforts. Engaging with prospective students in familiar and accessible environments enhances brand recall, the ability of a consumer to remember a brand, and fosters direct interaction, allowing the institution to address inquiries, showcase programs, and build trust. In the same theme, another public relations professional said: The quote by P1HLIG highlights a strategic public relations approach to corporate visibility through targeted outreach. By choosing high-traffic exhibition locations, the institution maximizes exposure to potential students, parents, and other stakeholders, ensuring broader engagement. It reflects a proactive marketing strategy to increase enrollment and strengthen institutional recognition in competitive higher education markets.

Moreover, this approach demonstrates the importance of location-based visibility in student recruitment efforts. Engaging with prospective students in familiar and accessible environments enhances brand recall and fosters direct interaction,

allowing the institution to address inquiries, showcase programs, and build trust. In the same theme, another public relations professional, for example, said:

> *"We participate in exhibitions like TCU, NACTEVET .... And East Africa exhibitions are conducted in Arusha annually"* *(Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant1, Male, May 25, 2023)*

The quote by P1HLIH serves as a testament to the proactive nature of HLIs, who have been actively participating in and organizing exhibition activities to engage with stakeholders and other interested individuals. Through their PR departments, these institutions have been using such platforms to significantly boost their corporate visibility, thereby raising public awareness and acquiring publicity through various means such as PR materials and media platforms. Furthermore, the data indicates that HLIs, through their Departments of PR and Communications, have been utilizing strategic communications to enhance their corporate visibility. Notably, the Vice Chancellors in the HLIs have been actively involved in these efforts, as one of them expressed:

> *"Communication specialists explain complex issues in a language everyone can understand; for example, the language of engineers or other professional jargon can easily be digested and disseminated to society by Communication and PR specialists (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

The quote by P5HLIA underscores the fundamental role of communication and public relations (PR) specialists in bridging the gap between technical knowledge and public understanding. By simplifying specialized jargon and making complex

information accessible, communication experts ensure that institutional messages reach diverse audiences effectively. This function is crucial in higher learning institutions, where academic and research outputs must be communicated clearly to policymakers, industry stakeholders, students, and the general public. The work of these specialists significantly enhances the visibility of these institutions, making their contributions more widely known and appreciated.

Furthermore, it underscores the strategic importance of PR in knowledge translation and public engagement. Without effective communication, valuable research and institutional contributions may go unnoticed or misunderstood. By acting as mediators between experts and the public, communication specialists play a crucial role in enhancing transparency, building trust, and positioning the institution as a thought leader in various fields. Their work ensures the security and reliability of the institution's communications, fostering trust among stakeholders and the public. Another Public Relations Professional also had some views concerning strategic communications. He, for example said:

> *"We strategically communicate and convince employers to provide space for intern or field practice" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 2, Male, March 31, 2023)*

The statement by P2HLIA underscores the positive impact of strategic communications in fostering strong relationships among students, colleagues, and other stakeholders. It also suggests that strategic communications play an essential role in nurturing a sense of trust and support within educational institutions, paving

the way for a more optimistic future. The other public relations strategy deployed in the HLIs was extracurricular activities and/or sports bonanza to enhance the HLIs' corporate visibility in a larger community. Some participants in this study, specifically the Presidents of the Students' Association and Public Relations Officers, said the following as examples:

> *"We also organize sports activities in collaboration with other constituent colleges" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant3, Male, May 10, 2023)*

It's worth noting that HLIs offer a diverse range of scholarships, catering to different student profiles. Some are geared towards sports enthusiasts, while others are based on academic achievements. A Public Relations Practitioner shed light on this, stating:

> *"We do offer scholarships from our internally generated funds. These scholarships come in three unique forms. The first is a merit scholarship, tailored for freshers with exceptional performance. The second, a standout 'African-Swahili' scholarship, is open to African scholars worldwide interested in pursuing MA Kiswahili at our University. The third type is a scholarship designed for students from underprivileged or disadvantaged backgrounds" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant2, Male, May 10, 2023)*

P2HLIA's statement highlights the institution's strategic use of scholarships as a public relations tool to enhance corporate visibility and attract a diverse student population. For instance, the merit scholarship has attracted high-achieving students from across the globe, while the African-Swahili scholarship has increased the institution's influence in Kiswahili studies globally. By funding scholarships through internal resources, the institution demonstrates financial sustainability and showcases

its commitment to academic excellence, cultural promotion, and social responsibility. This initiative strengthens the institution's reputation both locally and internationally. The merit scholarship positions the university as a centre for academic excellence, attracting high-achieving students, while the African-Swahili scholarship promotes linguistic and cultural exchange, significantly increasing the institution's influence in Kiswahili studies globally. The scholarship for disadvantaged students reflects a commitment to social inclusion and equity, which enhances public trust and strengthens community ties. On the same theme of scholarship, the public relations professional from the same university said, for example:

> *"We also liaise with other institutions that are in a position to assist these students; for example, there are times we get requests from about 100 students, and we actually can assist only 30 students; hence, other funding institutions support the remaining ones. These institutions include "Help to Help", "More Foundation", "Flavian Matata Foundation", NMB, EXIM and CRDB...These are our corporate stakeholders..." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Partcipant2, Male, March 31, 2023)*

It indicates that beyond the extracurricular activities and scholarship offers, HLIs play a crucial role in strengthening their relationship with the public, particularly students. These initiatives not only integrate the public, especially the scholarship beneficiaries, into the fabric of the HLIs but also transform them into ambassadors for the institutions. This transformation significantly contributes to attracting more prospects to join the HLIs.

Generally, this chapter enhanced several PR Strategies that HLIs employed to enhance their corporate visibility. Notably, the data revealed that public events

emerged as the most prevalent strategy, surpassing other strategies in effectiveness. In the subsequent chapter, the study will delve into the findings for research objective number two and its guiding question.

CHAPTER FIVE

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTATION FOR CORPORATE VISIBILITY

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents, analyzes and interprets the research findings related to the second specific research objective, which focuses on implementing public relations strategies in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) to enhance corporate visibility. The chapter seeks to answer the guiding research question concerning how these institutions put into practice various public relations initiatives aimed at improving their corporate visibility. The findings in this chapter build upon the strategies identified in chapter four, moving beyond identifying strategies to examine their practical application within HLIs. The analysis draws on the data collected from respondents and provides valuable insights into the challenges, successes, and best practices in the implementation process. These insights highlight the practical value of the research.

Furthermore, this chapter links with chapter two, which reviews the literature on public relations strategy implementation in HLIs' settings and sets the foundation for chapter eight, which provides the summary, conclusion and recommendations. Therefore, including this chapter is essential as it addresses one of the central objectives of the study and contributes significantly to understanding the operational aspects of public relations for corporate visibility in higher learning institutions.

5.2 Implementation of Public Relations Strategies in HLIs.

Data show that HLIs have different ways of implementing strategies to enhance their corporate visibility. Some specific sub-themes emerged about the implementation of the PR strategies. These include organizing and coordinating communication activities and the Use of Communication Channels. In addition, the HLIs, through their Public Relations Units, affirmed that implementing the Public Relations strategies would not have been smoothly handled without other institutions' support. Considering that fact, the researcher conceived an idea to explore the latter. Therefore, other sub-themes emerged in the institutional support, which, will be presented in this section. However, the implementation of public relations strategies in HLIs was not without its challenges. The researcher, recognizing the significance of these hurdles, was motivated to thoroughly explore and address them. Table 5.1 provides a comprehensive overview of the PR strategies' implementation in HLIs, while tables 5.2.1 to 5.2.3 specifically detail various approaches to their implementation.

Table 5.1: Implementation of Public Relations Strategies in the Higher Learning Institutions

Approach	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Organizing and Coordinating Communication Activities	6	4	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	14
Institutional Support to PR Units	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Use of Communication Channels	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	5

Source: Field data, 2023

5.2.1 Organizing and Coordinating Communication Activities

Data showed that HLIs involved the Public Relations and Communications Departments or Units in organizing and coordinating the communication activities in whatever activity was taking place within the given HLIs, as described in the table hereunder.

Table 5.2: Organizing and Coordinating Communication Activities

Approach	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Organizing and Coordinating Communication Activities	7	4	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	15

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 5.2 shows that some HLIs have overtly been organizing and coordinating activities related to communications and public relations, as stated by some of the respondents in the study. One of the Vice Chancellors in one of the HLIs, for instance, said:

> *"The Communications Unit is a necessary office with a mission to connect the HLIs and society at large. We have heard the concerns about our research results being stored in desks and libraries, and we are committed to changing this. We understand that it is our responsibility to inform society and make our research results accessible. The Communications and Marketing unit is instrumental in this, helping universities disseminate research results that address societal problems. (Higher Learning Institution A, Participant5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

P5HLIA's statement underscores the crucial role of the Communications Unit in bridging the gap between academia and society. The concern that research findings

remain inaccessible in libraries and offices highlights the longstanding challenge of knowledge dissemination in higher learning institutions. By actively ensuring that research results reach the public, the Communications Unit not only enhances the institution's relevance and visibility but also demonstrates its unwavering commitment to solving real-world problems.

Furthermore, this statement reflects the strategic function of corporate communication in public engagement and institutional branding. Universities that effectively share their research outputs with policymakers, industry stakeholders, and the general public strengthen their reputation as knowledge-driven institutions contributing to societal development. The Communications and Marketing Unit plays a crucial role in this process, as it is responsible for translating complex research findings into accessible formats. It utilizes media platforms, public forums and digital channels to maximize outreach, ensuring that the research is not only disseminated but also understood by a wider audience. The participants continued to elaborate on the implementation of the PR strategies in the HLIs based on the activities the HLIs manage, in this case, the projects; he said:

> *"For example, this year, we acquired about 92 projects. So, the Communications Department helps us disseminate the results, winner categories and the like (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

The statement by P5HLIA underscores the essential role of the Communications Department in ensuring that research and project outcomes are effectively disseminated, reaching beyond academic circles. With numerous projects, the

effective dissemination of results becomes crucial for showcasing the institution's research impact, attracting funding opportunities, and reinforcing credibility among stakeholders. This process not only enhances public awareness of the institution's achievements but also strengthens its reputation as a centre of innovation and knowledge production.

Furthermore, the mention of winner categories implies a sense of recognition and celebration, which contributes to institutional branding and serves as a motivation for researchers. By publicizing these achievements through various media platforms, including digital channels, traditional press, and public forums, the University can significantly expand its reach and influence. To ensure that its contributions to research and development are widely acknowledged, the institution should adopt a comprehensive multi-channel communication strategy, incorporating social media storytelling, documentary features, and strategic partnerships with mainstream media.

> *"The corporate communication unit of the University is still responsible for coordinating the communication activities of all campuses" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

The statement by P5HLIA indicates that PR Departments are not just important, but also proactive in organizations such as the HLIs. They take the lead in organizing and coordinating communication activities, preparing plans and campaigns that encompass a series of activities to ensure the illumination of the HLIs. They also show initiative by participating in organizing and coordinating activities done by

other Departments whenever they realize there is an opportunity to enhance the institutions' images. In the following section, the other way that HLIs implement their PR strategies to enhance their corporate visibility will be presented.

5.2.2 Institutional Support to Public Relations Units

Data showed that public relations strategies could not have been thoroughly implemented without the support of other institutions' units. Based on the obtained data, institutional support was divided into three sub-themes: financial support, resource support, and information support. All three are illustrated in the table below.

Table 5.3: Institutional Support to Public Relations Unit

Approach	HLI									Total
Institutional Support to PR Units	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Financial Support	12	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	9
Resource Support	3	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	0	13
Information Support	4	1	2	1	2	0	1	2	0	13

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 5.3 demonstrates a balanced distribution of support types, with resource support and information support leading equally with the same number of mentions (N). This balance ensures fairness in the provision of support. Each had (N=13) mentions, while financial support had (N=11). In terms of general institutional support, the Public Relations Professionals, for example, expressed:

> *"So we work in collaboration with respective units. For example, during 'Sabasaba' we engaged the Directorate of Undergraduate; during Innovation week, we engaged the Directorate of Innovation and Research issues; and during*

> *'NaneNane', the College of Agriculture actively participated and we greatly appreciated their involvement, and in TCU events, we invited admission people to explain to the visitors about the programmes we offer, both postgraduate and undergraduate"* (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant3, Male, May 9, 2023)

The statement by P3HLIA underscores the critical importance of cross-departmental collaboration in enhancing corporate visibility and public engagement. When strategically involving relevant units in significant events, the institution ensures its messaging is targeted and effective, aligning institutional communication with specific audiences and thematic areas. This highlights the urgency and significance of your role in the organization.

This approach underscores the institution's unwavering commitment to integrated communication, where different departments contribute their expertise to create a cohesive and impactful presence. Engaging the Directorate of Undergraduate Studies at Sabasaba, the Directorate of Innovation and Research during Innovation Week and the College of Agriculture at NaneNane ensures that each event effectively showcases the institution's strengths in the most relevant areas.

Moreover, inviting the admissions team to TCU events ensures prospective students receive accurate and comprehensive information, strengthening recruitment efforts. To maximize visibility, the institution should complement these physical engagements with digital marketing, live event coverage, and post-event media content to extend reach and engagement beyond the immediate audience. In the same theme, one of the Public Relations Professionals, for example said:

> *"We also get cooperation from trade organizations, Students' organizations and others" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant2, Male, March 31, 2023)*

The statement by P2HLIA indicates that, generally, the PR units acquire support from the various offices within the HLIs. According to interview accounts, several issues about institutional support for PR offices in implementing PR strategies were raised. One was financial support, which is presented in this chapter's introductory part. Data showed that financial support is essential in public relations departments as it helps manage and improve the reputation and profile of the organization with stakeholders, including investors, regulatory authorities, and the general public. It is particularly crucial in creating a positive image, building trust and credibility, and driving value for the organization, Professionals for example said:

> *"Some schools may provide financial support to pay additional exhibitors and booths during events such as exhibitions" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant1, Female, March 27, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIA reiterates the strategic investment made by different schools within the institution to enhance visibility and engagement during public events. By allocating financial resources for extra exhibitors and booths, these schools demonstrate their recognition of the value of exhibitions as platforms for showcasing academic programs, research achievements, and institutional strengths. This financial commitment ensures a more prominent institutional presence, attracting prospective students, industry partners, and the general public. Additionally, this statement reflects the collaborative nature of institutional branding,

where different academic units contribute to a shared goal of increasing corporate visibility. By investing in well-structured and interactive exhibition spaces, the institution can create a lasting impression on stakeholders and differentiate itself in a fiercely competitive higher education landscape. This differentiation is a testament to our unique value.

To maximize impact, the institution should integrate digital engagement strategies, such as live streaming, virtual tours and social media interactions, ensuring that the benefits of these exhibitions extend beyond physical attendees to a broader audience. On the same theme, one of the VCs commented that the PR units get financial support to handle its various activities. The VC, for example, said:

> *"The Directorate has its budget, and the coordinator coordinates and arranges budgeting issues about the activities that the Directorate intends to undertake in a particular period" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

The statement by P5HLIA emphasizes structured financial planning and administrative coordination within the institution. By having a dedicated budget and a coordinator, the Directorate ensures that planned activities are well-organized, financially sustainable and aligned with institutional objectives. The coordinator plays a crucial role in overseeing the budget, ensuring its alignment with institutional goals, and coordinating with various departments to execute planned activities. This structured approach enhances efficiency in resource allocation and allows the institution to execute strategic initiatives effectively.

Moreover, this statement underscores the role of financial planning in promoting transparency and accountability. A well-managed budget enables the Directorate to fund key activities such as research dissemination, public relations efforts, and outreach programs, all of which contribute to strengthening the institution's presence and reputation. For the Directorate to maximize the impact, it should integrate financial planning with strategic communication, ensuring that budgeted activities align with broader institutional branding and visibility goals. This emphasis on transparency and accountability in budget utilization can enhance stakeholder trust and attract further funding or partnerships to support institutional growth, making stakeholders feel secure and confident in the institution's operations. Based on the data obtained from the field, the second institutional support extended to Public Relations Departments was resources. This included materials like equipment, furnished offices, and human resources. The Public Relations Professionals in some HLIs, for example said:

> *"I get support from specific units like admissions and faculties. Their understanding of the importance of PR and communications is invaluable. Mass Communication students also assist me a lot, and their contributions, such as helping me take photos and shoot videos during events, are highly impactful (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 1, Male, July 12, 2023)*

P1HLIG's statement highlights the institution's collaborative nature of public relations (PR) efforts. Acknowledging support from admissions and faculties signifies an institutional culture that values PR and communication as essential for illuminating corporate visibility. The involvement of multiple units ensures a

coordinated approach in promoting the university's activities, from student recruitment to academic achievements and public engagement.

Furthermore, the engagement of Mass Communication students in PR activities is not just a theoretical concept, but a practical learning approach that engages and interests the audience. This hands-on experience in media production not only contributes to institutional visibility but also equips students with industry-relevant skills, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship. To further enhance this collaboration, the institution could formalize student involvement through structured internship programs, media clubs, or PR workshops, ensuring sustainability and professional development while strengthening its branding and outreach efforts. Also, data showed, in some instances, that public relations is a function that various other people within the institution can partly perform. One of the Public Relations Professionals, for example said:

> *"Also, we have contact persons who voluntarily oversee all communication issues within the schools and colleges (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant3, Male, July 12, 2023)*

The statement by P3HLIA suggests that individual participation in enhancing institutional image and reputation is a voluntary act. It further indicates that when individuals choose to participate in PR activities, they are not only helping the PR offices and the general HLI, but also inspiring others to contribute to the goal of illuminating corporate visibility.

Lastly, the support extracted from the interview extracts was primarily information support. Several Public Relations Professionals acknowledged that they were able to successfully implement the Public Relations strategies due to the support they received from other departments and individual members within the institutions. This recognition of their role and expertise was evident in the statements of public Relations Professionals in some HLIs, for example:

> *"I also get support from my fellow staff members. We work as a team, always ready to offer a helping hand and support each other in disseminating information. They use the mediums of posters and tweets to let people within their networks understand what the institution is always up to, like the admissions and so forth" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant1, Male, May 25, 2023)*

Statement by P1HLIH highlights the collaborative approach to public relations and corporate communication within the institution. Staff members' willingness to actively participate in information dissemination reflects a shared responsibility in promoting the University's visibility and engagement with stakeholders. This decentralized communication model, which allows for wider reach and ensures that key messages, such as admissions updates, are effectively communicated to diverse audiences, also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among staff members, leading to more effective and engaging communication.

Moreover, social media platforms like Twitter play a crucial role in enhancing the institution's digital presence, making information more accessible and engaging to prospective students, partners, and the general public. The informal yet impactful role of staff members as brand ambassadors reinforces the importance of internal

engagement in corporate visibility efforts. To further strengthen this approach, the institution could implement structured internal communication strategies, such as training sessions on digital PR, creating official content-sharing guidelines, and encouraging staff participation in institutional campaigns. This would ensure consistency in messaging while maximizing the institution's reach and reputation. Another public relations professional added on the same theme as he was quoted saying, for example:

> *"We engage in a collaborative information sharing process with other offices. They, for instance, provide us with details about their events and occasionally, they disclose their plans for our scrutiny. This allows us to suggest how communication elements can be integrated into their plans and activities". (Interview; Higher Learning Institution E, Participant 2, Female, August 22, 2023)*

The statement by P2HLIE indicates that some units in the HLIs understand the importance of corporate communications matters, which is why they support the PR department, as shown above. It further emphasizes the collaborative nature of communication efforts within the institution and highlights how different departments actively engage with the communications unit, sharing information about their activities and plans. This partnership, which you are an integral part of, allows the communications team to ensure that strategic communication elements are embedded in various institutional initiatives, enhancing coordination and ensuring consistency in messaging. Through strategic scrutiny and incorporation of communication elements into plans and activities from other offices, the communications team ensures that the institution's branding, visibility and outreach

goals are met across different departments. This proactive involvement strengthens the integration of PR strategies into the institution's daily operations, ensuring that all activities align with broader institutional objectives. To enhance the effectiveness of this approach, the institution could formalize these cross-departmental collaborations through regular planning meetings, joint workshops and communication protocols, ensuring a seamless and consistent flow of information across all levels. In the following section, another way that HLIs are used to implement the PR strategies will be presented.

5.2.3 Use of Communication Channels

This section delves into the diverse range of communication channels identified and the strategic implementation of public relations in the HLIs. The data reveals a rich variety of communication channels that were utilized to ensure the objectives of enhancing the HLIs' corporate visibility were met. The theme of communication channels had two main sub-themes: traditional media (mainstream) and online media. The traditional media was further divided into print media (N=13) and broadcast media (N=16). Online media, including websites (N=10) and social media (N=37), offered a wide array of options. The Notice Board, while the least used, still added to the diversity with a count of (N=2).

Table 5.4: Communication Channels

Communication Channels	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Use of Communication Channels	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	5
Traditional Media	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Print Media	4	1	2	4	2	0	0	0	0	13
Broadcast Media	3	2	2	4	2	1	1	1	0	16
Use of Notice board	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Online Media	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Website	3	0	2	1	2	1	0	1	0	10
Social Media	6	4	2	6	5	4	4	6	0	37

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 5.4 demonstrates the diverse range of communication channels employed in HLIs to bolster institutional corporate visibility. The most utilized mass media is social media (N=37), followed by broadcast media (N=16), print media (N=13), Websites (N=10), and the least Notice Board (N=2). The following section presents key quotes that shed light on the use of these communication channels in HLIs.

> *"For internal communication, we still use notice boards, while for external communication; we use e-posters to share information through social media. These e-posters, while primarily for certain achievements, appointments or celebrations, also serve as a personal touch for seasonal greetings like New Year and the like. However, we utilise our website the most. Somewhere, the emphasis was on social media, but we realised we could not reach all our target audiences; hence, now we put more emphasis on the website. The website can accommodate more information like feature articles and several pictures; we also put links that can direct readers to particular schools or colleges for more information. We also use newspapers and our institutional media to share information."(Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant1, Female, March 27, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIA highlights a strategic shift in the institution's communication approach. Initially, the institution relied on social media for external

communication but later realized that it did not effectively reach all target audiences. Consequently, the emphasis was shifted towards using the website as the primary communication platform. This platform allows for more in-depth content, such as feature articles, photos, and links to other departments or programs, reflecting the institution's commitment to providing comprehensive and accessible information. This shift also reflects a more nuanced understanding of the need for diversified communication channels to cater to different audience needs.

The use of notice boards for internal communication reflects traditional methods still in practice, especially for reaching on-campus staff and students. However, a more modern and dynamic approach is taken for external communication, with e-posters for seasonal greetings and newspapers for broader coverage. The institution's website serves as the central hub, allowing for detailed, organized, and accessible content, which enhances the University's digital presence.

Integrating traditional and digital media channels ensures a comprehensive communication strategy that accommodates different audience preferences. To maximize effectiveness, the institution could explore expanding its digital engagement through tools like email newsletters, blogs, and online webinars, further strengthening its online presence and making it easier to reach diverse stakeholders. Another participant added to the same theme, he said for example:

> *"We organize and coordinate radio programmes and use social media like Instagram and Facebook to reach our target audience. We also primarily use WhatsApp groups" (Interview;*

Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 1, Male, July 12, 2023)

The statement by P1HLIG highlights the institution's strategic use of various communication channels to engage its target audience. Integrating traditional media, such as radio programs, with modern digital platforms like social media (Instagram and Facebook) and messaging apps (WhatsApp) illustrates a forward-thinking, multi-channel approach. This approach ensures that the institution is not only reaching diverse demographics, including students, staff, and the broader community, but also staying connected to current trends, making the audience feel engaged and connected.

The institution effectively expands its reach and enhances its visibility across different audience segments by utilising these platforms. Radio programs provide an opportunity for in-depth discussions and community engagement, while social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook help target younger, digitally active audiences. WhatsApp groups, often used for more direct and informal communication, help foster a sense of community and keep audiences engaged in real time.

This strategic blend of traditional and digital media has been successful, and there is potential for further engagement. The institution could explore and integrate content such as podcasts, live-streaming events, or interactive online discussions to increase engagement and visibility across all platforms, fostering an optimistic outlook for future improvements. Considering that social media was the most used media to

assist the implementation of public relations strategies, the researcher conceived the idea of exploring further why social media was preferred over other media. One of the Public Relations Professionals, for example said:

> *"Social media have a significant impact and are cheap compared to other media" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant 1, Male, May 25, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIH reflects the growing recognition of social media as a powerful and cost-effective communication tool for higher learning institutions. Social media's low cost, particularly compared to traditional media outlets like television, radio, or print, empowers the institution to reach a broad audience without significant financial investment. This affordability puts the institution in control, especially for those with limited marketing or PR budgets, allowing them to be proactive in their communication strategies.

The high impact of social media is also emphasized, as platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter provide an opportunity for immediate, direct engagement with students, faculty, prospective applicants, and the broader community. Social media's viral nature further enhances its reach, allowing content to spread quickly and reach audiences beyond the institution's immediate followers. When prioritizing social media in their communication strategies, institutions can increase visibility, engage with a younger, tech-savvy demographic, and effectively promote events, programs and institutional news. However, to maximize this impact, institutions should not just adopt social media, but continuously refine their strategies, assess their audience, and adjust their content to maintain relevance and interest. This

dynamic approach is crucial in the ever-changing landscape of social media engagement.

> *"Somewhere, the emphasis was on social media, but we came to realize we could not reach all of our target audiences" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIA suggests that HLIs, through their communications or public relations units, should consider deploying a variety of media or conducting media analysis and scheduling. It's important to adopt comprehensive media strategies that take into account the target audience, as this holistic approach can lead to better PR outcomes. For example, one Public Relations Officer emphasized conducting audience and media research to get the best result for the PR Campaign. The officer said for example:

> *"As a PR expert, I bring a strategic approach to media issues, particularly in the selection of media for specific campaigns. My preference for Clouds Media, particularly for mainstream media like radio, is a strategic one, as it is a platform that resonates with the youth. I carefully select programmes that are most appealing to the youth, such as Amplifier, Power Breakfast, and Jahazi, as they are my primary target audience" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLI A, a seasoned PR expert, demonstrates a strategic and targeted approach to media selection in public relations. The expert's emphasis on understanding the audience and selecting media platforms that best reach that demographic instills confidence in the effectiveness of the strategy. By choosing

Clouds Media, known for attracting a youthful audience, the institution can effectively engage with its primary target group, young people, particularly students. The focus on specific radio programs like Amplifier, Power Breakfast and 'Jahazi' highlights the adaptable approach to communication, ensuring that the content resonates with the interests and preferences of youth in various contexts. This strategy increases the relevance of the messages and maximizes the likelihood of engagement and impact. The PR expert's awareness of media consumption habits is critical in crafting campaigns that effectively capture the desired audience's attention. To further strengthen this approach, the institution could supplement traditional media engagement with digital platforms and social media, where young people are increasingly active, ensuring a well-rounded and comprehensive communication strategy.

Also, data showed that implementing the public relations strategies was not without their implementation bottleneck. The challenges PRPs encountered when implementing the PR strategies included inadequate resources with its sub-themes, namely human resources, fiscal and material resources, and the challenges of decoupled strategies. The other sub-themes that emerged were communication policies and communication strategy. Communication strategies comprised of thorough situational analysis and non-organized communication strategies are sub-themes under the category of communication strategies. Each category is presented below with their frequencies in tables:

Table 5.5: Realized Implementation Bottleneck

Implementation Bottleneck	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Inadequate Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Decoupled Strategies	1	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	7
Material Resources	5	2	4	4	2	0	1	0	1	19
Fiscal Resources	1	8	3	5	3	1	2	1	1	25
Human Resources	6	5	4	5	4	1	3	4	1	33

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 5.5 presents the implementation bottleneck for Public Relations strategies in HLIs, primarily due to inadequate resources. Human Resources (N=33) was the most significant bottleneck, followed by Fiscal Resources (N=25), Material Resources (N=19), and Decoupled Strategies (N=7). The shortage of human resources is not just a statistic, but a real issue affecting the work of Public Relations Professionals in HLIs, as their voices reveals:

"Employ competent and qualified staff" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution D, Participant 1, Female, May 23, 2023)

The statement by P1HLID underscores the fundamental importance of having skilled personnel within the institution to ensure the effective execution of public relations strategies. Competent and qualified staff members are key to successful communication campaigns, as they bring expertise in media relations, strategic communication, crisis management, and audience engagement. Their role is crucial in ensuring the institution's messages are transparent, credible, and delivered through the appropriate channels, thereby enhancing the institution's public image and reputation.

When HLIs prioritize recruiting qualified professionals, the institution can enhance its PR efforts, increase its corporate visibility, and foster stronger relationships with its stakeholders. Additionally, skilled staff members are essential in analyzing communication outcomes, adjusting strategies for better engagement, and most importantly, in maintaining a positive institutional reputation. This underscores the crucial role of PR professionals in shaping public perception. To further build on this, the institution could invest in continuous professional development and training programs for its staff to ensure they remain at the forefront of the ever-evolving public relations and communication strategies.

> *"We are just five professionals within the unit and have to serve a large community of approximately 5000 individuals" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 3, Male, May 9, 2023)*

P3HLIA's statement highlights the challenge of managing public relations with a limited team while serving a sizable institutional community. With only five professionals responsible for communication efforts for over 5000 individuals, the unit faces significant workload pressures. To address this, the team can effectively manage resources by, for example, influencing partnerships with faculty and student organisations to disseminate information to reduce the burden on the core PR team, prioritising tasks such as focusing on high-impact activities like institutional branding and communication crisis.

Furthermore, strategically delegate responsibilities like assigning faculty representatives or departmental liaisons to act as points of contact for internal

communication. This will ensure that key messages are communicated efficiently and that the institution's visibility remains high despite the limited staff. Also, the disparity between the small team and the large audience underscores the need for using technological tools and collaborative strategies to maximize the impact of their efforts. The team could utilize automation tools for social media management, newsletters, and event promotion to streamline communication processes.

Moreover, collaboration with other departments or student volunteers, as seen in other responses, could help expand the reach of PR efforts. This potential for collaboration offers hope and a way forward, underscoring the importance of prioritizing key communication goals and integrating both traditional and digital platforms to maximize outreach within the constraints of available resources. One of the public relations professionals added to the theme, he said for example:

> *"We should increase the workforce. For example, getting international students requires more investment in the Internet, and that can only be possible when there is a labour force. Therefore, I wish my office to expand by having more co-workers; working alone has always been tiresome and negatively impacts my work performance. Imagine I am the one who also deals with internationalization and even permits issues ... You may, therefore, find me around migration offices most of the time instead of focusing on my professional matters…"*
> *(Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 1, Male, July 12, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIG, a respected figure in the field of public relations, emphasizes the strain that a limited workforce places on the effectiveness and efficiency of public relations work. The participant's concern illustrates how the

heavy workload, especially when managing multiple complex tasks such as internationalization and permit issues, diverts focus from core PR responsibilities. The need for more staff is critical, as the current system forces the individual to juggle responsibilities that could impact their work quality and job satisfaction.

The participant highlights a key point about resource allocation: attracting international students and investing in infrastructure, like Internet connectivity, which requires sufficient human and financial resources. Expanding the team would reduce the burden on the existing staff and allow for more focused and strategic efforts in enhancing the institution's PR and international relations. To address this challenge, the institution could consider staffing expansion, redistributing responsibilities, or investing in cutting-edge support technologies to enhance efficiency and streamline workflows, ushering in a new era of PR management. From the same standpoint, public relations professionals in some higher learning institutions (HLIs) attested that other professionals carried out their roles because they were overloaded. In some instances, the PR Professionals lacked skills, for example, those related to Information, Communication Technologies (ICT).

> *"It is known that IT people are technicians. They therefore do not understand the importance of news immediacy and other PR issues" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant2, Male, April 4, 2023)*

P2HLIH's statement reflects a common challenge in many organizations: a gap in understanding between technical teams (like IT) and communication professionals (like PR staff). While essential for the technical aspects of infrastructure and support,

the comment underscores how IT professionals may not fully grasp the urgency or nuances associated with public relations, notably regarding timely communication and the need for swift dissemination of information.

This misunderstanding can create barriers to effective collaboration between departments, especially when PR requires rapid responses or the real-time publication of information. For instance, news immediacy is a critical factor in PR, where a delay in releasing updates can impact an institution's reputation or public perception. To overcome this challenge, institutions could foster better cross-departmental communication through regular collaborative meetings, joint workshops, and a clearer understanding of each team's goals. These steps can help bridge the gap between IT and PR, ensuring that both teams are on the same page and can work together more effectively.

> *"The academic staff does the marketing and PR issues while there are professionals" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution C, Participant 1, Male, April 4, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIC highlights a potential misalignment in roles and responsibilities within the institution. The comment suggests that academic staff members are handling marketing and public relations tasks despite the availability of professional communication and PR experts within the institution. It underscores the urgent need for better delegation or an underutilization of skilled professionals in the marketing and PR fields. While academic staff may possess expertise in their academic areas, being involved in PR and marketing may not lead to optimal results

in terms of strategic communication and brand positioning. Public relations require specific expertise in media relations, crisis communication, brand management, and audience engagement, where academic staff might not have sufficient training or experience.

Therefore, to address this, the institution could consider redistributing responsibilities, ensuring that PR and marketing tasks are handled by trained professionals who can utilize their specialized knowledge to enhance its visibility and reputation. Furthermore, fostering collaboration between academic staff and communication professionals can lead to a more comprehensive and informed approach, aligning the institution's academic strengths with its communication strategies and enhancing its overall performance. In addressing the challenge of staff shortage, some HLIs hire external public relations professionals and others find contact persons who would voluntarily perform the duties of Public Relations Professionals on their behalf. The public relations professionals in some HLIs, for example, said:

> *"Regarding the staff shortage, we come together as a team to foster cooperation. For instance, with only one photographer, we all pitch in and seek the support of others. We are fortunate to have the assistance of photographers from some of our schools. When activities are conducted within the University premises, the process is seamless. However, when they take place in constituent collages, we all rely on the focal persons to provide coverage and send us reports for wider sharing. They also show unity by sometimes hiring a professional photographer, taking photos, and sending them to us…"* *(Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 2, Male, March 31, 2023)*

P2HLIA's comment underscores the adaptive strategies to address staff shortages in public relations and communications work. The participant emphasizes the institution's reliance on internal collaboration and outsourcing to ensure adequate media coverage of events. While this approach demonstrates flexibility and resourcefulness in overcoming workforce limitations, it also poses potential risks. The reliance on external assistance, such as focal persons or hired photographers, may lead to inconsistencies in content quality and delays in information dissemination.

The institution could consider a promising solution to the issue of staff shortages by addressing the problem with a sense of urgency. This could be done by hiring additional permanent staff in critical roles like photography, media production, and content creation. Additionally, training faculty and staff members in basic media coverage skills could enhance efficiency and ensure that institutional events are consistently documented and shared in a timely manner. Also, one of the vice-chancellors had some opinions on addressing the problem of staff shortages within the communications and PR departments. He, for example said:

> *"When we get more resources, we need to hire more people to work for the department because one person is insufficient. The department needs more people like a cameraman, graphics person and so forth" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant 2, Male, May 10, 2023)*

P2HLIB acknowledges the critical and urgent need for specialized personnel, such as a cameraman and a graphic designer, to enhance the department's ability to manage

institutional visibility and communication efforts effectively. This statement highlights the challenges of understaffing in PR and communication units, where a lack of specialized personnel can hinder the timely production and dissemination of high-quality content. Without a dedicated team, the burden falls on a few individuals, potentially affecting work efficiency and output quality.

To address this, institutions must prioritize budget allocations for human resources in PR and communication. Additionally, influencing internship programs with media and communication students or outsourcing some tasks to freelance professionals could be interim solutions while awaiting more substantial financial investments. Strengthening the PR department with skilled personnel would enhance the institution's corporate visibility and brand reputation. Again, on addressing how such threats can be changed into opportunities, one participant from the regulatory body associated with education issues in the country provided a piece of advice on how the higher learning institutions (HLIs) in the country could upgrade their images and maintain their reputation, which is essential in raising the bar for institutional corporate visibility. The participant, for instance, said:

> *"They should invest more resources in marketing and communications. Also, the quality of education an institution offers and the kind of students the institution has or produces determine the institution's state in the future. Students may be, for instance, excellent ambassadors of the Universities. So, if they improve the quality of education, more students will be attracted in the long run. Also, if they create good website pages, more people will be attracted...Also, statistically, if you look at more people who join Universities, they are teenagers. The power of social media as a point of contact is immense, as it can influence most of them to join the University" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution I, Participant 1, Male, April 19, 2023)*

P1HLI I highlights the integral role of strategic communication, institutional reputation, and digital engagement in enhancing university visibility. The participant emphasizes that beyond investing in PR and marketing, institutional visibility is also shaped by the quality of education and student success. Satisfied graduates, as brand ambassadors, wield significant influence, shaping the perceptions of prospective students through their word-of-mouth and professional achievements. This underscores the power of personal recommendations in the university visibility landscape. Additionally, the call for improved digital presence, mainly through well-designed websites and social media, aligns with modern trends where most university applicants, particularly teenagers, rely on online platforms for information and decision-making.

To capitalize on this, institutions should enhance their digital marketing strategies by maintaining interactive websites, focusing on data-driven social media campaigns, and creating engaging content tailored to prospective students' needs. However, it's crucial to remember that these strategies are only as effective as the foundation they're built on. Investing in robust communication infrastructure and academic excellence is not just a choice, but a necessity. These elements will attract more students and strengthen the institution's long-term reputation and visibility. The other sub-theme that emerged in the interview extracts was fiscal resources. Participants pinpointed that issues related to fiscal resources posed a challenge in implementing the strategies related to Public Relations. Public Relations Practitioners in some HLIs, for example said:

> *"Most activities remain pending or not executed due to financial constraints..."* (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 1, Male, July 22, 2023)

P1HLIG's statement highlights the significant impact of limited financial resources on executing institutional activities, particularly in public relations, marketing, and corporate visibility efforts. Financial constraints can hinder the implementation of crucial PR and communication strategies, such as media engagement, event organization, and digital marketing initiatives, all essential for enhancing institutional visibility. Without adequate funding, universities may struggle to sustain promotional campaigns, maintain a strong online presence, or invest in necessary human resources and technology.

Institutions should explore alternative funding sources, such as partnerships with corporate sponsors, alum contributions, and grant opportunities. Optimizing low-cost digital marketing tools and empowering student interns to contribute to high-impact PR activities within available budgets could mitigate financial challenges while maintaining a strong corporate presence. Another participant added to the theme, he, for instance, said:

> *"There is no hope because whenever I submit my concerns, especially those related to budget matters, they respond that there are financial constraints..."* (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 1, Male, July 12, 2023)

PIHLI G's statement reflects a deep frustration with financial limitations affecting the institution's public relations and communication efforts. This response highlights

a systemic issue where budgetary constraints hinder the execution of essential PR activities, leading to stagnation in corporate visibility efforts. A lack of financial support can demotivate staff, limit innovation, and weaken an institution's ability to market effectively. However, there is hope in the potential of alternative revenue streams, such as strategic partnerships, sponsorships, and alum funding. These avenues can provide the necessary resources to invigorate PR efforts.

Additionally, institutional leadership should prioritize cost-effective PR strategies, including digital marketing, social media engagement and collaborations with media outlets, to maximize visibility despite financial constraints. Strengthening advocacy for PR funding within institutional budgets is also crucial to ensure sustainable communication strategies that enhance corporate visibility. The other sub-theme that emerged in the theme of inadequate resources was material resources. Public Relations Professional in one of the HLIs, for example said:

> *"The lack of equipment is a pressing issue. As you're aware, a Public Relations person is a full-time working individual, and most events last until around 4 pm. immediate coverage is a necessity, but we're hindered by the lack of equipment and facilities such as computers and cameras. There are times when I feel embarrassed when visitors come because I'm using 'kiswaswadu camera'-the outdated equipment. We also face a lack of communication facilities, such as the internet, which is crucial for our work" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 1, Male, July 12, 2023)*

P1HLIG's response highlights critical challenges in resource allocation for public relations functions within the institution. The lack of essential PR tools such as cameras, computers and stable internet significantly hampers effective

communication, media coverage, and timely dissemination of information. In the digital era, where real-time communication is crucial for institutional visibility, inadequate resources undermine efforts to enhance brand reputation and stakeholder engagement.

The participant's frustration also suggests a demotivating work environment where professionals feel under-equipped to execute their roles effectively, creating an urgent need for action. To overcome these challenges, institutions should prioritize investment in modern communication tools, seek external partnerships for sponsorship of media equipment, and explore cost-effective digital solutions. Additionally, lobbying for increased budget allocation to the PR department could help address these deficiencies and improve the institution's corporate visibility. Another sub-theme that emerged was the need for adaptable strategies, as some PR strategies remained impractical due to the lack of entanglement between the practitioners and the practices to be carried out. Some of the public relations officials, for example, were quoted saying:

> *"The department should be better acknowledged" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution E, Participant 2, Female, August 22, 2023)*

P2HLI E's statement underscores the need for greater institutional recognition and support for the Public Relations (PR) or Communications Department. This sentiment reflects a common challenge where PR functions are undervalued despite their crucial role in shaping institutional reputation, stakeholder engagement, and

corporate visibility. The consequences of this undervaluation, such as inadequate funding, minimal collaboration with other departments, and limited influence in decision-making processes, are significant and should not be overlooked.

Therefore, higher learning institutions should integrate PR strategies into their overall strategic plans, involve PR professionals in key institutional discussions, and ensure their contributions are recognized. This integration not only strengthens internal awareness about the role of PR in institutional growth and visibility but also holds the promise of fostering a culture of collaboration across departments. In the following section, the study presents, last but not least, the issue raised about the implementation bottleneck for the PR Strategies in the HLIs. A concluding section will be presented in this chapter, the Communication Policy and Strategies.

Table 5.6: Communication Policy and Communications Strategies

Approaches	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Communication Policy	3	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	1	9
Communication Strategy	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Situational Analysis	3	2	2	4	2	2	3	2	1	21
Non-organized Communication Strategy	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	6

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 5.6 presents the professional insights that were gathered, revealing the issues that acted as implementation bottlenecks for the PR strategies in the HLIs. These issues, such as the Communication Policy for specific HLIs and the Communication Strategy, are of significant importance. The two sub-themes, Situational Analysis and Non-organized Communication Strategy, further underscore the credibility of the

information. Regarding the Communications Policy, the feedback from Public Relations Practitioners in some HLIs, for instance, was:

> *"We will also use the same approach to create a communication strategy for the whole University and the communication policy" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female March 27, 2023)*

P1HLIA's response highlights the institution's intent to develop a structured, strategic communication framework. This is not just a proposal, but a crucial need for the institution. A well-defined communication strategy and policy are essential for ensuring consistency in messaging, strengthening corporate visibility, and enhancing stakeholder engagement. This initiative indicates the institution's recognition of the importance of public relations in shaping its reputation and fostering transparency. A comprehensive communication strategy would help streamline internal and external communications, define key target audiences, and establish protocols for crisis management, media engagement, and digital outreach.

Moreover, having an official communication policy ensures that all institutional communications align with the university's goals, values, and branding. This alignment provides a clear direction and reassures the audience that the institution is on the right path. To succeed, this process should involve collaboration with various stakeholders, including faculty, students, alums, and external partners, to create an inclusive and effective communication framework. Adding to the same theme, the President for Students' Associations in one of the HLIs said, for example:

"For example, when you visit other University pages, let's say Harvard and other International Universities, you'll notice their unique branding. Our university also has its own unique branding, and it's important to maintain and enhance it." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 4, Male, May 3, 2023)

The statement by P4HLIA highlights the need for improved digital branding and social media engagement in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. This statement underscores the fact that international universities are leveraging advanced digital marketing strategies, high-quality visuals, and effective social media presence to significantly boost their corporate visibility. In contrast, local universities may not be utilizing these tools to the same extent, potentially hindering their attractiveness to prospective students, researchers, and partners.

Institutions can significantly enhance their digital branding and social media engagement by investing in professional graphic design, adopting modern digital marketing techniques, and optimizing their social media strategies. These steps, when implemented effectively, can increase engagement and visibility. Additionally, benchmarking against top global universities can provide valuable insights into best practices for branding and communication, ultimately strengthening the institution's reputation and competitiveness in the global academic domain. One of the officials from the Tanzania Commission for Higher Learning Institution (TCU) also had his observations on the theme; the participant said, for example:

"They attract International students to the Universities, and what needs to be done is to be in digital space. In most universities, for instance, you may hardly find any comprehensive information for international students about admission issues and other guidelines, so to speak. The scarcity

> *of such information is a pressing issue that needs to be*
> *addressed"* (Interview; Higher Learning Institution I,
> *Participant 2, Male, April 4, 2023)*

The statement by P2HLI I emphasizes the potential benefits of a strong digital presence in attracting international students to Tanzanian universities. This observation underscores a critical gap in institutional communication, including a lack of accessible and well-organized information for international students. A robust online presence, featuring well-structured websites and active social media engagement, is not just a necessity in today's competitive higher education sector, but also a potential game-changer. Many international universities provide comprehensive digital platforms with clear admission guidelines, scholarship opportunities, academic programs, and student services, making it easier for prospective students to make informed decisions.

Universities in Tanzania, therefore, should improve their digital strategies by developing user-friendly websites, ensuring that key information is available in multiple languages, and investing in social media platforms. These platforms are not just for promotion, but also for actively engaging with prospective international students. About HLIs' official statements and advertisements, the officer added for example:

> *"...Many people believe in advertisements and are mostly*
> *interested in radio advertisements but what seasons are these*
> *adverts aired? Usually, it's only during admission periods,*
> *right? It's between July and October but thereafter the HLIs do*
> *not advertise...As for me, I think the advertising process should*
> *be throughout the year... it should also take different forms, for*
> *example, there could be seasons for advertising the programs,*
> *then raising public awareness on what the University does,*

thereafter performance or output and so forth…" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution I, Participant 2, Male, April 19, 2023)

P2HLI I's statement emphasizes the need for continuous and strategically timed advertising by higher learning institutions (HLIs). This perspective suggests that while institutions focus their advertising efforts during peak periods like admissions, sustained visibility throughout the year can help maintain public awareness and enhance the institution's reputation. The diversification of advertisement campaigns into thematic seasons, such as promoting academic programs, showcasing research outputs, or highlighting university achievements, is a reassuring strategy that would keep the institution in the public eye and build a consistent narrative.

Therefore, a year-round advertising strategy, using a variety of channels like radio, digital media and print would help reinforce the university's presence and connect with potential students, alums, and other stakeholders at different stages of their decision-making or engagement process. The R2HLI I, a key figure in the theme, was quoted saying:

> *"What I observe is that their focus is mainly on publicity during admission periods, and even their publications lack statistics. They should, for instance, publish issues related to the number of enrollments and the number of International Students pursuing particular programmes from different countries like Kenya, Burundi and so on... In my opinion, this is not yet done; we only see adverts that call for applications. However, there is a clear need for more creativity in our HLIs' Public Relations mechanisms to attract more students, especially International students. This is an area where we can truly innovate and make a difference" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution I, Participant 2, Male, April 19, 2023)*

The statement by P2HLI I reflects a concern over the limited scope and creativity in the current public relations efforts of higher learning institutions (HLIs). This observation suggests that most HLIs focus on publicity during admission, with minimal attention to sustained engagement or meaningful, data-driven content. Emphasizing the need for sustained engagement, including relevant statistics, such as enrollment numbers, the diversity of international students, and program-specific data, can help build a more transparent and attractive image, making the audience feel involved and committed.

Such information provides prospective students with practical insights and demonstrates the university's global reach and various academic opportunities. To better attract international students, HLIs should diversify their public relations strategies, incorporating creative campaigns and showcasing their international student body and academic success stories. This emphasis on showcasing international diversity, rather than just focusing on application calls during admissions, would enhance the institution's credibility and appeal, making the audience feels included and valued. Communication Strategies, which are essential in the HLIs, include keeping stakeholders abreast on the various issues such as institutional projects and programmes under development. One of the participants, for example, said the following:

> *"The current scenario, for example, is the innovative car by the University, which is indeed a commendable effort; however, people would want to get more information about the particular innovation on social media and websites. This platform not only simplifies the task of information-seeking for professionals like journalists but also empowers them with a direct and connected*

source of information." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Male, May 3, 2023)

The statement by PIHLIA underscores the critical need for effective digital communication and information accessibility. While our innovative developments, such as the university's groundbreaking car, are commendable, the statement highlights a significant gap in how these achievements are communicated. Social media and websites are not just platforms, but crucial tools for reaching the public and professionals, such as journalists, who seek detailed and timely information.

Imagine the possibilities of a robust online presence with readily available information. It could revolutionize the way we communicate, making the information-seeking process more efficient for journalists, building public awareness, and furthering our reputation for innovation. By using digital platforms to share updates, insights, and behind-the-scenes content, we could not only enhance the visibility of our groundbreaking initiatives but also foster a new level of engagement with our audiences.

In the same scenario, the threats associated with communication strategies were identified in two ways: one focused on situational analysis, and the second on non-organized communication strategy. One of the students' representatives, for example said:

> *"The communication initiatives help people living in towns, especially those with access to media like TV. Likewise, exhibition events, such as health fairs, job expos, and educational seminars, are beneficial to those who are close to the exhibiting grounds or those who are lucky enough to acquire*

> *information about the exhibitions. However, those who cannot access information, such as people from villages, face obstacles. You may find that those who dwell in villages acquire information from other people, such as graduates or those employed at the regional wards. When they seek information about the person, they understand that he is a graduate, so the person serves as a reference point. Therefore, most interior people are influenced by such people (Interview; Higher Learning Institution C, Participant 3, Male, August 5, 2023)*

The statement by P3HLIC underscores a pressing issue-the significant gap in the accessibility and reach of communication efforts between urban and rural populations. It highlights that while urban dwellers benefit from communication initiatives, media, and exhibitions, those in remote areas face barriers to accessing the same information. This reliance on word-of-mouth, particularly from individuals with higher education or professional exposure, can limit the outreach of higher learning institutions' initiatives to rural communities.

Therefore, HLIs need to broaden their communication strategies to reach marginalized groups by using more inclusive and accessible channels, such as community radio, local leaders, or digital platforms that could bridge the information gap. Additionally, HLIs could explore mobile communication tools or partnerships with community organizations to better connect with people in rural areas and make their offerings known. To improve the situation, it is crucial to heed the suggestions of public relations professionals in some HLIs, who have proposed the following:

> *"It's imperative for institutions to establish new strategies that align with the current global trend of investing in technology. This is because most institutions still rely on traditional promotional methods, which are becoming outdated as people's*

> *lifestyles, time allocation, and priorities change, and as the use of gadgets become more prevalent. It's crucial for institutions to keep up with these trends to remain relevant" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution D, Participant 1, Female, May 23, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLID underscores the urgent need for higher learning institutions (HLIs) to adapt to the rapidly evolving communication landscape driven by technological advancements. As society increasingly embraces digital engagement and tech-centric lifestyles, traditional promotional methods, such as print media or in-person events, are rapidly losing their effectiveness in reaching modern audiences, particularly younger generations who prioritize convenience and digital interaction. This shift is not just a trend, but a necessity that HLIs must address to stay relevant and effective.

The statement calls for HLIs to invest in technology-driven strategies that have the potential to revolutionize communication in higher learning institutions. By embracing digital platforms, social media, and other innovative communication tools, HLIs can better engage with their audiences, improve visibility, and stay relevant in an increasingly digital world. This shift not only allows institutions to enhance their outreach and better target prospective students but also opens up new possibilities for communication in the digital age, fostering a sense of hope and anticipation for the future. Regarding the non-organized communication strategies, which implies that the communication strategies or part of them as action plans exist in HLIs but are not practised appropriately. Public Relations Professionals in some HLIs, for example said:

> *"We do not have a planned or a well-established (stated) strategy, not even a yearly or five-year strategic plan" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIA reflects a critical gap in the institution's strategic planning for communication and public relations. It suggests that the institution lacks a formalized roadmap for its communication efforts, which is essential for ensuring consistency, direction, and practical resource allocation in its outreach initiatives. Without a well-established strategy, the institution risks fragmented or reactive communication efforts, which may hinder its ability to engage with its target audience and achieve long-term goals effectively. This absence of a strategic plan underscores the critical need for the institution to prioritize the development of a comprehensive communication strategy that aligns with its overall mission and goals. A clear, structured plan, whether annual or multi-year, would provide guidance, measure progress, and help allocate resources more efficiently, ultimately improving the institution's visibility, reputation, and engagement with various stakeholders. Another public relations professional added to the theme and said, for example:

> *"Existing ones are not well utilized; once they are set clearly and well implemented, maybe we will consider employing additional activities" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution C, Participant 1, Male, March 27, 2023)*

P1HLIC suggests that the institution has some public relations and communication activities, but these initiatives are not fully capitalized or executed effectively. This pinpoints a critical need for better implementation and optimization of the existing strategies. Before introducing new activities, it is crucial to establish a solid

framework. The institution can maximize its potential impact if its strategies and resources are clarified, well-defined, and properly utilized within this framework. Effective execution of these existing initiatives within a strategic framework could lay a strong foundation, enabling the institution to build on these efforts and explore additional activities. This approach would ensure that the institution's communication efforts are more focused, efficient, and impactful, ultimately improving its corporate visibility and stakeholder engagement.

Summing up, this chapter presented the way PR strategies were implemented in the HLIs to enhance the corporate visibility of various HLIs in the country. However, some implementation bottlenecks emerged in interview accounts about the process of PR strategy implementation. On the other hand, this chapter serves as an opener to stakeholders who play a crucial role in understanding and improving PR strategies in the HLIs. The discussion about this state of affairs will be extended in chapter seven of this thesis report. The subsequent chapter will present more study findings to enrich the understanding of PR practices in the HLIs. This comprehensive understanding, derived from the study findings, will empower stakeholders to articulate better about the role of PR Strategies in corporate visibility of the HLIs, making them feel more informed and knowledgeable.

CHAPTER SIX

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIC APPROACHES FOR CORPORATE VISIBILITY IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

6.1 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter presented findings on the implementation of Public Relations (PR) strategies within Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in their efforts to enhance corporate visibility. Building on those findings, this chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of data related to the strategic approaches employed by HLIs to promote their visibility and strengthen their public image. Specifically, this chapter presents and discusses the research findings related to the third specific objective of this study, which aimed at investigating PR strategic approaches for enhancing the corporate visibility of HLIs. The chapter offers insights into how different PR strategic approaches have been applied across HLIs and assesses their effectiveness in increasing institutional visibility. The empirical literature and theoretical perspectives drawn from earlier chapters guides the analysis of data.

6.2 Public Relations Strategic Approaches in shaping Institutional Corporate Visibility

Field data revealed three strategic approaches in which PR strategies contribute to corporate visibility of HLIs: acceptance, recognition and attractiveness. The table below presents each of these ways or means with its frequency or Number of mentions (N).

Table 6.1: PR Strategic Approaches which enhance the Corporate Visibility of

HLIs

Approach	HLI									Total
Acceptance	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Fair	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Good	5	6	2	1	2	2	1	3	0	22
Recognition										
More recognized	1	3	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	8
Most recognized	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Attractiveness										
Less attractive	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Fairly attractive	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Highly attractive	5	4	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	13

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 6.1 shows the PR strategic approaches to enhance corporate visibility. These were acceptance, recognition, and attractiveness. The leading one was acceptance, which was total (N=26), followed by Attractiveness (N=17) and recognition (N=13). In the table below, each way will be presented with its frequency.

Table 6.2: Acceptance

Means	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Acceptance										
Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Fair	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Good	5	6	2	1	2	2	1	3	0	22

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 6.2 demonstrates that the acceptance of public relations strategies was largely positive, with the majority of participants (N=22) viewing it as good. This reassures stakeholders that PR strategies, when implemented effectively, can indeed enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs to the public.

As stated, acceptance was the leading theme during the interview sessions. Some participants affirmed that the PR Strategies were good in shaping the corporate visibility of the HLIs. In this case, for example, the Presidents of Students Higher Learning Associations for instance said:

> *"Most students here have heard about the University through various means of communication even before they joined the University...They believe it is the greatest and best University in East and Central Africa."(Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 4, Male, May 3, 2023)*

The statement by P1HLIA underscores the crucial role that effective communication strategies play in shaping the perceptions of prospective students. It suggests that the institution's public relations efforts have successfully created a strong and favourable image, which the audience recognises and values even before students officially join the university. The widespread awareness and positive reputation reflect the success of the university's communication activities, positioning it as a leading institution in the region.

It also highlights the power of sustained and strategic messaging through various channels, contributing to the institution's appeal and recruitment success. However, it's crucial to note that maintaining and enhancing this positive image is an ongoing process that will require continued, targeted communication efforts aligned with the institution's values, achievements, and aspirations. The statement also makes stakeholders refer to the previous chapter of this report about implementation of the PR Strategies in the HLIs. Based on the implementation bottleneck or concerns

raised in the interview extracts, the reasons for certain HLIs performing at least well in making their particular HLIs visible can also be articulated in this section.

The data about the acceptance aspect indicate that some participants commented well about the PR Strategies because it could be that HLIs focus on innovative communication media to reach their target audience effectively. This includes utilising social media platforms, investing in digital marketing, website optimisation and multimedia content. It indicates that mass media enabled them to convey their messages and showcase their achievements accordingly, making the public accept that the PR strategies enabled them to learn about HLIs' activities and endeavours.

It may also imply that with the increasing use of digital platforms and social media in the country, the PR Professionals in the HLIs adapt their strategies to effectively engage with audiences online while focusing on such issues as online reputation management and managing social media crises. That is why participants positively commented on the strategies and particular HLIs, as shown in the quotes above. To support this scenario, one of the Participants, for example, said:

> *"We usually come across advertisements and announcements about the programmes through social media and other mass media." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution F, Participant 2, Male, June 17, 2023)*

Furthermore, the P2HLIF's statement implies that certain HLIs that have become successful in illuminating their corporate visibility maintain proactive media relations. These include organizing media events, regularly issuing press releases,

and fostering relationships with journalists and media outlets. This emphasis on media relations informs our audience about effective PR strategies, ensuring their accomplishments and initiatives receive adequate coverage and enhancing their visibility further. Similarly, the interview extracts showed that even the top management in certain HLIs, specifically the Vice Chancellors, accepted that the PR Strategies affect the corporate visibility of HLIs. This reiteration of top management's acceptance of PR strategies reassures our audience about the validity of our analysis. They, for example said:

> *"I want to reiterate the crucial role of the Communications and Marketing Unit in our efforts to connect our HLIs and society. It's a role of immense importance, particularly in light of the feedback that our research results often remain confined to desks and libraries. We have come to understand that it's our responsibility to ensure that society comprehends the outcomes of our research. The Communications and Marketing Unit is instrumental in this, playing a key role in disseminating research results that address pressing societal issues". (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

P5HLIA's statement highlights the crucial role of the Communications and Marketing Unit in bridging the gap between academic research and the broader community. It also suggests that the institution has recognized the importance of conducting research and ensuring its practical impact on society. Furthermore, it indicates a significant shift toward making research more accessible and valuable to the public, a change that you will find particularly important, emphasizing the need to disseminate research outcomes effectively. The role of the Communications and Marketing Unit in this context is not just important, but critical. It's not only about

communicating research findings, but also about making these findings relevant to societal needs. This is a key aspect that the statement underscores, highlighting how public relations and communication strategies are vital in promoting the practical applications of academic research. This ensures that Universities contribute meaningfully to addressing societal challenges. On the same theme, the one participant added:

> *"The Communications and Marketing Unit helps ensure that society understands the University's output regarding the increased number of graduates, how it is perceived globally and other activities like outreach programmes and innovations..."* *(Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

It underscores the crucial role of the Communications and Marketing Unit in shaping and projecting the university's image to the public. This assertion underscores the unit's central role in bolstering the institution's visibility and reputation. By spotlighting achievements such as the surge in graduate numbers, global recognition, and various impactful initiatives like outreach programs and innovations, the Communications and Marketing Unit strategically showcases the university's contributions to local and global communities.

It helps the institution effectively communicate its successes and initiatives, thereby boosting its public image and aligning with its long-term social relevance and academic excellence goals. This approach fosters a positive perception, both locally and internationally, and solidifies the university's position as a leader in education and innovation. Another participant who was the Vice Chancellor added to the theme and said for example:

"This could not be possible if we do not invest in advertisements, exhibitions, CSR and other activities." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant 2, Male, May 10, 2023)

Aside from demonstrating how the management of certain HLIs has embraced PR Strategies and their role in enhancing the corporate visibility of specific institutions, it underscores the importance of investing in activities such as Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Relations, all stemming from the PR discipline. Stakeholders are encouraged to refer to chapter five of this thesis report for findings that address the first research objective of this study. The data also reveal that when HLIs actively engage in community initiatives, showcase their commitment to social responsibility, and make positive contributions to society, they can cultivate goodwill. This goodwill, fostered through community engagement, is a key factor in enhancing their reputation, visibility, support and ultimately ensuring their sustainability, stability, and survival.

About the sub-theme under the same aspect of acceptability, which is the poor and fair acceptation of PR strategies on illuminating the corporate visibility of the HLIs, the findings from the interview extracts showed that participants had not accepted the PR strategies' contribution on the corporate visibility of HLIs. These were explicitly the Presidents of students' associations in certain HLIs. One of them, for example, said that the poor acceptation was due to the lack of understanding of PR strategies and their potential impact on corporate visibility.

"We often find ourselves without crucial information when we need it most. For instance, important updates may only be released in the middle or end of the semester, disrupting the academic process. It's imperative that we receive such information at the beginning of the academic year, or at the very least, before the commencement of exercises, to ensure a smooth and uninterrupted academic journey" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 2, Male, August 5, 2023)

P2HLIG's statement highlights the challenge of delayed communication within the institution, which impacts planning and decision-making. The lack of timely information reflects a breakdown in internal communication processes, which may affect the efficiency of academic and administrative operations. When crucial details are only shared later in the semester, it limits the ability of departments, staff and students to prepare adequately, potentially leading to confusion, missed opportunities, or disrupted plans.

It underscores the crucial need for enhanced communication strategies and more efficient channels. These improvements are essential in ensuring stakeholders receive pertinent information when they need it, empowering them to make informed decisions and engage proactively with institutional activities. This delay undermines effective planning and coordination, which are critical to the smooth functioning of academic operations.

The issue of the PR and Communications Unit not delivering the information promptly to key stakeholders, particularly the students, led the stakeholders to reflect on the uncertainty reduction theory (1975) by Charles Berger in chapter two of this thesis report. This theory posits that people seek to reduce uncertainty in their lives

by gaining information. On the one hand, cultural and societal factors may have influenced the delay in information dissemination in some HLIs through their Departments of PR and Communications. The culture and societal factors position the society, particularly the academic communities, not to prioritize or fully understand the role and importance of PR in enhancing corporate visibility. Traditional modes of communication and engagement might still hold more sway, making it challenging for PR strategies to gain traction.

On the other hand, as most HLIs face resource constraints related to fiscal, skilled personnel and infrastructure necessary to implement effective PR campaigns (please refer to chapter five); it implies that their ability to invest in comprehensive PR strategies is limited. This leads to an improper illumination of the corporate visibility. Understanding these challenges can foster empathy and a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in effective communication strategies.

> *"There are other factors. For example, the quality of education the university provides the cost implications of tuition fees and the extension of payments for those who fail to pay the tuition fee promptly". (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 2, Male, August 5, 2023)*

It identifies several key elements that influence the perception of the University and its effectiveness. The first element is the quality of education, which highlights the importance of the academic standards and how they directly impact the reputation and attractiveness of the institution. A strong focus on improving educational quality, such as updating the curriculum to meet industry standards or investing in faculty development, is essential for drawing in students and maintaining the institution's

status in the competitive academic environment. The second element is the cost implications of tuition fees, which significantly determine accessibility to education. High fees may limit access for potential students, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The financial burden on students can impact their ability to focus on their studies and may lead to increased dropout rates.

The last element is the extension of payments for tuition fees, which implies that offering flexibility in payment deadlines can be a strategy to ease financial pressure on students. However, it also reflects some students' challenges in meeting payment deadlines. This underscores the importance of proactive financial planning and clear communication to ensure students are well-informed about payment schedules and the implications of late payments. The mention of these factors suggests that, for an institution to improve its overall performance and attract more students, it needs to address these issues effectively. Balancing quality education with reasonable tuition fees and offering flexible payment options could help improve student retention and satisfaction.

Table 6.3: Recognition

Means	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Recognition										
More recognized	1	3	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	8
Most recognized	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 6.3 demonstrates that the recognition of public relations strategies led to the emergence of two sub-themes: 'more recognized' (N=8) and 'most recognized' (N=5),

totaling 13. This indicates the widespread recognition of the importance of PR strategies in illuminating the corporate visibility of HLIs. It also highlights the crucial role of PR professionals in increasing public awareness of particular HLIs, thereby enhancing their corporate visibility. For instance, the president of a students' association in one of the HLIs stated:

> *"Some individuals have become aware of this University therefore; speaking of it its reputation is relatively high" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution H, Participant 2, Male, June 17, 2023)*

It suggests that certain universities have made notable progress in building their reputation. The increased awareness of these institutions among individuals indicates that their branding and communications efforts have successfully reached their audience. This higher reputation may be attributed to several factors, such as effective marketing and communication, where the universities' PR and marketing strategies have likely played a role in improving visibility and awareness. It can involve advertising campaigns, partnerships, or positive word-of-mouth among students and alums.

Also, the quality of education and achievements, particularly academic excellence, are important, as the University's reputation is often linked to its academic performance, research output and the success of its graduates. Positive recognition in these areas can enhance public perception. Last though important is strategic engagement with stakeholders, whereas the statement implies specific individuals have become aware of the University, suggesting that there is a growing recognition

from various stakeholders. This could result from targeted outreach efforts, including participation in local or international events, collaborations, and other initiatives that showcase the university's offerings and achievements.

Therefore, the statement reflects that the university is making strides in establishing its reputation, which could be built upon further with continued strategic communication efforts, academic excellence, and stakeholder engagement. One of the students' representatives also added to the theme, the student said for example:

Most students who study here have heard about the University even before they joined the University (*Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 4, Male, May 3, 2023*).

It implies that effective PR strategies are recognized for their creativity, innovation, and impact on enhancing the reputation of HLIs. Such issues as positive media coverage, awards and accolades for PR initiatives can elevate the HLIs' credibility and, more importantly, the HLIs' corporate visibility, which refers to the extent to which the HLI is known and recognized within its community and beyond. It also indicates that when PR Strategies are well operated, they can increase stakeholder engagement as they help to call the attention of various groups of people, including alums, donors, tutors, students and other partners.

It can mainly be done through consistent communication and relationship-building efforts, the essence of excellence PR by Grunig (2002) and Dozier (1995) (Please refer to chapter two). As the HLIs cultivate a positive reputation and enhance their

visibility through various mechanisms within the community, the PR Units' role remains to enhance the emanated corporate visibility to the public. In supporting the above, one of the Presidents of the Students' Association in the HLIs, for example said:

> *"More people have joined this University because they have understood its programmes through the University communications" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution D, Participant 2, Male, July 15, 2023)*

P2HLID's statement indicates that increased engagement can lead to more significant support, collaboration, and participation in institutional activities, thereby boosting corporate visibility. Also, when PR strategies are recognized as illuminating corporate visibility, they can provide the HLIs with a competitive advantage in higher education. However, it's important to note that institutions known for their innovative and impactful PR Strategies may stand out from competitors and attract attention from prospective students, faculty and other key stakeholders. On the other hand, poorly executed PR strategies may fail to distinguish one institution from another, resulting in a limited impact on corporate visibility and potential loss of competitive edge.

HLIs that fail to gain recognition for their PR efforts risk missing out on opportunities to showcase their achievements, attract talent, secure funding and build partnerships. These missed opportunities can hinder the HLIs' growth, limiting corporate visibility in a competitive global environment. The discussion about PR strategies recognition will be extended to the following chapter of this thesis report.

In the following section, the final approach through which PR Strategies contribute to corporate visibility of HLIs will be presented.

Table 6.4: Attractiveness

Means	HLI									Total
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Attractiveness										
Less attractive	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	
Fairly attractive	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Highly attractive	5	4	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	13

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 6.3 presents the allure of PR Strategies, with its three sub-themes significantly illuminating corporate visibility. The first sub-aspect that emerged was highly attractive to a majority (N=13), reasonably attractive to a few (N=3), and less attractive to a minority (N=1). This data underscores the crucial role of PR Strategies in illuminating the corporate visibility of HLIs, making them attractive to the public. Here are some poignant quotes that further illustrate this:

> *"The 10km walk event captured the public's attention, so people were attracted." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant 3, Male, May 10, 2023)*

The event was successful in drawing public attention and generating interest. It also implies that the event likely engaged the local community and brought attention to the University through its involvement in such a widely recognized activity. Public events like a 10km walk often attract diverse participants, including students, staff, residents, and potential future students, allowing the institution to increase its visibility. Hosting such an event allowed the university to increase its visibility and

position itself as an active and socially responsible institution, thereby enhancing its image. The fact that it attracted attention contributed to increased recognition and positive perceptions from the public.

The event also implies that the university is trying to engage with the broader community outside of academic activities. It can foster goodwill, strengthen ties with the local population, and even build long-term relationships with potential students, staff, and other stakeholders. Therefore, the statement indicates that the 10km walk event was a successful strategy to attract attention, engage the public and likely contribute positively to the university's image. One of the public relations professionals added, for example:

> *"We also participate in events like TCU exhibitions, in which we pay for participation mainly to acquire corporate visibility" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant 3, Male, May 10, 2023)*

P3HLIB's statement underscores the strategic nature of the institution's investment in events to enhance its visibility. The deliberate decision to pay for participation in events such as TCU exhibitions indicates that the university views these opportunities as crucial for its visibility and brand promotion. This strategic investment is a means of showcasing the university's offerings to a wider audience, demonstrating our foresight and planning.

Participation in high-profile exhibitions, particularly those organized by esteemed bodies like TCU (Tanzania Commission for Universities), plays a significant role in

positioning the university as a reputable institution within the higher education sector. This enhanced profile not only allows the institution to engage directly with prospective students, parents, educators, and international stakeholders but also instills a sense of pride in our collective achievements.

Events like TCU exhibitions serve as excellent platforms to engage with a specific target audience, such as prospective students, parents, and educational professionals. More importantly, they provide invaluable networking opportunities with other institutions, regulatory bodies, and organizations. The potential for these connections to lead to partnerships, collaborations, and greater recognition within the educational sector is not just promising, but also exciting.

> *"Good alum relations and public figures create a legacy for the University." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 4, Male, May 3, 2023)*

It is evident that when HLIs engage in appealing activities or initiatives, they attract public attention and enhance visibility. Public relations professionals have shown how public events, such as graduation ceremonies, can be used to gain public attention, thereby adding value to the corporate visibility of HLIs. This underscores the role of PR strategies in creating visibility and enhancing the institution's success. As one HLI representative put it:

> *"We also take advantage of the ceremonies to get the best photos, including happy faces and beautiful graduation gowns, to attract more students to join the University." (Interview;*

Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 1, Female, March 27, 2023)

Strategically using visual content to enhance the university's appeal is a powerful tool. It's a testament to the university's recognition of the positive impact of visual content in attracting prospective students. The university's creation of positive and inspirational imagery, such as capturing happy faces during graduation ceremonies and showcasing students in graduation gowns, instills a sense of optimism and hope for the future among potential students.

Graduation ceremonies, as high-profile events, offer an excellent opportunity for the communications and marketing team. They can take the lead in capturing compelling content that can be repurposed for various promotional materials, including brochures, social media, and advertisements. This role of the marketing team in utilizing graduation ceremonies for content creation should make them feel empowered and important.

> *"Imagine we started with 1000 plus students, but now we have 4500 plus students. This could not be possible if we do not invest in advertisements, exhibitions and other activities" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution B, Participant 2, Male, May 10, 2023)*

P2HLIB's statement underscores the essential role of strategic communication in the growth and success of a university. It highlights that the university's significant increase in student enrollment is a direct result of its strategic communication and marketing activities. This emphasis on strategic communication not only informs but

also makes the audience aware of its crucial role in the university's growth. It underscores the importance of advertising, exhibitions and other promotional activities in boosting the institution's visibility and attracting potential students.

The statement also indicates that such growth might not have been possible without the financial and resource investment in promotional activities. Budgeting for public relations and marketing is essential to the university's overall competitive strategy to attract prospective students. The increased student enrollment can also reflect the institution's growing recognition and positive perception. The university has likely built its brand and reputation through consistent promotional efforts, making it an appealing option for students. The Vice-Chancellor from another HLI, whose unique perspective enriches this discussion, said for example:

> *"We measure by looking at the numbers. We started with 14 students when the University started, but now, we have over 17,000 students. This could not be possible if we do not engage fully in corporate communication issues (Interview; Higher Learning Institution A, Participant 5, Male, August 22, 2023)*

It indicates that PR strategies, which include activities such as media relations, event planning, and social media management, can help HLIs' corporate identities (brands) stand out in a crowd, especially in this era where the internationalization of higher education has made HLIs experience expansion and transformations (Please refer to chapter one). Therefore, by generating their appeals, the HLIs can differentiate themselves from other institutions offering similar services. It can, therefore, lead the HLIs to attract more significant stakeholders' attention, particularly the students.

This differentiation can increase corporate visibility as stakeholders gravitate towards brands that align with their perceptions of attractiveness or desirability.

The findings also indicated that ineffective PR strategies that fail to deliver results may lead to a significant waste of valuable financial, human and time resources. This can divert attention and investment from other corporate visibility initiatives, limiting the institutions' ability to compete effectively in the market. To support the above, some participants, specifically the Presidents of student associations in the HLIs example, said:

> *"All in all, they should assess whether the graduates from this institution fit in the labour market (Interview; Higher Learning Institution C, Participant 3, Male, August 5, 2023)*

P3HLIC's statement implies that poorly executed or controversial PR strategies can damage the reputation of HLIs, leading to negative media coverage, public scrutiny and loss of trust among stakeholders. This can undermine institutional credibility and adversely affect the corporate visibility of particular institutions. It also implies that PR strategies can erode stakeholders' confidence in the institutions' management and overall brand when they perform poorly. The potential loss of support from institutional stakeholders, including their less participation and engagement in HLIs, could significantly hinder corporate visibility efforts. To support the above based on the findings concerning the means of attractiveness on corporate visibility of HLIs, one of the Presidents in the Students' Association among the HLIs said, for example:

> *"I do not know whether the PR and Marketing activities attract students to the University." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution G, Participant 2, Male, August 5, 2023)*

Certain HLIs are currently experiencing disconnect, particularly in how PR strategies are implemented, which does not fully align with the overarching goals and objectives. It highlights the urgent need to ensure that PR efforts are precisely aligned with institutional goals. Without this alignment, it's challenging to achieve meaningful results in terms of enhancing the HLIs' corporate visibility. As one student representative aptly put it:

> *"They look at programmes' potentiality but also the management and whether they effectively address student issues..". (Interview; Higher Learning Institution C, Participant 3, Male, August 5, 2023)*

The statement by P3HLIC suggests that institutions may struggle to understand what works and what does not without robust mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of PR strategies. It is crucial to remember that student feedback is a key component of this evaluation process. Failure to adapt and refine strategies based on this feedback and data can lead to stagnation in visibility efforts. This finding and interpretation of data should serve as an eye-opener about PR strategies and attractiveness in the HLIs. In the next chapter, these means will be discussed further. Other students provided views related to the physical attraction of higher learning institutions. One of them said the following as an example:

> *"Some students were attracted to the facilities, infrastructure and pleasing physical environment" (Interview; Higher Learning Institution C, Participant 3, Male, August 5, 2023)*

P3HLIC's statement underscores the crucial role of campus infrastructure and physical appeal in attracting students to a university. The presence of contemporary and well-maintained facilities such as libraries, laboratories, lecture halls, and recreational centres can profoundly shape the decisions of potential students when choosing a university. These state-of-the-art facilities enhance the learning experience and equip students with the necessary tools to excel academically and socially, fostering a conducive academic environment.

Furthermore, the university's physical environment, including green spaces, well-maintained buildings, and an aesthetically pleasing campus, plays a significant role in shaping its overall image and reputation. A visually appealing and well-organized campus not only serves as a key marketing tool for higher learning institutions but also fosters a sense of pride and belonging among students, thereby enhancing their emotional connection to the institution.

However, it is clear that institutions that invest in infrastructure development gain a competitive edge in attracting local and international students. Modern campuses with high-quality facilities are more likely to appeal to students who seek a comfortable and conducive learning environment. Beyond mere attraction, these good facilities play a crucial role in supporting student engagement and academic success. Well-equipped lecture rooms, libraries, and technology-driven learning spaces contribute significantly to improved student performance and overall satisfaction, demonstrating the practical benefits of infrastructure investment.

Therefore, to enhance corporate visibility and student enrollment, universities should invest in modern infrastructure and maintain existing facilities, use campus facilities as a key selling point in marketing and PR campaigns, highlight the physical environment in promotional materials, websites, and social media. It's crucial to ensure a balance between academic quality and infrastructure development to sustain long-term growth. This means that while investing in infrastructure, the academic mission and quality of education should not be compromised.

Overall data showed that public relations strategies aided HLIs reach their mission of enhancing the corporate visibility through elements namely acceptance, recognition, and attractiveness, which were attributed to several factors. These were, for example, stakeholder engagement, facilitating brand differentiation and resource allocation. Also, the findings underscore the importance of investing in relevant PR Strategies that align with institutional goals and objectives while considering the potential risks when attempting to implement the PR Strategies. That way, it may be assumed that the HLIs in Tanzania can position themselves as reputable and influential higher education institutions within and beyond borders. In the subsequent chapter, the study's findings will be discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ON THEMATIC ISSUES IN PUBLIC

RELATIONS AND CORPORATE VISIBILITY IN HIGHER LEARNING

INSTITUTIONS

7.1 Chapter overview

This chapter integrates and discusses the key findings from the study, specifically focusing on the thematic issues emerging from the deployment and implementation of Public Relations (PR) strategies in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. It combines insights from the previous chapters to present a narrative aligned with the research objectives with their guiding questions, which were the rigorous basis for data collection. Eight (8) themes emerged from the analytical process of this study as presented in the discussion below.

7.2 Public Relations Strategies for Corporate Visibility

7.2.1 Public Event

The first theme that was useful in offering an understanding of the problem under investigation was 'public event'. The public events theme responds to the first objective of this study, which was to identify the PR strategies that HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility. Data indicated that public events, besides illuminating the corporate visibility of the HLIs, also help raise public awareness of the respective HLIs. Raising awareness among the public about HLIs' services and programmes is essential for stakeholders, especially students, so they can make informed choices of the programmes to pursue. Therefore, for HLIs to succeed in enhancing institutional corporate visibility, they should implement public relations

strategies, such as public events that guide the institutions in reaching their goals and objectives. Abubakar (2020) and Chapleo (2015) posit that visible institutions can easily be recognised and accepted in the market and distinguish themselves from other institutions offering the same services regarded as competitors.

The findings show that HLIs capitalise on events like 'bonanza', which includes sports and games and recreational activities such as talent shows. Public Relations Departments within the institutions organise and coordinate the bonanza activities with other units, such as students' association offices. The Bonanza activities attract people from outside the HLIs, and the HLIs benefit from the platforms. Interview extracts showed that public events help HLIs showcase their potential to attract stakeholders and help institutional members build teamwork and a sense of belonging, essential for corporate visibility.

The interview extracts also showed that the extracurricular activities help ensure the corporate visibility of the HLIs in the sense that the external public may get involved in the activities. In such a way, the visibility of HLIs is enhanced. The participants' views about bonanza activities mirrored the findings of the various scholars who found that sports, games and entertainment, in addition to providing students with hands-on experience and a positive impact on academic performance, also influence the corporate visibility of the academic institutions (Stack, 2020; Muñoz-Bullón et al., 2017). Also, the interview extracts showed that when HLIs participate in sports, games, and entertainment, it demonstrates the necessity of community involvement in the HLIs. On top of that, it helps individual members within the HLIs acquire

more exposure and create relationships among individuals in their communities. According to Zhou and Kaplanidou (2018), for example, clubs that provide entertainment in the HLIs encourage community members to attend and support bonanza activities like sports and talent shows. Therefore, the bonanza helps foster relationships between the HLIs, students, and community members, such as students, tutors, parents, and peer groups.

In the parallel vein, scholars such as King, McQuarrie and Brigham (2021) found that students whose parents and friends engage in community activities are more likely to be volunteers. Therefore, encouraging HLI members to participate in bonanza activities creates opportunities for individuals such as students to acquire experience in their fields of experience as volunteers. It also helps the HLIs acquire the benefits related to community involvement and enhances the corporate visibility of the institutions.

Stack (2020) states that extracurricular activities help students and staff members develop social capital by allowing them to interact with fellow students and lecturers. Such activities also help develop cooperation and discipline, which are important for their social well-being and skills (Stack, 2020). Based on the discussion above, one may argue that the bonanza and creating relationships in the HLIs create a sense of belonging and teamwork among stakeholders. The bonanza activities play a part in building an organisational culture, which is essential in PR endeavours, especially in enhancing corporate visibility and overall organisational success. Apart from bonanza, the HLIs engage in academic ceremonies and other internally organised

parties to enhance their corporate visibility. Activities related to ceremonies include issues such as convocation, graduation, and welcome parties for international students, as well as students' bashes, among others. The convocation and graduation ceremonies attract potential stakeholders such as donors and funders who ensure HLIs' sustainability. The HLIs also use such opportunities to invite prominent, influential persons like the country's president, who add potential value to HLIs in illuminating corporate visibility through mass media. In such activities, the PR Officials for the HLIs tend to use such avenues to enhance corporate visibility by positioning happy faces on website content and other media platforms such as social media and web blogs to attract stakeholders, especially prospective students.

During the ceremonies, particularly the convocation and graduations, the HLIs, through their Public Relations Departments, may acquire corporate visibility through publicity of the HLIs and academic programs they offer by writing stories and features in newspapers and other mass media. The fact that ceremonials, especially the graduations, help the HLIs enhance their corporate visibility cannot be overemphasised because the HLIs showcase their organisational culture and innovations in the same way as exhibition activities do. However, PR efforts in the HLIs should be made throughout, not mainly during the graduation ceremonies, as most HLIs do.

This kind of practice for acquiring external PR support to enhance the corporate visibility of the HLIs confirms what some scholars, such as Nyamwaya and Muchunku (2021), found about external PR support to enhance the corporate

visibility of HLIs. Nyamwaya and Muchunku (2021), for instance, found that ceremonies are indeed the best-used mechanisms to draw public attention to the HLIs; however, they are usually deployed occasionally, especially during graduation ceremonies. This provides a ground to debate public events, specifically the academic ceremonies. The abovementioned author's findings are echoed by Camilleri (2020), whose study highlighted the importance of marketing and PR efforts as ongoing activities in the HLIs. In so doing, the HLIs may acquire fruitful and collaborative relationships with industry stakeholders.

The above discussion about external PR support through activities such as ceremonials may suggest that ongoing PR efforts in the HLIs foster students' engagement and mobility in such issues as exchange programmes, as they can create partnership agreements with other institutions as their strategic avenue. The study tour was the other helpful pattern in this public event category. HLIs deployed the strategy of study tours to enhance their corporate visibility among the public. The institutional Departments, particularly the Public Relations, were supported in various ways to ensure they visited different places such as the schools, both O'level and A level, and the Military Camps.

When they visited such places, they made students aware of their HLIs' products and services, particularly the institutions' programmes. Studies about institutional brand image in PR conducted by Scholars such as Fauzi and Ramayah (2018) found that when students are aware of the services and products the particular HLIs offer, they

will be in a position to make proper decisions about the programmes to undertake or about the decision to join particular HLIs.

Also, Couch and Gorgeous (2017), in their study about immersion tours and long-term transformative impacts on students, found that tour visitations open doors for long-lasting relationships and solidarity among students, staff and institutions of higher learning. It also suggests that when people from different places with different knowledge and perspectives meet, it provides them with connections and opportunities for personal growth. It also helps students develop independence skills, confidence, problem-solving skills and other personal traits that would be valuable throughout their lives.

With this scenario, it becomes visible that the relationships that may be established during the study tours can relieve the memory of others and with institutions in the future, as the interview extracts indicated, when PR Professionals of the HLIs visited different places or when members of the HLIs including staff and students visited different places, they carried along with them the memorabilia and/or put on uniforms such as T-shirts with logo that made those they met remember about the HLIs and specific programmes and services the HLI offer, in addition to that the study tour and visitations provided an opportunity for experiential learning which deepened their understanding of the various subject matters including the programmes and services HLIs provide.

Similarly, it was revealed in A-Jalil's (2022) study findings that with the increase of globalisation and internationalisation, tours prove to be vital for students, staff and the HLIs as they make individuals expand worldviews, be out of their comfort zone, get opportunities to add insights about the various issues affecting the globe and most important they make the HLIs they represent to be visible among the public. The interview extracts also revealed that study tours and visitations enable individual persons and the HLIs to establish networking that may provide future opportunities for establishing collaborations and links, which are vital in the corporate visibility of the HLIs, which in turn adds valuable contributions to the success of the organisations.

Based on the findings, study tours and visitations benefit not only individual members among the HLIs but also their general corporate visibility because they create long-lasting relationships and relieve the memory of those who host the visitors. The HLIs may be memorised in terms of how they were advocated by those who represented them and their visual representation, including the logo and other symbols.

The last theme to refer to in this section is exhibition. Findings also indicated that the use of internally and externally organised exhibitions helped the intuitions enhance their corporate visibility, allowing HLIs to reach a wider audience through the display and explain the products and services they offer. This observation by the study participants concurs with Hjelde's (2020) findings, which showed that the exhibitions not only showcase individual students or cohorts but are the institutions' public face. It implies that exhibitions offer great opportunities for HLIs to connect

with their prospects and assist them on issues such as admission. Also, the exhibitions provide a broader picture to the public about the roles and responsibilities HLIs have to the public, such as community services, consultancy, and research activities (e.*g.,* HLI A).

Data also indicated that the internally organised exhibitions created a ground for the externally organised exhibitions in which other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, NACTVET and the Tanzania Commission for Universities were the key organisers of such events. The findings further revealed that the externally organised exhibitions paved the way for HLIs to be widely known to the public, increasing their corporate visibility. The exhibitions allow HLIs to demonstrate their products and services, including the programmes offered, further influencing prospective students to join the HLIs. This scenario informs stakeholders that exhibitions simplify information-seeking by acquiring immediate personalised responses and discovering more about what the HLIs can offer regarding the programmes, funding opportunities, accommodation, etc. It, therefore, adds value when prospects visit in person rather than sticking to online research.

It is, however, evident that a well-designed trade booth, booth staff, and knowledge of the institutions are important factors. For example, Schweder and Maas (2017) found that booth staff should ensure that the interests of the visitors are not lost when attracted to the booths. Their findings coincide with the study findings of Bloch et al. (2017), who emphasise that booth staff not only focus on informational and relational aspects.

Also, Bauer and Borodako (2019) argue that if the visitors have plenty of time at the booth, the staff's focus should mainly be on establishing relationships and not making an attempt to sell them directly. Nevertheless, Hänninen and Karjaluoto (2017) mention in their study findings that marketing communication may usually increase a person's trust in an organisation. This may suggest that if the representatives from the HLIs communicate well, trust between the booth staff and the HLIs at large will increase.

The interview extracts also indicated that some Public Relations Professionals in the HLIs confirmed to be precise about the size, number and booth design in terms of being in good condition and accommodative. However, Bloch et al. (2017) suggest that the booth design is not the most important thing because it is hard to take in all design features in a trade show environment. Also, since the institutions participating in exhibitions offer similar programmes, the chance of their booths looking alike is relatively high. Bloch et al. (2017) suggest it is good to keep the booths simple.

The discussion about HLIs' exhibitions as a PR strategy to enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs implies that the exhibitions or trade fair expos for HLIs are imperative as they make HLIs easily interact with prospects; however, the exhibitions need to be carried out in a very professional manner to minimise the costs for organising, coordinating and even implementing them. The HLIs were encouraged to market their services better even before the trade shows to attract more visitors during the trade shows. The exhibitions' success depends on the overall PR mechanisms carried on over a long period.

In the following section, the second theme, corporate uniqueness, which manifested among the PR strategies most HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility and attract stakeholders will be discussed. It was important to debate on the theme because it was increasingly drawing the attention of practitioners within the field and stakeholders, including students of the HLIs. Along with the analyses and discussion based on the findings presented from chapter four to six, the scrutiny of other researchers whose scholarly work closely relates to or adds some insights to the debate about PR Strategies in the HLIs was considered.

7.2.2 Corporate Uniqueness

Another key finding of this study was the importance of corporate uniqueness in building a strong institutional brand. Based on interview accounts, for example, HLIs recognised the importance of creating and demonstrating their uniqueness to attract stakeholders vital for their stability, sustainability, and survival. In this theme, common patterns were identified, and all appeared to inform the researchers about the first research objective and specific research question that guided the study.

Upon close examination of participants' observations during the interviews, it became evident that the HLIs, through their Departments of Public Relations, played a strategic role in creating institutional uniqueness to make them stand out. They were actively involved in coordinating and implementing activities related to marketing and advertising in their respective HLIs. For instance, they invested in space in various media channels to position advertisements that would attract public attention. The PR Department's key role was in creating publicity for HLIs, including

the institutions' programmes and endeavours. Such a scenario is similar to what Terkan (2014) found in his study. Terkan (2014) found that advertising significantly informs customers about the institution's products and services. On the other hand, marketing activities help manage the brands' images, which ultimately helps boost the companies' reputation. It was further realised in the findings of this study that HLIs' brand awareness was built through some marketing mix elements, especially advertising, to boost corporate visibility and expose the brands to stakeholders. In this case, the PR departments in the HLIs, for example, coordinated and participated in various marketing activities to help HLIs boost their brands and profiles.

Furthermore, the issues of creating corporate uniqueness were also raised by scholars in communications studies, such as Masele and Rwehikiza (2021a & 2024b), who institute that advertising and marketing activities help HLIs communicate their value and differentiate themselves from other HLIs offering similar services. This implies that marketing and advertising activities have proved to be effective means of engaging HLIs with stakeholders, particularly students. It is usually done through the display of academic programmes and the general HLIs' contexts, including the faculties or institutes, schools and facilities the institutions own, as well as the institutional profiles, which mostly have been successful through publishing the success stories.

Based on the current study findings, acquiring prospective students' attention may be challenging without solid marketing and PR advertising strategies. Therefore, some HLIs, such as B, invested much in marketing and advertising. However, some

informants stated that airing the HLIs' announcements and advertisements for programmes offered on media channels was expensive. It coincides with Nyamwaya and Muchunku's (2021) findings about the effect of brand awareness campaigns due to the identity rebranding of the Multimedia University of Kenya. It was found that advertising by a particular University was only done in newspapers occasionally, and that was during graduation ceremonies because it was expensive to buy space in media.

Similarly, Muya and Tundui (2023), in their study about the effects of marketing orientation on the performance of HLIs, found that HLIs face various issues that threaten their existence and sustainability. It includes slashed budgets across all aspects of HLIs' spending, such as salaries, facilities and the number of staff, whereas marketing and advertising are no exception. This was also observed by participants of this study, who argued that it was expensive to advertise on mainstream media, especially on TV and Newspapers (*e.g.* HLI B, Participant 2)

Given that the HLIs could hardly meet the cost of advertising in mass media, alternative ways were found, such as visiting various offices and schools to physically meet prospective students. One may generally establish that most HLIs do not allocate enough funds for these activities. Alternative ways should be sought to overcome the challenge. As Nyamwaya and Muchunku (2021) suggest, studies should be done to make a clear assessment of how the HLI brands could be publicly known other than through advertising and marketing strategies.

In an attempt to create corporate uniqueness, the HLIs have been using publications to gain public understanding of the HLIs' activities and programmes it offers. The Departments of Public Relations in the HLIs prepared packages (press kits) with informational products about the HLIs, such as flyers, brochures, advertorials and backgrounders. They also prepared news flashes and newsletters, which were published monthly and quarterly. These materials were made available online, specifically on the HLIs' websites and interactive online media such as WhatsApp, Face book and Linked-In.

Moreover, the Public Relations materials were placed in offices and open places such as the halls and libraries where stakeholders could easily access them. They were also used by the HLIs when individuals, especially the public relations and marketing personnel, participated in various HLI events, such as exhibitions, where they could interact with people. The PROs carried along with them flyers, posters and brochures when they visited places like schools, military camps and so forth to meet the prospective students (*e.g.* HLI H).

Regarding research publications, data indicated that some HLIs used the opportunity of their research publications to map the HLIs in the World rank, which was important in ensuring their corporate visibility. This is echoed by some scholars whose studies centred on the visibility of the HLIs based on research publications, as presented in the empirical literature of this study in chapter two. These scholars were people like Feyen et al. (2016) and Torres-Samuel et al. (2018), whose study findings support this argument by maintaining that the corporate visibility of HLIs depends on

the number of publications a particular institution makes. The findings of Torres-Samuel et al. (2018) and Feyen et al. (2016) studies align with some participants' views about research. They were of the view that their universities invested heavily in research to expand and make the public aware of the services and contributions the HLIs make in society (*e.g.,* HLI A). In so doing, the HLIs become visible even in the global arena, underscoring the importance of research in enhancing the visibility of HLIs.

Some scholars' viewpoints, however, contradict what the aforementioned researchers, Torres-Samuel et al. (2018) and Feyen's (2016) found about research and HLIs' corporate visibility. Olufemi et al.(2018), for example, found some factors other than research that can make HLIs visible among the public; these include the increased role of education in social development, teacher-student ratio, trained tutors, classroom atmosphere, availability of resources such as teaching and learning facilities to mention a few. The above discussions about research publications made the researcher of this study critically examine further the debate about the strategies HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility while maintaining the focus on Public Relations. Thus, other PR strategies were identified and scrutinised in the ongoing discussion below.

In the same scenario, some participants observed that standard customer care guaranteed customer loyalty and institutional credibility, which added value to HLIs' corporate visibility. This was confirmed during the interview when some participants proclaimed that standard customer care attracted students and other stakeholders to

the HLIs. This was evident when stakeholders, especially customers, visited the premises of the HLIs off the campus and within. They were, for example, provided with useful information when they visited the admissions offices at HLIs and the pavilions during exhibition seasons. The prospects were, for instance, assisted further with application processes and advised accordingly (*e.g.* HLI B).

Such observation is also in line with Khadka and Maharjan (2017), who found that standard customer care, helped organisations cultivate good relationships with stakeholders who, in turn, added value to organisational credibility. Khadka and Maharjan's (2017) findings referred stakeholders back to the second chapter of this study, whereas popular PR scholars and excellent theorists, in particular Grunig (2017) and Dozier (1995), emphasise on cultivating favourable relationships to improve the PR system within organisations. PR's positive impact could be amplified when its efforts were amicably integrated with standard customer service in the HLIs.

Khadka and Maharjan (2017) further argued that a fundamental tenet of good customer relationships was that organisations won by attracting potential customers. It should also be noted that customers require flexibility, availability, creativity, and advantageous product prices from service providers or manufacturers. Hence, those are the issues HLIs should consider when trying to integrate customer relations with Public Relations practices.

The issue of standard customer care also coincides with Rahi's (2016) findings, which indicated that the role of standard customer relations in public relations efforts could not be overemphasized. Standard customer care implied a company's image and reputation because stakeholders closely monitored the activity's capabilities and accuracy. Rahi's (2016) findings are in line with Masele and Rwehikiza's (2021), who highlighted the need for organisations, in particular the HLIs, to keep a continuous flow of communication and provide opportunities for customers to give feedback (please also refer to Excellence Theory in chapter two). The need to acquire feedback creates a sense of belongingness for the institutions' customers. It also highlights the importance of companies mutually communicating their information as stipulated by the excellence theorists. The two communications enable companies to avoid misconceptions and negative perceptions due to information and communications gaps (Grunig, 2017).

Khadka and Maharjan (2017) found that customer satisfaction was essential as it allowed companies to speculate how organisations might be managed. Considering the above discussion, it was important for HLIs to broadly understand the worth of a standard customer relationship. Grunig (2017), in his excellence theory, emphasise that communication and research are imperative because they enhance information flow within and outside the companies and avoid unnecessary confrontations that may occur due to communication gaps.

Nevertheless, some HLIs through the PR Departments or units focus on identifying and managing the Corporate Identity to enhance the corporate visibility of their

HLIs. Bravo et al. (2017) maintain that Corporate Identity Management benefits the company by making it visible and different from other companies. In addition, the proper maintenance of corporate identity influences people to not only recall the given institutional brands but also make the audiences attracted to the services or products the institution or corporation offers. It also helps the company maintain its image and reputation among stakeholders and creates a distinctive attribute among the companies offering similar services or products (Burke, 2016).

It can be suggested that when HLIs maintain their corporate identity, it may help mould the perceptions of stakeholders, particularly customers who are inclined to the corporation's products or services, employees who work for the company, the government to provide a sympathetic legal framework; and the media to cover the stories of the companies well and increase informed citizenry.

Scholars such as Wheeler (2017) found that corporate identity, if not managed, can bring challenges to organisational operations. He established, for example, that the unsuitable and inconsistent corporate identity may mislead the public on how to get along with the company's activities and services it produces. Wheeler's (2017) findings agree with Iglesias et al. (2020), who add that a lack of clear or consistent Corporate Identity could mean that the views and expectations of different stakeholder groups, especially employees, are fragmented. This may confuse other stakeholders, such as funders and prospective students.

Some study participants also asserted the issue of adequately managing corporate identity. For example, they believed that managing the corporate identity, corporate logo and branding in general should be done strategically while adhering to the standards and guidelines stipulated in the brand manuals (*e.g.* HLI B). The findings generally suggest that organisations which are visible but have unfavourable corporate identities are in constant danger of damaging their reputation; however, it is complicated because different groups and individuals are likely to evaluate organisations on different dimensions and may hold different perceptions of the organisation (Dachler & Wilpert, 2019). Given that several issues were discussed in the section about corporate uniqueness, the researcher gained insight to explore more issues until more discoveries on PR Strategies were unveiled. In the following section, other PR strategies that HLIs deployed to enhance their Corporate Visibility were identified and discussed with their specific themes.

7.2.3 Community Support

The interview extracts showed that HLIs, through their Public Relations Units, capitalised on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Community Relations to enhance their corporate visibility to the public. The Public Relations Professionals affirmed that HLIs were no longer institutions that offer a variety of subjects and grant academic degrees as well as conduct research but instead have turned into institutions of higher education and research that train responsible humans and create cutting-edge knowledge to solve issues and problems facing society. Several CSR studies with their different facets, including the impacts of CSR on organisations, support the above contention (see, for example, Tibaijuka, 2020, who studied

Community Relations; Li, Morris & Young 2019 on CSR and corporate visibility; and Gong & Grundy, 2018, on CSR and Labor productivity).

Scholars such as Rahman, Castka and Love (2019) asserted that the general public feels a sense of firms' ownership as they continue to grow and expand. In this case, organisations such as HLIs show that they are part and parcel of society by engaging in various activities, particularly CSR. The data showed that HLIs employed CSR in three significant ways: teaching, public service, and research. In teaching, the HLIs serve as a machinery body to produce responsible citizens who are well-equipped in some areas of specialisation to develop their personal well-being and society at large. In some instances, individuals and groups are beneficiaries of the knowledge and skills, for example, of initiating and developing projects related to such issues as fishing, agriculture and entrepreneurship (*e.g.* HLI C).

On public service, the findings showed that HLIs did community outreach as a way of enhancing the HLIs' corporate visibility by doing such activities as donating equipment and facilities while doing school visits. They also constructed premises for schools in communities around, for example, the latrines, which create a memory for beneficiaries and, in the long run, maybe the prospective students and funders (*e.g.* HLI & A). The participants' observations on CSR agree with Murashima's findings (2020), which showed that by strengthening CSR visibility, the firms could attract more long-term investors, financial capital, and political support, which impact organisational goals and objectives. Murashima's findings (2020) further

revealed that HLIs may need to be aware that the visibility of the institutions was occupied by CSR publicity and no other tactics such as advertisements.

Despite CSR being the strategy to enhance the HLIs' corporate visibility, Karmani et al. (2023) were concerned about financial slack matters in utilizing CSR; they emphasized that several contingencies should be taken into account to improve companies' visibility while avoiding overspending for managing the organizations better. There could be more reasons beyond HLIs to engage in CSR activities. It is acceptable for organizations to use CSR and other activities as part of the organization's strategic direction. However, they should align with their institutions' missions, visions and core values. As such, they indicate the passion and goal for solving societal problems. In the subsequent section, the theme of Internationalization, with its sub-theme will be discussed.

These alum relations add insight to the PR Strategies HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility. At the same time, Internationalization tends to focus on making the institution widely known in International settings rather than the local context; alum relations maintain direct contact with alums and plan to develop projects to oversee the activities of the institutions (Romani-Dias, Carneiro & Barbosa, 2019). They are both discussed below to give an insight into how they might be used to help enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs.

7.2.4 Internationalisation

The theme of Internationalisation, with its sub-theme of alum relations, still informs stakeholders about the first research objective with its guiding research question that sought to identify the PR strategies HLIs use to enhance their corporate visibility. Data showed that some HLIs operate the activities of alum relations and Internationalisation in public relations units. In contrast, in other HLIs, the function was handled independently by a directorate or office related to internationalization matters. No matter the condition, Public Relations Professionals must be involved in matters related to the functions to enhance the corporate visibility of the HLIs. (*e.g.* HLI A).

Research by scholars like Vitenko et al. (2017) has underscored the myriad benefits of Internationalization. These include facilitating the exchange of students and staff in advanced institutions abroad, thereby enhancing education standards and quality. Furthermore, Internationalization can bolster the positioning of HLI brands. It also has a positive impact on research projects and cooperation, and aids in benchmarking activities such as reviewing the teaching curriculum in the HLIs.

The findings also revealed that some HLIs position independent Public Relations Professionals in Alumni and Internationalisation offices. The Professionals deal mainly with Alumni and Internationalization issues and handle matters related to PR issues internationally (*e.g.* HLI A). It was also observed that the Alumni and Internationalisation offices are separate entities in some institutions but still work closely because the goals to be achieved by both offices are almost the same. They

deal with the public and maintain the objective of enhancing institutional corporate visibility. However, Romani-Dias, Carneiro and Barbosa (2019) critique that internationalising to new markets is complex and often expensive.

The findings of this study may lead to the assumption that HLIs may use the opportunities of Internationalisation and Alumni Relations to acquire publicity through effective means of communication such as newsletters, newsflash and audio-visual materials. This will keep the Internationals and alums abreast of the activities taking place within the institutions. Regarding Internationalisation, HLIs, through their Public Relations Units, may be better positioned to help stakeholders cope with cultural diversity. Concerning the aspect of Alumni Relations, HLIs, through their Public Relations Units, maybe in a position to keep the Alumni in touch with the HLIs by maintaining their contacts and updating them regularly on HLIs endeavours as well as opening the room for discussions and recommendations on how the particular HLIs may attain their organizational goals and objectives.

In the same scenario, participants revealed that HLIs deploy collaborations and links among the PR strategies to help the particular HLIs enhance their corporate visibility. Some participants affirmed this when they presented that their HLIs signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with various other institutions, including those offering similar services to position the institutional brand, attract the market and inform the public that the institution was not isolated (*e.g.* HLI A).

The participants' observations about collaboration and links are echoed with the study findings of various scholars who found that collaborations are vital in ensuring the organizational objectives and goals are achieved. For example, Williams (2017), in his study about collaboration, alliance, and merger among higher education institutions in some Universities in Europe, showed that collaborating and linking with other institutions is strategic in the current era for several reasons. Firstly, the HLIs face many financial threats, and students' enrollment keeps declining. Secondly, they face certain risk factors related to academic and administrative issues. Lastly, the HLIs mainly depend on tuition fees for their stability; hence, the decline in the number of students creates risk factors for their sustainability. Therefore, their reactions to the market need the institutions not to be solely independent or isolated from one another (William, 2017).

Hentschke et al. (2017) affirm that the proposal to merge public colleges has become more common in recent years. The campus leaders' survey identified the most common type of collaboration and stated that it focused on academics. The alliances of, for instance, collages are no longer limited to proximity; science and technology can now link the institutions that are miles and hundreds separated in terms of geographical distance (Hentschke et al., 2017).

Similarly, Ladd and Lundy (2020) argue that collaborations and links should not be seen as a strategy for weaker players to survive; they can help both fronts to raise revenue or cut costs and, most importantly, create a strong institutional brand. They further argued that collaborations and links in the HLIs are not without setbacks.

Those institutions that engage in academic collaborations may face internal resistance as they attempt to structure the alliance. When the institutions partner on administrative matters, the hurdles are usually implementing the agreement, especially in determining matters of control (Ladd &Lundy, 2020).

Ishengoma's (2016) findings agree with Ladd and Lundy's (2020) arguments by recommending that when HLIs consider developing extensive partnerships, they should ensure the relationships are mutually beneficial. In his study about strengthening the higher education space in Africa through North-South partnerships and Links, using Tanzania Public Universities as a case, he recommended that the partners eliminate the inherent structure imbalances and inequalities.

The above discussion suggests that collaboration is a strategy many institutions may need to adapt to meet their mission and goals in this era. Public Relations Units may help HLIs boost their images and reputation and, most importantly, enhance their corporate visibility. In so doing, HLIs may be aided in acquiring proper partners to create a strong institutional brand in the global market.

Another sub-theme that completes the category and theme of Internationalisation is institutional representation. Public relations professionals in the HLIs stated that they have been deploying the mechanism of institutional representation at local and international levels to garner corporate visibility for their institutions. At the national level, for instance, individual members within the HLIs presented their particular HLIs by participating in conferences and seminars organized by bodies and organs

such as the parliament and other similar government institutions and CSOs. Participating in events tends to raise public awareness of the institutions' services (*e,g.* HLI).

It was also affirmed that some Higher Learning Institutional members and alumni were also appointed to hold various positions in the Government, which assisted in positioning the intuitional brand locally and internationally *(e.g.* HLI G). Institutional representation at the international level was done such that some HLI representatives were appointed to participate in global ranking competitions and conferences conducted abroad and were involved in exchange programmes. In some instances, Institutional members were appointed to hold various positions in International Organizations like UNESCO. Some were appointed to become board members of various associations, such as the Association of African Universities (AAU), which provided space for HLIs to be presented in the public arena at all levels *(e.g.,* HLI A).

The above discussion shows that PR is a cross-cutting and broad concept, and if effectively strategized, it can provide positive results to organizations. It also suggests that the Public Relations Specialists in the HLIs may use the opportunities of institutional representation to enhance the institutions' corporate visibility by disseminating institutional messages using mass media channels like radio, TV, online media and other related media channels at both local and international levels. Rawat (2019) states that when HLIs acquire representation, it will benefit the PR

outputs by increasing corporate visibility and revenue as the admission number of students increase and the institutional profiles of stakeholders are raised.

The final sub-theme identified in this category of collaborations and links was project initiatives and management. It was revealed that some HLIs try to initiate projects and manage them accordingly. In contrast, some HLI stakeholders believe these projects add value to institutional endeavours, including enhancing the HLIs' corporate visibility. The projects were proclaimed to be both academic and non-academic and were also categorized into two. The first category included those projects initiated in-house, and the second included those initiated externally by the Government, NGOs, and other stakeholders. The internally initiated projects were related to research, training, and awareness campaigns, which were meant to improve and maintain the status of the HLIs and the communities around them.

Regarding internally initiated projects, some HLIs, for example, conducted training on preparing project proposals for development projects and provided management skills. This eventually led to, for example, the formation of native associations in places around the Lake Zones in Tanzania and the association of entrepreneurs, which led to the construction of structures in historical places like Kilwa Kivinje and Bagamoyo in the Coast Region of Tanzania (*e.g.* HLIA and HLI C).

Of externally initiated projects, the HLIs participated in projects that were brought by other organizations, as mentioned earlier. One of the popular projects that most participants mentioned was the HEET project. Some participants explained that they

used the opportunity of the same project to enhance their institutional and corporate visibility so that mass media products similar to newsletters, features, documentaries and other products for public and media consumption were prepared in the Public Relations offices. In so doing, the public became familiar with particular HLIs' activities, including their products and services.

Reflecting on the benefits of project initiatives and management in the HLIs, particularly in enhancing the HLIs' Corporate visibility, Sunder (2016) found that the projects help institutions achieve their objectives, for example, in implementing the academic programmes through curriculum reviews, enhancing student support and other services as well as improve the institutional infrastructure. Also, the project initiatives and management in the HLIs aid in enhancing the understanding and instilling necessary skills related to time management for both trainers and trainees. Since it is also done by breaking down complex tasks into smaller and manageable ones, it helps people involved in the projects set deadlines and effectively allocates the resources regarding materials, finance and human resources (Njuguna, 2019).

A study above by Njuguna (2019) concurs with Mtaka's findings (2022), which reveal that when projects are done in collaboration with organizations, particularly educational institutions, they help them organize and inspire HLIs to take necessary actions to create project deliverables that meet the particular HLIs' needs. Nevertheless, the projects in HLIs may provide the project coordinators and managers with both hard and soft skills necessary for ensuring the stability of the HLIs' activities, guaranteeing the sustainability and survival of the particular HLIs.

Mtaka (2022) recommended that the projects in HLIs should be controlled and deliverables be transparent to ensure that each person involved understands their specific roles and responsibilities.

When the projects are well controlled, the costs for their operations may be minimized, and the target will be met as initially planned (Mtaka, 2022). Therefore, in addition to helping enhance the HLIs' corporate visibility, the above discussion suggests that when public relations professionals in the HLIs are effectively involved in project initiatives and management as team members, their focus will be on assessing the projects through the lens of their profession. It will allow them to excavate the crucial details about the projects and enable the public to acquire complete information about the institutions and projects. Meanwhile, the PRPs, as professionals, will consider issues related to reputation and image management, which are vital in illuminating corporate visibility.

It was realized that the above PR Strategies were not sufficient to inform the stakeholders about how the HLIs enhance their corporate visibility. This led to critical exploration of other strategies, which will be presented in the next section, along with a discussion of the two remaining objectives of this study.

7.3 Implementation of Public Relations Strategies

This section extends the discussion on thematic issues in the study initiated in the previous sections. It reflects the findings presented in chapters four, five and six.

The section begins the discussion on internal positioning theme followed by media engagement and internal collaborations.

7.3.1 Internal Positioning

Some HLIs capitalize on internal positioning strategy to enhance their corporate visibility. They first ensured they strategically used communications and employed PR Protocol and Etiquette, which refers to the established rules and customs in public relations, to better position their HLIs in people's minds. At the same time, strategic communications imply creative and efficient ways of communicating the best message using proper channels of communication to the right target audience, as well as using research to acquire feedback to meet organisational goals, PR Protocol and Etiquette issues associated with making a good impression and avoid causing offence or embarrassment to avoid lousy reputation.

It was indicated in the findings that public relations practitioners in the HLIs believed that Strategic Corporate Communications helped the HLIs build support for particular causes and shape the opinion of stakeholders on issues that impact the HLIs. Such observation coincides with the findings of Heide et al. (2020), which showed that strategic communications helped HLIs manage situations such as communication crises. It also implies that when institutions, in this case, the HLIs, do not consider the strategic communications approach, they may be at risk of circulating the wrong information to the public, which may result in negative perceptions and wrong decisions in particular HLIs.

It was also recognised that before authorising the operations of PR activities through the Departments of PR or Communications, most HLI outputs could not reach the broader communities, neither were communications issues handled properly nor reach the communities. One of the important quotes about this, for example, was, "…the results of our research have been stored in desks and libraries but we have realised that it our responsibility to make the society understand the results of the research we do…" (*e.g.* P5, HLIA).

The above quote signifies a significant shift in the understanding and use of PR in HLIs. Initially, some HLIs did not fully grasp the importance of PR. However, with the recognition of the value of corporate strategic communications, HLIs in the country have begun to effectively utilize PR and communications departments to achieve their organizational goals. This transformation in the understanding and application of PR reflects the evolution and progress in the field of Public Relations.

Interview extracts also showed that the HLIs, through the PR Units, have been strategically using PR and Protocol etiquette to edify the reasonable standards of their institutions. Most importantly, PR and Protocol etiquette have been used as tools to give HLIs an edge in cultivating relationships with representatives and partners who visit the particular HLIs (*e.g.*, HLI H). This coincides with the Excellent Theorist Grunig (2017), who highlighted the importance of relationship-building among stakeholders to minimise the risk of turning the image of organisations.

This theme about internal positioning completes the discussion of the findings and analysis of research objective one and its guiding question, which attempts to identify the Public Relations Strategies that HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility. It was regarded as the concluding theme in the categories of themes that attempted to answer research question number one because it was realised that participants could not unveil discoveries about the same. In the following section, the themes that answer research objectives two and three will be discussed.

7.3.2 Media Engagement

In this section, media engagement with its aligning patterns, such as media relations, notice boards, and the website, informed about the second research objective, which required an assessment of the implementation of the PR Strategies in the HLIs. The interview accounts portrayed that PR Professionals believed that to implement the PR strategies for enhancing corporate visibility effectively, they had to use various communication channels. The communication channels deployed were categorised into the Mainstream and Online Media Channels. Mainstream media are traditional mass media such as newspapers, television, and radio, whereas online mass media is comprised of media that use the Internet to reach audiences. Examples of online media are social media and web blogs.

During the Interviews, participants affirmed that their roles and responsibilities, in particular of creating institutional images and reputation and eventually illuminating the HLIs' Corporate visibility, would not have been comprehensively done without the mass media channels. It was because the audiences were heterogeneous and

widely dispersed; therefore, the best means to reach them was through the mass media channels. The findings showed that almost all informants mentioned the mainstream media and believed they helped the HLIs' images grow. Their corporate visibility is enhanced among the broader audiences, especially students, donors, funders and even tutors who are the internal public.

The mainstream media were, therefore, strategically incorporated in communication plans to avoid dire consequences, such as when the HLIs face crises. It was supported by Perse and Lambe's (2016) study findings that if the media is not controlled, HLIs may suffer the consequences of not securing positive images on mistrusted media outlets. Moreover, it was revealed that the Public Relations Professionals in the HLIs deployed different communication channels such as television, newspapers, radio and other mainstream media to cover the success stories of the given HLIs. The mainstream media enabled the HLIs through their Communications and Public Relations Departments to reach the target audiences more easily than trying to meet them physically (*e.g.* HLI F). Empirical evidence about the PR profession and the media confirms that PRPs and practitioners from other specialisations believe in the importance of media in reaching a wider audience.

Katsoudas (2023) found that when utilising the media, particularly the broadcast media, the organisations may connect with people who may not be active in seeking information online or who belong to demographic groups less engaged with digital media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Linked and the like.

Katsoudas's (2023) findings agree with Sriramesh and Verčič (2013), who found it challenging to underestimate or overstate the significant relationship between the mass media and Public Relations. PR Professionals play a crucial role in managing media relations, as they depend on media channels to reach their target audiences through disseminated messages carried by the media.

Likewise, the mass media depend on the Public Relations industry to get news and advertisements, which are essential for survival. They, therefore, have a close relationship, and they all depend on each other. Grunig (2017) established that every public relations professional should create a positive relationship with the media, which elicits extra consideration when the institutions or organisations are under attack. Although controlling the messages of HLIs in the media can be challenging in particular when the content is not paid advertising, both practitioners and scholars acknowledge the powerful role of mass media in shaping public opinion and discourse. The public relations professionals in the HLIs, therefore, constantly seek to use the media to communicate their institutional messages to the target audience. Sriramesh and Verčič (2013) maintain that to nourish effective PR and media relations, PR professionals should consider the target audience and the media policies.

PR, being the voice of the organizations, particularly the HLIs, must deploy the means through which the public will recognize the organizations' policies, procedures, and actions. This stress on the role of PR as the voice of the organization makes the audience feel the responsibility and importance of their role. Nukurungi's

(2018) findings that it is the role of PRPs to create the position of an organization in terms of improving its reputation and increasing brand awareness, further emphasizes the importance of the PR person in the organization using different media channels to reach the target audiences.

The interviews also showed that stakeholders believed that social media significantly affected public relations practice and made institutions visible to the public. The majority of informants confirmed the importance of social media in the HLIs through which their observations mirrored the findings of various scholars such as Jędrzejczyk and Brzeziński (2021) as well as Birkholz et al. (2016). In their study findings, the aforementioned scholars found that social media significantly impacts the PR profession, and more importantly, they aid in enhancing institutional corporate visibility, which is vital for HLI's sustainability. Nevertheless, social media also helps ensure that HLIs are widely known in terms of their services. The findings on social media are not surprising, given that social media revolutionized the communication process in the media industry (Zeitzoff, 2017).

Despite the increased relevance of social media in the HLIs' communications, some stakeholders remained ambivalent towards the application of social media as both challenges and opportunities were realised. Some Presidents of students' Associations in the HLIs, for example, believed that social media alienated some less privileged prospects, specifically those who dwell in rural areas. In the Tanzanian context, most people who dwell in villages do not have internet access, as do social media (e.g. HLI C, August 5, 2023).

This lack of internet access can be a significant challenge for HLIs in reaching these potential students. Some students' attitudes toward social media coincide with the study by scholars such as Nchabeleng et al. (2018) on social media limitations; the scholars revealed how certain people and even public relations professionals had mixed feelings towards using social media and the Internet. However, social media also presents opportunities for HLIs to reach a wider audience and to engage with their stakeholders in a more direct and interactive manner.

Most interviewees believed that social media forced organisations, including the HLIs, to be more transparent, responsive and authentic in disseminating information and, most importantly, providing quality education. Social media has become a valuable tool for HLIs to communicate directly with their audience, respond to feedback, and showcase their activities and achievements. This aligns with Shields and Peruta's (2019) findings that emphasise social media as a valuable communication tool influencing organisations' image. Generally speaking, social media positively impacts how HLIs communicate to the public and enhances their corporate visibility of the HLIs, which is vital for their sustainability and survival. Besides social media, HLIs use notice boards to communicate their messages to target audiences, particularly the internal public. Notice boards have effectively facilitated communications in organisations such as the HLIs. They have used them to keep the community members, particularly staff members and other stakeholders who may happen to be around the HLIs' premises, abreast of the various issues happening to the HLIs.

In most instances, one may find the information posted on the HLIs' notice board displaying issues such as policy updates, work-related events like promotions, conferences, institutional success stories, and upcoming events. However, some findings about this strategy reveal that the notice boards eliminate valuable nonverbal communication and do not allow the PR experts to receive feedback promptly. Therefore, it may infringe on the theorists' principles of excellence, highlighting the importance of feedback and two-way communications in making the PR system effective in organisations (Grunig, 2017).

Nevertheless, Public Relations Officers (PROs) explained that activities such as media relations necessitate PR work to enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs. The research findings revealed that media relations and all its facets play an essential role when deployed to enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs. It involves coordinating directly with media personnel, such as the editors responsible for producing news, features and other media products. Most interviewees agreed that media relations were cost-effective since they acquired free publicity and media coverage at minimal cost (*e.g.* HLI C). It can be done by establishing relationships between the HLIs through the Department of Public Relations and the media personnel responsible for disseminating information to the heterogeneous category of people through the mass media. The ultimate goal for media relations is to get the company's name mentioned in media outputs, including TV, Radio, Newspapers and Online Media Channels.

The results showed that PROs in the HLIs have been trying their best to manage HLIs' relationship with media to bring valuable benefits to HLIs, especially in making the public acquire and understand messages accurately and immediately. HLIs build relationships with media personnel through visits, inviting them to conferences, attending their inquiries like answering phone calls and arranging interview sessions, and preparing pitch stories for them (*e.g.* HLI A).

Despite the usefulness of this strategy to public relations in HLIs, it is not without critique. For example, Iturregui-Mardaras et al. (2020) and Hanusch et al. (2020) found that the PRP approach to media relations sometimes generates misunderstanding between the practitioners and media personnel, specifically the journalists in the media houses. Firstly, some journalists complain about the pressure they receive from PRPs; they claim that the PRPs put much pressure to ensure their public relations materials get published by contacting the upper managers of the media houses, which discourages the journalists and raises anger to bypassed editors. Such behaviour diminishes the credibility of Public Relations Practitioners in the eyes of media house practitioners (Iturregui-mardaras et al., 2020; Hanusch et al., 2020)

Also, ignorance was one of the setbacks in PR and media relations, as identified by authors like Cutlip (2006), who argued that some Public Relations materials, including statements and press releases, lack news values, which causes dissatisfaction among editors as they consider wasting their time concentrating on the same. Thirdly high number of Public Relations materials proved to be a challenge in

media relations. Cutlip (2006) further argues that some PRPs feel their credibility is measured by the bulk of PR materials sent to media houses weekly. Regardless of how good they are, the media generally feels uncomfortable when swapped for publicity resources.

Cultlip's (2006) criticisms of media relations are echoed by Verčič and Colić (2016), who found unprofessional media statements and other PR materials being sent in large quantities such that they get rejected due to expressions and logo writings, which reduce the trust of journalists towards the PR Professionals. However, literature shows that editors of media organisations admit that media relations are still important to parties, the PRPs and journalists, as they smoothen the information transfer process from the PRPs of HLIs to editors and later to the general public. Therefore, this section provides insight to practitioners in the PR field and other interested individuals that the work of PR, particularly when striving to enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs, may not be possible without engaging media. As discussed above, Media has been essential in disseminating the institutional strategic messages to the target audiences. The theme of internal positioning marks the end of the discussion about the PR strategies that HLIs deploy to enhance their corporate visibility. In the following section, other key issues that inform about research objective two will be discussed.

7.3.3 Internal Collaborations

This section informs about the leading theme in an attempt to answer research objective two. The theme of internal collaborations with its sub-themes, namely

organising and coordinating communication activities, financial support, resource support, and information support, was identified. This category enlightens the second research objective about the implementation of public relations strategies to enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs.

Participants, particularly the Vice Chancellors (VCs) and Public Relations Ofiicers (PROs), argued that for HLIs to enhance their corporate visibility, they had to implement the PR Strategies thoroughly. In so doing, the PR Professionals were engaged in various activities to play a part in organising or coordinating the communication activities. These activities included exhibiting research activities and projects conducted in various units, departments, and faculties of higher learning institutions (*e.g.*, HLIA & C). It implies that if PROs were not coordinating such activities, the public, including employees, could not know what was occurring within their HLIs.

The above justifies why the PR and Communications Specialists in the HLIs usually prepare publications such as Newsflash, Infographics and Newsletters in formats, print and hard copies, to disseminate the messages to staff members and visitors. They do so to inform them about the projects and other activities within the HLIs. Such circumstances suggest that if it had not been for the involvement of PR and communications experts in the projects, both public, internal and external, they could hardly have understood their organizations, including their activities and organizational culture.

The findings also imply that when PR specialists coordinate and organise communication activities, creating and illuminating corporate visibility becomes manageable and more meaningful. That is why one of the VCs said: "…. So, they have started to implement the strategies while before the office of public services was responsible..." (P5, HLIA). The above quote also suggests that Public Relations Departments can do better when they are not sublimated to other functions, something which scholars with incredible personalities in the PR profession, like Grunig (2017), keep emphasizing.

PR activities are of utmost importance in organisations, particularly the HLIs, because their executed strategies aid in interpreting individuals' attitudes within and outside the organisations. As PR Gurus such as Griswold (1948) posit, public relations specialists identify and shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and when involved in coordinating information activities, they help organisations earn public understanding and support.

Findings also indicated that implementing the PR Strategies would not have been thoroughly guaranteed without the support of the various units within the HLIs. It showed that the support to the public relations units was mainly in finance, resources, and information. Like any other endeavour to be achieved in the organisations, budgets and financing are indispensable when executing Public relations strategies. One of the participants, for instance, said: "...The PR Department has its budget, and the coordinator coordinates and arranges budgeting issues about the Department's activities in specific periods (*Interview; HLI A, Participant 5, Male, August 22,*

2023). This implies that the management of HLIs understands the importance of financially supporting the PR department in achieving its objectives.

Public Relations Practitioners need to plan for activities or strategies, whether the campaign or independent activity within the institution, that require PR tactics before executing the particular plan. In most instances, the organisation's financial strengths determine the success of the activities to be carried out in the PR department; however, creativity is also essential. In determining how the PR Departments were financially supported, some participants said: "…There are times we need financial support to sponsor certain events in public the University does support..." (*e.g.* HLI G). The above quote implies that some PRPs comfortably executed their duties and responsibilities because of the financial support they acquired from their HLIs' management.

It concurs with Anani-Bossman's (2022) findings, which explicitly showed that when the PR Department obtains financial support from the management, the focus will mainly be on building trust and institutional credibility, which add value to the corporate visibility of the institution. One of the participants said, for example, "…Some schools may provide financial support to pay additional exhibitors and more booths to accommodate visitors during exhibitions and reduce the bulky of phone calls from customers......" (*e.g.* HLI A).

The above quote suggests that there is no loss when the PR Departments obtain financial support from the HLIs' management. The sentence … "reduce the bulky of phone calls from customers" may particularly mean that it was not just a support to

executing the activities of the exhibition but rather the extension to solve other queries that would rescue the institution from poor reputation or damage in that case, for example, customer relations during such incidents as admissions.

The second support to the PR Department was the resources support, which included human and material support. The material support entailed such issues as well-furnished offices and working facilities. Concerning human resource support, some participants commented that the other HLIs' units extended full support to the operations of Public relations strategies. They acquired support from the various Departments and Directorates, such as the Directorate of Undergraduate Studies, Research, and Postgraduate Studies, to mention a few. The findings suggest that other institutional units should support PR motives and actions to ensure public relations strategies are smoothly handled. PR and Communications specialists within the HLIs should not be isolated; every person in the institution has a Public Relations role to play, as Aikins and Adu-Oppon (2015) affirmed in their study findings that the whole HLIs community has a role to play in Public Relations, whether the management, non-teaching staff and staff members including the technical people, cross guards and/or cafeteria people. They must maintain relationships among themselves and other stakeholders to ensure an institutionally favourable image, in which public relations practitioners coordinate the activities to enhance institutional and corporate visibility.

Last but not least, support is to be identified as information support. Several PR Professionals admitted that they managed to implement the Public relations strategies

due to information support they acquired from other Departments and individual members within the institutions. The quote by one of the PR Professionals in the HLIs, "…Some colleagues offer hand support in disseminating information in the form of posters and tweets..." (*e.g.* HLI H) advocated the essence of information support to Public Relations operations. The information support also helps PR acquire recommendations on going about the various institutional endeavours while not damaging the institution's image and reputation.

However, the implementation of the Public relations strategies was not without obstacles. It was indicated that the HLIs, through the Departments of Public Relations, faced several challenges in an attempt to execute the strategies for Public Relations, which aimed at enhancing the HLIs' Corporate visibility. The leading challenges were identified as inadequate resources and problems associated with communication strategies and policy. The inadequate resources comprised human resources, followed by fiscal, material, and decoupled strategies. In contrast, the communication strategy comprised unclear situation analysis (research) and a lack of communication policy. There is no doubt that these challenges, when they become critical, threaten institutional functionality, stability and survival.

It was affirmed that some Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) required additional staff in their PR departments due to various factors, including the institution's size. Some HLIs were significantly large, creating a mismatch between the scope of PR activities and the available personnel needed to serve the institution effectively. To enhance efficiency, PR departments should be equipped with sufficient staff capable

of handling diverse responsibilities rather than relying on one individual. The shortage of personnel in PR departments may lead to inefficiencies in work performance and hinder practical communication efforts.

This agrees with Aikins and Adu-Oppong's (2015) study findings about staff perception of the PR Unit in the University of Education in Winneba Campus Ghana, which revealed that in addition to inadequate human resources, some HLIs did not make it clear in their structure about the position and roles of PRPs. Aikins and Adu-Oppong's (2015) study findings further revealed that the primary function of PRPs was attending visitors and taking care of their well-being, planning for their itinerary at the migration offices and coordinating funeral affairs of staff members, among other duties. It may pose a challenge to scholars in the PR field; the question is whether this builds up the PR profession when referring to the PR principles put forth by the PR fathers, Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays and others.

The other evident threat that the offices of PR faced in implementing the strategies for enhancing the HLIs' Corporate visibility was the fiscal resources. It concurs with Okaiteyo and Ottah (2021), Page (2019) and Tesch's (2018) study findings, which revealed factors that hinder PR effectiveness among HLIs. These included a lack of support from the management and other units, an inability to accord PR to its rightful position and inadequate funds. For example, the same could be extracted in this study's interviews, where some participants complained that some PR strategies could not be accomplished due to financial constraints in the Departments. It may add insight that some HLIs could better attract more stakeholders and enhance corporate visibility, but the main challenge was finance.

The PRPs posited that resource scarcity, particularly materials, also threatened the implementation of PR strategies to enhance corporate visibility. Such materials included working facilities and equipment like professional cameras, computers and editing software. One of the PRPs, for example, said: "…we lack equipment and facilities like computers and cameras…there are times I even feel ashamed when visitors come because I am using 'kiswaswadu' camera to take them photos..." We also face a lack of communication facilities, for example, internet" *(e.g.* HLI G). The phrase "...I am feeling ashamed..." implies that the PR office is the face of the institution, as Sachdeva (2009) pinpointed that Public Relations is the eye and ears of the institution, hence being that reputable institutions that produce professionals needed for countries development and yet lack facilities do not sound proper.

Additionally, even in the organisation structure, the PR Professionals are directed to report to the Chief Executive Officers of Organizations and are also the intermediaries between the organisation and its public; they, therefore, receive some visitors in their offices. Therefore, PR Offices should be well furnished and equipped with all necessary facilities to ensure that the tasks related to PR issues get smoothly handled to meet organisational goals and, most importantly, guarantee proper illumination of institutional and corporate visibility.

Last but not least, the threat to the implementation of the PR strategies was the decoupled PR strategies. This implies that some PR strategies remained impractical due to the lack of entanglement between the practitioners and the practices. Some of the Public Relations Officials, for example, were quoted saying: "...There is also no

acknowledgement or recognition of the role of Public Relations activities, for example, most people think that PR person's role is mainly to take pictures …Also lack of PR involvement in the activities is a major problem … There should also be a clear-cut point on the roles played between other professionals and PR people in the institutions." *(e.g.* HLI C).

The above scenarios suggest that the PR profession is yet to be recognised and acknowledged in most HLIs. Staff members, particularly of public HLIs, should be aware of the importance of Public Relations in organisations. If the PR Departments' roles were acknowledged, they could function properly and maximise their benefits in particular HLIs.

Data also showed that HLIs lacked a Communication Policy and a Communication Strategy. While Communication Policy implies a set of communication rules and regulations that form a base for day-to-day decisions, the latter is the plan that is from several plans or policies to achieve organisational goals and objectives. Martinelli (2021), no matter the differences the two may have, both are designed to achieve organisational goals and objectives. When considering the importance of Communication Policy and the Communication Strategy, one of the participants, for instance, said: "…. We will as well use the same approach to create a communication strategy for the whole University and the communication policy…" (*e.g.* HLI A). It implies that there are benefits of robust when corporate communication strategies and policies are situated in organisational plans and operations.

Gallini et al. (2021) proclaim that the Communication Policy and Strategy help the public, particularly the internal public of an organisation, understand expectations about a particular organisation's standard behaviour and performance. They also protect individuals within the organisations from communicating in a manner that may endanger the corporate visibility of a particular organisation, in this case, the HLIs. Some scholars' observations on the topic match with participants' views on the same; one of the participants, for example, said:

> *"...We should be creative in terms of developing new programmes, and they should align with the needs of the public... also we should strategically communicate about the services we provide..." (Interview; Higher Learning Institution F, Participant 1, Male May 25 2023).*

Another participant said:

> "…We get support from other units, but I think much needs to be done to raise people's awareness of the importance of Public Relations and Communications in general within the institution. Some confuse its roles or do not understand what it is all about..." (*Interview; HLI D, Participant 2, Female, July 14, 2023).*

The above quotes in the discussion imply that much needs to be done to reshape the current trend, especially on how PR should be handled in the context of HLIs. As some participants pointed out, people are unaware of the duties and responsibilities of the PRPs. Even those who were at least aware of the PR profession were not familiar with the rules and standards set to guide communication issues in the HLIs. It poses a threat to the PR professionals in the HLIs and other individuals within the

management teams, as well as the whole institutional image and reputation, which may be in danger, especially when communication standards are unclear.

Two other specific concerns identified within the realm of Organizational Communications, particularly in the HLIs, were lack of research (not conducting situational analysis) before undertaking any PR activity and the non-organised communication strategy. The latter implies that some HLIs knowingly or unknowingly utilised the communication strategies in a non-organised or unprofessional way. One of the participants, for example, said: "…I would say the existing ones are not well utilised, hence once they are set to clear and are well implemented, maybe we will think of employing additional activities.." (e.g. *Interview; HLI C, Participant 1, Male, March 27, 2023).*

Another participant said: "…. We do not have a planned or well-established strategy, not even a yearly or five-year strategic plan..." (*e.g.* HLI A). The above quotes suggest that several HLIs do not have well-defined communication strategies to guide them in their daily communication endeavours. They mainly depended on the HLIs' Almanac, the product of the overall corporate strategic plan, to execute their daily calendar-based activities. The PR departments must be proactive in ensuring their plans and activities meet the organisational goals; they should go the extra mile to make events remarkable in their HLIs. Perhaps that would be possible if they strategically employed communication plans and policies to guide them appropriately.

Therefore, even though HLIs deploy several PR efforts to enhance their corporate visibility, it's not without obstacles. It may be suggested that HLIs examine ways through which their corporate visibility will be enhanced with no or minimal obstacles. In the subsequent section, the theme that informed stakeholders about research objective three will be discussed, and that is stakeholders' confidence.

7.4 Public Relations Strategic Approaches to Enhancing Corporate Visibility

This section builds upon the thematic issues discussed earlier by exploring the strategic public relations approaches adopted by Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) to enhance their corporate visibility. Drawing insights from the findings in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, it highlights key strategies and analyse them in the context of their effectiveness in enriching the visibility and reputation of HLIs. The section fundamentally concludes the discussion by underscoring stakeholders' confidence as a central outcome and driver of successful visibility efforts.

7.4.1 Stakeholders' Confidence

Stakeholder confidence, a key theme in this study, is the focus of this section. It is a crucial aspect that the research guiding questions sought to address. This category of themes, which is the final objective of this study, investigates the contribution of PR strategic approaches on the corporate visibility of specific HLIs. Some participants, particularly students and the management of HLIs believed that the PR strategies were essential in meeting the HLIs' goals and objectives. The results showed that some HLIs became more accepted as they endorsed and executed the PR strategies in their overall institutional plans and operations. This underscores the significant role

of PR strategies in enhancing the corporate visibility of HLIs and instilling confidence among stakeholders.

The data also revealed that PR strategies, in addition to enhancing corporate visibility, can significantly increase awareness of the services and products offered by HLIs. This could potentially lead to an increase in student enrollment as the HLI brand becomes more visible to the public. This observation aligns with the findings of Masele and Rwehikiza (2022), who noted that a visible HLI brand can familiarize stakeholders, particularly prospective students, with the institution's offerings without the need for a physical visit. Therefore, PR strategies can help stakeholders such as students, funders, donors, employees, and lecturers build confidence and trust in the institution by clearly communicating its messages.

The observations by participants and scholars such as Masele and Rwehikiza (2022) also imply that favourable corporate visibility ensures the maintenance of institutional images and reputations even when it is about to experience image or reputational damage, the PR mechanism can be used in the HLIs to help rescue the situation. Bundy et al. (2018) also found that when the organisation is accepted, it can quickly build relationships with various stakeholders, including the organisations that offer similar services; as such, they can collaborate in various activities that may benefit both parties.

Concerning recognition, some participants argued that the more HLIs through the PR Departments applied the strategies for enhancing corporate visibility, the more the

public recognised the institutional brands and services HLIs offer. Zeitzoff (2017) found in his study that increasing institutional recognition can be accompanied by several PR strategies, such as deploying social media and ensuring the institutions' services to public on various other traditional media, such as radio and television, which participants had also affirmed.

Kim (2020) found that when used effectively, public relations can help institutions overcome various obstacles and create a long-term impact. It goes beyond creating institutional recognition, as it humanizes the institutional images, thereby fostering lasting relationships with familiar audiences. One participant's statement, for instance,'…More people have joined this university because they have understood its programmes …' *(e.g.* HLI D), suggests that HLIs that effectively deploy PR strategies can achieve institutional recognition from the public. This recognition is crucial in attracting key stakeholders who ensure the institution's survival. Powell (2024) emphasizes that public relations is not a quick fix; it requires consistency and mutually beneficial relationships to yield long-term results. When applied effectively, PR can be a powerful tool for increasing brand recognition and driving business growth.

In attracting customers, participants believed that the PR strategies were essential in enhancing corporate visibility so that people were attracted to particular HLIs. Some participants, for example, said: "…We also take advantage of the ceremonies to get the best photos, including the happy faces and beautiful graduation gowns to attract more students to join the University..." It implies that PR's activities intend to attract

stakeholders, particularly students, to the HLIs. This is in line with Provini (2019), Christensen and Gornitzka (2017), who found that the PR strategies are especially necessary for the stability and survival of HLIs in the contemporary World in which the rapid growth of the international higher education system has put colleges and universities under the pressure of acquiring more students and stakeholders. Therefore, raising the profile of HLIs has become imperative (Collins, 2016).

Therefore, public relations practitioners in the HLIs do several activities to improve institutional status and, more importantly, attract students, lecturers, funders and donors. However, some participants believed that HLIs may go further, particularly in improving the quality of their services and doing such activities as providing loans and scholarships to attract prospective students attracted to the HLIs (*e,g*. HLI G). These participants' observations concur with the findings of Ansoglenang et al. (2018) about responses to the changing competitive educational environment in the World. They highlighted several areas that need attention in the higher education system; however, it was realised that the quality control standard in implementing the academic programmes should be prioritised. It suggests further investigation into corporate visibility and Higher Learning Institutions to assess how the aspects identified in the category influence stakeholders' confidence regarding the HLIs' corporate visibility.

Based on the above scenarios, one may assume that the HLIs have ignored immediate interactions with stakeholders; therefore, their confidence towards HLIs may be minimal. Additionally, the PR strategies may not be sufficient for the

corporate visibility of the HLIs. However, they should ensure stakeholders' engagement and confidence towards the HLIs and the services they offer. The HLIs build trust, loyalty, and a sense of belonging among the stakeholders, which are imperative to the corporate visibility of HLIs.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Chapter Overview

This study, which explores the practical implications of public relations strategies on corporate visibility of the HLIs, has attempted to identify the public strategies employed by HLIs in Tanzania, analyse their implementation, and assess contribution of public relations strategic approaches on the visibility of specific HLIs. This final chapter will present a summary of key research findings and a conclusion based on these findings. Moreover, the study's practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future studies will be presented, making the research directly applicable to the field of public relations and higher learning institutions.

8.2 Summary of Key Research Findings

This study attempted to explore the PR strategies Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) deploy to enhance their corporate visibility among the public. When the HLIs are visible, they ensure a good position of the institutional profiles, which is vital in attracting potential stakeholders such as students, lecturers, funders, and donors. The potential stakeholders are assumed to guarantee the stability, function-ability and survival of the HLIs. Having realized the general importance of corporate visibility, the Governments in East Africa, particularly Tanzania, have endeavoured to promote the HLIs through public relations strategies to raise their profiles. PR strategies are not just crucial; they are the lifeline for the stability and survival of HLIs in the contemporary world. The rapid growth of the international higher education system

has put colleges and universities under immense pressure for expansion and transformation. In such instances, PR practitioners help their HLIs achieve the goal of being visible to the public. However, the concept of corporate visibility has left ambivalence in the market by affecting the HLIs such that they experience inequality in terms of recognition, acceptance and attraction.

Guided by theoretical reviews on public relations and corporate visibility, this study pursued three crucial research objectives. These objectives were to identify the public relations strategies employed by higher learning institutions in Tanzania to enhance their corporate visibility, to assess the implementation of these strategies in enhancing the corporate visibility of these institutions, and to understand how public relations strategic approaches affect the corporate visibility of the selected higher learning institutions. Data collection and analysis were based on the interpretive philosophy, which allowed the construction of reality inductively based on the participants' views and experiences.

The study employed Qualitative data analysis methods where in-depth interviews solicited information about the subject matter. The participants were individuals from higher learning institutions, including the advisory and regulatory HLI body, namely the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). Additionally, primary data was supplemented by comprehensively reviewing reports and publications on admission trends from particular HLIs and TCU reports. More importantly, the study also focused on the uncertainty reduction theory (URT) and the excellence public relations theory (EPRT) to guide the study and its analysis.

The study findings revealed that HLIs use several PR Strategies to enhance their corporate visibility, particularly in Tanzania. The HLIs, through their Public Relations Departments, mainly deploy strategies, namely public events, corporate uniqueness, community support, internal positioning, internationalization and internal facilitation. Integrating public events into corporate strategic communications was predominant since it carried a variety of other sub-themes or categories that made it the most preferred strategy. It included, for example, ceremonies and other internally organized parties, sports bonanza, study tours and exhibitions. Some strategies appeared that did not acquire much mention, which led to an assumption that not all HLIs employed those strategies, so they turned out to be peculiar. These were, for example, project initiatives and management, institutional representation and standard customer care, among others.

The findings showed that the PR departments of HLIs play a crucial role in ensuring the implementation of PR Strategies. They coordinate various activities while considering the PR perspectives when implementing those activities. This ensures the double roles of PR: to meet the desired organizational goals and, most importantly, to enhance the corporate visibility of HLIs. The Public Relations Practitioners (PRPs) also coordinate activities such as disseminating research results and reports for projects done by the institutions. The findings also revealed that the HLIs implemented the PR strategies with the support of various other institutional units and directorates, such as the admissions, the Dean of students' office and the management. Therefore, the PR Department acquired support related to finance, information, and resources, including human and material resources.

The PR units are not just departments; they are the organizational eyes, ears and mouthpieces. They play essential role in using mass media channels, both traditional and online, to guarantee the thorough implementation of the PR strategies for enhancing the HLIs' corporate visibility. Their engagement with the mass media facilitates the public recognition of HLIs' policies, procedures, and actions. Therefore, in their day-to-day endeavours and long-term plans, PR uses media to disseminate messages to the targeted audience, whether internal or external, thereby illuminating the corporate visibility of the HLIs.

Despite the favourable context for implementing PR strategies, several challenges hinder their implementation within the context of HLIs. These challenges also threaten the functionality, sustainability, and survival of HLIs. Among them are inadequate resources, which comprise human resources, fiscal challenges, materials, and decoupled challenges. Also, PR professionals face threats to communication policy and strategies, and most HLIs do not research communication and corporate affairs before implementing PR strategies. Ultimately, the communications and PR Strategies in most HLIs were neither professionally handled nor fully utilized. Additionally, the misconception about corporate communications strategies made the institutional individuals not comprehend the duties, responsibilities, and importance of Public Relations in the HLIs.

Last but not least, the concluding objective aimed to answer the research question about how the PR strategic approaches contribute to enhancing the corporate visibility of the HLIs. In answering this research question, three approaches emerged

in the findings. These were the acceptance, recognition and attractiveness. On acceptance, findings revealed that most participants believed that PR strategies were essential in meeting organizational goals and objectives. The findings further exposed that the PR practice in general and the executed strategies can make the HLIs widely known regarding the products and services they deliver, making them accepted by the public. When HLIs get accepted, they are acknowledged; that way, the stakeholders may support the HLIs in various ways, including initiating collaborations and links, which influence the corporate visibility.

Regarding recognition, the findings revealed that HLIs might become more recognized when they acquire publicity through PR strategies. Also, the approach of attractiveness was revealed by participants when they affirmed that PR strategies may influence stakeholders to support the HLIs in various ways, including joining the services the HLIs offer. However, some participants observed that for HLIs not to be pressured to push the PR outputs through media to the public, they might go the extra mile to improve the quality of their programmes to compete in the global market. They may also creatively induce such issues as providing loans and scholarships to attract prospective students and other stakeholders to the HLIs.

The data generally provide a picture that it is necessary to strategically use PR to benefit from the PR system, including gaining the stakeholders' confidence, which is vital for HLIs' sustainability and survival, as Abubakar (2020) and Chapleo (2015) emphasize, visible institutions can be easily recognized and accepted in the market, they also distinguish their brands from other institutions offering the same services,

in another term, the competitors. It is also conceivable that the PR strategies and their implementation do not merely lead to corporate visibility but rather the sense of teamwork and belonging, trust and loyalty, network and partnerships, as well as relationship building that, in the long run, enhance corporate visibility of HLIs.

In summary, this study identified eight categories and themes about the role of public relations on the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions in Tanzania, which attempted to answer the research objectives and guiding questions. These were public events, community support, corporate uniqueness, internationalization, internal positioning, internal collaboration, media engagement, and stakeholders' confidence.

8.3 Conclusion

This study delved into the Public Relations Strategies employed by Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania, shedding light on their corporate visibility. Three objectives guided the study: identifying the PR strategies used, analyse their implementation, and assessing the contribution of public relations strategic approaches on enhancing the corporate visibility. Utilizing a qualitative research approach underpinned by interpretivism philosophy, the data was gathered through in-depth interviews with PR practitioners, University administrators, and stakeholders. The other data source was a document analysis of institutional reports and Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) publications. The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the PR strategies used by HLIs and their impact on corporate visibility, thereby informing and enlightening the academic

community and stakeholders in higher education. The study uncovered that HLIs in Tanzania employ a range of PR strategies, including public events, corporate uniqueness, community support, internal positioning, internationalization, and internal facilitation. Notably, public events emerged as the most prevalent strategy, incorporating activities such as ceremonies, exhibitions, and sports bonanzas.

The study also highlighted the crucial role of media support and collaboration with other institutional units, such as admissions offices, student affairs departments, and university management, in the effective implementation of PR strategies. However, despite these efforts, PR departments faced challenges such as inadequate resources, weak communication policies, and a lack of research-based decision-making. Three key dimensions resulted: acceptance, recognition, and attractiveness. The study found that well-executed PR strategies enhance public acceptance of HLIs, thereby increasing stakeholder engagement and institutional credibility. Recognition was achieved through effective publicity and media engagement, while attractiveness aligned to efforts to improve institutional offerings, scholarships, and student support services. These factors collectively contribute to a university's reputation and ability to compete in the global higher education market. Given these findings, this study recommends that HLIs strengthen their PR departments by increasing resource allocation, formulating clear communication policies, and adopting data-driven PR strategies. Furthermore, the potential of future research to explore the long-term impact of digital PR strategies on HLIs' visibility and stakeholder engagement is promising. It should interest the academic community and stakeholders in higher education.

In conclusion, beyond PR Strategies, the HLIs should urgently adopt a comprehensive communication framework that fosters trust, loyalty and strategic partnerships. This is crucial for reinforcing their corporate visibility in an increasingly competitive educational environment and should be a top priority for all HLIs.

8.4 Implications of the Study

The study was a collaborative effort that addressed the ambivalence of enhancing the corporate visibility of the HLIs in Tanzania. It not only identified public relations strategies to enhance corporate visibility but also assessed their implementations. By uncovering a gap and suggesting necessary improvements, the study aimed to add insight into the competitiveness of the HLIs in the global market, with a focus on producing high-quality graduates. The implications of the study, which will be presented in this section, are of importance to various stakeholders such as academic, policy and PR Practitioners, higher learning institutions, the practice and research, and are a result of our collective efforts.

8.4.1 Implications to Academics

The study significantly advanced the existing body of knowledge about Public Relations Practice, particularly in the context of higher learning institutions. It not only analyzed the puzzle engulfing public relations strategies and corporate visibility but also provided valuable insights that can shape the future of the field. Using sound research approaches, including the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) and Excellence Public Relations Theory (EPRT), the study validated the assumptions of

the theories, thereby opening up new avenues for research and discussion in the field of public relations in higher education.

Also, using qualitative approaches and methodologies in the study is expected to help other academics or researchers learn the means through which they may explore interesting topics like PR and corporate visibility. It will also enable them to comprehend the meanings participants attach to certain PR concepts such as internal positioning, internal facilitation, internationalization and stakeholders' confidence.

8.4.2 Implications to Policy Makers and PR Practitioners

The policy makers and professionals will be able to make informed choices on the effective strategies to employ in the specific institutional contexts. Also, the information about opportunities and challenges encountered during implementing the public relations strategies will be acquainted with them for possible interventions. Moreover, the information provided about the implementation bottleneck for PR strategies will be insightful to practitioners and policymakers regarding the means to overcome threats and capitalize on opportunities for effective implementation of PR strategies.

The results of this study also shed light on the various modalities through which the PR Strategies may be functioning to enhance the corporate visibility of the HLIs. Lastly, the study adds a valued advantage to PR professionals in the HLIs and elsewhere, inspiring them to learn about the lessons for improving their profession and capabilities.

8.4.3 Implications to Higher Learning Institutions

The Higher learning institutions' various units, departments, faculties, schools and institutes need to be well-informed about the position and importance of public relations practice. Understanding PR professionals' distinguishing roles and responsibilities in higher education contexts and the unique aspects that set PR apart from related fields such as journalism, mass communication, marketing and digital animation among others, is key to the collective success of the HLIs.

More so, other units, departments, institutes, faculties, or schools to provide necessary support related to information dissemination, financial planning, human resource management, and material resource allocation. These supports enable the Public Relations Units or Departments to effectively and efficiently handle their duties and responsibilities in the HLIs. Lastly, management should strategically situate, structure, and support the PR practices in the HLIs. This strategic support is a testament to stakeholders' value of the public relations function and its potential to maximize benefits in the HLIs and beyond.

8.4.4 Implications to Public Relations Practice and Research

In the practice of public relations and research, the study results and discussions have the following implications:

i. The fact that formal research is not usually conducted before and during the implementation process of PR Strategies and other Corporate Communications endeavours implies that PR activities are unprofessionally handled.

ii. The fact that most PR professionals of the HLIs in Tanzania are not trained on various issues, such as digital marketing, data analytics, and intercultural communication, implies that they face negative career development.

iii. The absence of planned, precise, or existing communications strategies and/or policies in most HLIs is a pressing issue. It's crucial that stakeholders address this to ensure the growth of the PR profession in Tanzania.

iv. The decoupled PR strategies and/or the PR responsibilities performed by other professionals within the PR units imply that the PR practice is misconceived and not well professionally handled.

v. The case of PR units lacking working facilities, furnished offices and other necessary support implies that the PR Professionals experience negative career development, which also hinders the growth and development of the practice.

8.5 Study Limitations

Like any research study, this investigation on the role of public relations on the corporate visibility of higher learning institutions had some limitations. One of the key challenges was scheduling interviews with key stakeholders who had valuable insights that could enrich the study. Despite the researcher's consistent follow-ups and adherence to systematic data collection procedures to ensure data adequacy, the unavailability of some critical individuals, such as Vice Chancellors, due to their administrative responsibilities, might have limited insights from top leadership

perspectives. This potential impact should be considered when interpreting the study's findings.

Additionally, the study confined the design to specific HLIs in Tanzania based on admission trends reported by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) (TCU, 2020a; 2021b; 2022c & 2023d). The study did not conduct a comparative analysis of multiple HLIs, which could have provided broader insights into PR strategies across different institutions. Another limitation was related to the scope of participants. The study focused on managerial roles such as Senior PR Officers, Heads of PR Departments, and Presidents of Student Associations. It could have affected the transferability of findings, as the study omitted the perspectives of staff members and the external public other than students.

Methodologically, qualitative research and interviews present inherent limitations, such as potential interviewer bias, participant subjectivity, and ethical concerns (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). To mitigate these risks, the researcher strictly adhered to the interview guide, ensuring consistency and minimizing bias, followed thematic analysis principles to ensure a systematic and objective analysis, and ensured a comfortable interview environment to promote honesty and accuracy in responses.

Furthermore, participants' emotional or psychological states during interviews could influence the trustworthiness of the findings. The researcher employed reflexivity and created a relaxed interview atmosphere to address this. While researcher bias in

qualitative research is often inevitable, using thematic analysis in MAXQDA 2022, Analytical Pro helped minimize subjectivity, as coding was primarily inductive.

To conclude, this study observed all possible challenges brought about by the data collection approach and tried to tackle them accordingly. The commitment to integrity in generating trustworthy findings should instill confidence in the study's outcomes.

8.6 Recommendations for Future Research

This study proposes several recommendations for future research based on the study's findings and limitations.

i. Comparative Analysis of PR Strategies Across HLIs

Future research should compare PR strategies used by various HLIs in Tanzania to determine why some institutions experience progressive admission growth while others face fluctuations despite having similar ownership structures.

ii.   Impact of Individual PR Strategies on Corporate Visibility

By dissecting each PR strategy, researchers can uncover unique insights into their impact on corporate visibility. This approach promises to reveal new perspectives on the effectiveness of PR tactics in higher education institutions, sparking curiosity and motivation for further exploration.

iii. International PR Strategies and Corporate Visibility

Given the significant role of international PR strategies in some HLIs, it is crucial to delve deeper into this area. Exploring the PR strategies used for international

branding and visibility, and their influence on student admissions and global partnerships, will keep the audience engaged and interested in the global impact of their research.

iv. Expanding Participant Scope

Future studies should aim to cast a wider net, including a diverse range of participants such as faculty members, administrative staff, students and other public members. This inclusive approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of PR strategies and their impact on institutional visibility.

v. The Role of Digital PR Strategies in Higher Education

With the increasing dominance of digital communication, the potential for digital PR strategies to revolutionize the field is immense. Investigating how these strategies, such as social media, online branding, and influencer partnerships, influence corporate visibility in HLIs compared to traditional methods, will inspire the audience about the future of PR in higher education.

vi. Longitudinal Study on PR and Corporate Visibility Trends

A longitudinal study could be conducted to track how PR strategies evolve over time and their long-term impact on higher education institutions' visibility, reputation and student enrollment.

In conclusion, while this study has provided valuable insights into PR strategies in HLIs in Tanzania, there is still a need for further research to refine PR approaches,

expand empirical evidence and enhance corporate visibility in the higher education sector.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: THE REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

S/N	Title	Source	Date
1	VitalStats on University Education in Tanzania	TCU website (VitalStats 2022.pdf (tcu.go.tz)	2019, 2022 and July 2023
2	Press releases and announcements for the 53rd Graduation Ceremonies for five clusters	UDSM Website (www.udsm.ac.tz) and Social Media Accounts; Facebook and WhatsApp	9th May 2023, 17th October 2023, 19th October 2023, 28th Nov 2023
3	"Dk Salim Ahmed Salim akumbukwa, kupewa tuzo Kigoda cha Mwalimu". Public lecture organized by the University of Dar-es-Salaam	Hard News, Mwananchi Newspaper	23rd June 2023
4	Nane-Nane 2023 Highlights on the gallery	UDSM Website	8th August 2023
5	Announcement on Research and Innovation Week (Organized By UDSM)	UDSM Website	12th April-14th April 2023
6	Magofu Marathon: A remarkable event in Kilwa and Tanzania	UDSM Facebook page	April 10, 2021
7	TUDarCo Week: Day 1 to 7	TUDarCo Instagram page	Nov 6, 2023
8	Press release and Announcements for the Mzumbe graduation ceremony	Mzumbe Website and Social Media Accounts	23rd November 2023
9	Press release and Announcements for SAUT participating in TCU and NACTEVET exhibitions	SAUT Website and Social Media Accounts	May 2023 and July 22, 2023
10	Press Release-Academic Promotions	SAUT website (www.saut.ac.tz)	14th December 2024
11	Public Notice on Alumni Convocation and 26th Graduation Ceremonies	SAUT website	15th and 16th December 2023 respectively
12	Announcements for UDOM participating in TCU exhibitions	UDOM Website and Social Media	17th July 2023
13	Announcements for Zanzibar University participating in TCU exhibitions	ZU Website and Social Media	16th July 2023
14	Announcements for ZU exhibiting at Kisonge	ZU Website and Social Media	3rd September 2023

Appendix II: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Research project title: Role of Public relations strategies in Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

Research investigator: Kahenga Hillary Dachi

Research Participant's designation…………………………

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. The interview will take 30-35 minutes. Ethical procedures for academic research generally require that interviewees explicitly agree to be interviewed and be informed about how the information to be obtained from the interview will be used. This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced

- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by Kahenga Dachi as principal investigator

- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Kahenga Dachi and academic colleagues and researchers with whom she might collaborate as part of the research process

- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publications or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed

- The actual recording will be kept and destroyed after some years

Quotation Agreement

I understand that my words may be quoted directly. About quotes I state the following;

(Please tick where you agree and cross where you do not agree)

▪ I wish to review the notes transcripts, or other data collected during the research about my participation.   [   ]

▪ I agree to be quoted directly.   [   ]

▪ I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (Pseudonym) is used.   [   ]

▪ I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

                                        [   ]

All or part of the content of your interview may be used;

▪ In academic papers, policy papers or news articles

▪ On other feedback events

▪ In an archive of the project as noted above

By signing this form, I agree that;

1.   I am voluntarily taking part in this project.

2.   The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;

3.   I have read the content form and understood;

4.   I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;

5.   I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

    Participants Name: Investigator's Name:

    Signature: Date: Signature: Date:

Appendix III: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL EXECUTIVES (VC/PROVOST)

Role of Public Relations Strategies in Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

Introduction

Dear Participant, thank you for accepting to be part of this study. This conversation is very important to my research project, which aims to assess the role of PR strategies in the corporate visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. In this regard, your answers to the interview questions are central to the analytical strategies of this PhD project. They will help to shed light and inform the researcher about the research problem in question. Our conversation will take about thirty minutes to complete. The information to be obtained from our conversation will remain strictly confidential. Once again, I thank you for your co-operation.

1. For how long have you been working in that position?

2. According to the Corporate Strategic Plan, a goal for the University has always been to increase the number of students. In this regard, do you think the University's Public Relations efforts have been a factor in making the University visible to the public?

3. In your view, how do Public Relations efforts contribute to making the University accepted and recognized among the public?

4. How do you make use of the Public Relations or Communications Department of the University?

5. What challenges do you face when trying to make the University visible and more specifically in creating its positive image and reputation among the public?

6.   How do you think the above challenges should be addressed?

Thank you for your co-operation. If you believe there are any additional points of particular interest regarding the topic of this study, please feel free to share them with me.

Appendix IV: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE HEADS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS/COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN THE HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS (HLIs) IN TANZANIA

Role of Public Relations Strategies in Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

Introduction

Dear Participant, thank you for accepting to be part of this study. This conversation is very important to my research project, which aims at assessing the role of PR strategies in Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. In this regard, your answers to the interview questions are central to the analytical strategies of this PhD project. They will help to shed light and inform the researcher about the research problem in question. Our conversation will take about thirty minutes to complete. The information to be obtained from our conversation will remain strictly confidential. Once again, I thank you for your co-operation.

1. For how long have you been in that position?

2. What communication strategies (or activities) does the institution deploy to enhance institutional (corporation) corporate visibility?

3. What tactics (means of communication) does the institution use to disseminate messages based on the strategies you mentioned above?

4. From your viewpoints do you think there is a need for establishing other strategies to enhance the institutional corporate visibility? Explain why.

5. In which ways do you get support from other units within the institution when executing activities aimed at illuminating corporate visibility?

6. What do you think should be done to make the institution more widely known than its current status, both locally and internationally?

7. What challenges do you face when trying to implement the strategies aimed at illuminating institutional corporate visibility?

8. How do you think the above challenges should be addressed?

Thank you for your co-operation. If you believe there are any additional points of particular interest regarding the topic of this study, please feel free to share them with me.

Appendix V: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE TANZANIA COMMISSION FOR UNIVERSITIES (TCU) ADMISSION AND DOCUMENTATION OFFICERS

Role of Public Relations Strategies in Corporate Visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

Introduction

Dear Participant, thank you for accepting to be part of this study. This conversation is very important to my research project, which aims to assess the role of PR strategies in Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. In this regard, your answers to the interview questions are central to the analytical strategies of this PhD project. They will help to shed light and inform the researcher about the research problem in question. Our conversation will take about thirty minutes to complete. The information to be obtained from our conversation will remain strictly confidential. Once again, I thank you for your co-operation.

1. For how long have you been working in that position?

2. When attending clients, what do they say about the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania?

3. From your views, what can you say about the admission trends in various Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania?

4. In your opinion, what are the factors towards admission trends in the various Higher Learning Institutions in the past two or three years?

5. Based on your experience, what institutions attract students the most?

6. From your views, why do you think students are attracted to the institutions you mentioned above?

7. Do you think the communication aspect of the institutions you mentioned (in 6 above) is a factor for their attraction?

8. How is the communication aspect of Higher Learning Institutions a factor for their attraction?

9. From your perspective, what do you think should be done to make the HLIs in Tanzania more widely known (visible) than their current status?

Thank you for your co-operation. If you believe there are any additional points of particular interest regarding the topic of this study, please feel free to share them with me.

Appendix VI: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS' REPRESENTATIVES IN THE HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS (HLIs) IN TANZANIA

Role of PR Strategies in Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

Introduction

Dear Participant, thank you for accepting to be part of this study. This conversation is very important to my research project, which aims at assessing the role of PR strategies in the Corporate Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. In this regard, your answers to the interview questions are central to the analytical strategies of this PhD project. They will help to shed light and inform the researcher about the research problem in question. Our conversation will take about thirty minutes to complete. The information to be obtained from our conversation will remain strictly confidential. Once again, I thank you for your co-operation.

1. For how long have you been the president of the students' association at the University?

2. When meeting students how do they comment on the general institutional reputation?

3. In your view, why do you think students are attracted to the University?

4. What initiative if any do you think the institution does to make students attracted to the institution?

5. Do you think University Public Relations efforts make students attracted to the institution?

6. How do existing Public Relations efforts attract students to the University?

7. What factors other than corporate communication aspects that you think make students attracted to the University?

8. From your perspective, what do you think should be done to make students more attracted to the institution than its current situation?

Thank you for your co-operation. If you believe there are any additional points of particular interest regarding the topic of this study, please feel free to share them with me.

Appendix VII: COPIES OF RESEARCH CLEARANCE AND PERMIT

UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

In replying please quote

Ref. No. AB 269/319/01

1st March, 2023

Coordinator
Communication and Marketing Unit
University of Dar es Salaam

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE FOR MS. KAHENGA DACHI

This is to introduce Ms. Kahenga Dachi, Reg. No. PG201705187 who is a student at the Open University. Ms. Dachi is at the moment conducting data collection as part of her Studies. The title of her research is The Influence of Public Relations Strategies on Visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania.

This is to request you to grant the above-mentioned student any help that may enable her to achieve her study objectives. The period for which this permission has been granted is from February to November 2023.

Dr. Mathew A. Senga
Ag. DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

cc: Deputy Vice Chancellor - Research
cc: Ms. Kahenga Dachi

Cranford Pratt Building, University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 35091, Dar es Salaam
Phone +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2054, Phone +255 22 2410727 - Direct Fax +255 22 2410743
Email: research@udsm.ac.tz, Website: www.udsm.ac.tz

TUMAINI UNIVERSITY
DAR ES SALAAM COLLEGE
(A Constituent College of Tumaini University Makumira)
CocaCola Road, Plot No.10, Mikocheni Light Industrial Area
P.O. Box 77588, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Telephone: +255 222 702 025; +255 222 702 026
Email: *provost@tudarco.ac.tz;* Website: *www.tudarco.ac.tz*

Reg No.PG201705187   01/03/2023

Ms. Kahenga Dachi

P. O. Box 23409

Dar es Salaam,

Dear Ms. Kahenga,

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE

I acknowledge receipt of your letter to collect data at TUDARCo.

Please note that your request has been granted. When you are ready to collect data, you are required to report to the Director of Postgraduate Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship for further guidance.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Gideon Enock
For: Deputy Provost for Academic Affairs

"Where Morals, Positive Mindset and Attitudes are Inculcated"

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
THE UNIVERSITY OF DODOMA

Our Ref. No. AC/PF/1076/17   14th March, 2023

To: All Principals,
      Deans,
      Directors,
      The University of Dodoma.

Re: Introduction Letter for Ms. Kahenga Dachi.

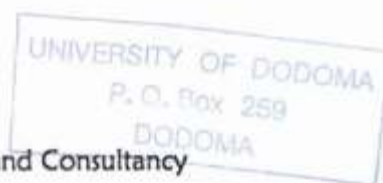The heading above is in reference.

The aforementioned is a bonafide student of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) , she has been granted research clearance by the Vice Chancellor of (OUT) and she intends to conduct research at the University of Dodoma (UDOM).

On the basis thereof, I kindly introduce her to you and request your esteemed office for any necessary support that she may require in conducting her research at your College/School and Institute. The title of her study is *"The Influence of Public Relations Strategies on Visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. "*She will conduct her research from 14th March to 14thNovember, 2023.

Kindly do not hesitate to contact the undersigned in case of any queries.

Sincerely,

Prof. Ambrose Kessy
Director-Research, Publications and Consultancy

UNIVERSITY OF DODOMA
P. O. Box 259
DODOMA

C.C: Vice Chancellor
       Deputy Vice Chancellor-Academic, Research and Consultancy

Directorate of Research, Publications and Consultancy (DRPC), The University of Dodoma, P. O. Box 259,
Benjamin Mkapa Street, Benjamin Mkapa Building, 41107 Dodoma, Tanzania.

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

MWANZA REGION
Telegrams: "REGCOM"
Telephone: 028-2501037/2500366
Fax: 028 – 2541242-2501057
Email: ras.mwanza@tamisemi.go.tz
In reply please quote:

REGIONAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
2 Mkoani Street,
P.O. Box. 119,
33180 NYAMAGANA, MWANZA.

Ref. No. FB. 277/333/66

10ᵀᴴ February, 2023

District Administrative Secretary,
District Commissioners' Office,
MAGU, MWANZA.

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE

Refer to the heading above.

2. I have honour to introduce to you Ms. **Kahenga Dachi** who is a bonafide student of The Open University of Tanzania. She has been granted a permit to conduct a research at **Institute of Rural Development Planning**. The title of the research is **"The Influence of Public Relations Strategies on Visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania"**.

3. The period of the research is from **November, 2022 to November, 2023.**

4. Please accord her with your cooperation for expected results.

B.K. Nyamsenda
For: REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY
MWANZA

K.n.y KATIBU TAWALA MKOA
MWANZA

Copy to: Vice Chancellor,
The Open University of Tanzania,
P.O. Box 23409,
DAR ES SALAAM.

"   Ms. Kahenga Dachi,
STUDENT.

INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING
LAKE ZONE CENTRE – MWANZA

P.O. Box 11957
MWANZA
Tanzania

Telephone: +255 282560994
Fax: +255 282560995
E-mail: mwanza@irdp.ac.tz
Website: www.irdp.ac.tz

Our Ref: DC.182/225/01/149

Date: 30ᵗʰ March, 2023

Mr. Kahenga Dachi,
kahenga.dachi@out.ac.tz,
MWANZA.

Ref: PERMISSION FOR DATA COLLECTION

Refer the heading above and your email emailed us on Friday, March 17ᵗʰ, 2023 at 3:04 pm.

2. I am glad to inform you that you have permitted to conduct data collection concerning your Research in our Campus.

3. The permission starts form 3ⁿᵈ April, 2023 to 7ᵗʰ April, 2023 at IRDP – Kisesa Campus. We advise you to communicate with our communication and marketing office for more assistance.

Thanks:

Mlari Costantine
For Director
Institute of Rural Development
Lake Zone Mwanza

Copy: Director Office (for information)
Communication & Marketing Units (Give him Assistance)

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

MWANZA REGION
Telegrams: "REGCOM"
Telephone: 028-2501037/2500366
Fax: 028 – 2541242-2501057
Email: ras.mwanza@tamisemi.go.tz
In reply please quote:

REGIONAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
2 Mkoani Street,
P.O. Box. 119,
33180 NYAMAGANA, MWANZA.

Ref. No. FB. 277/333/65

10TH February, 2023

District Administrative Secretary,
District Commissioners' Office,
NYAMAGANA, MWANZA.

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE

Refer to the heading above.

2. I have honour to introduce to you Ms. **Kahenga Dachi** who is a bonafide student of The Open University of Tanzania. She has been granted a permit to conduct a research at **St. Augustine University of Tanzania**. The title of the research is **"The Influence of Public Relations Strategies on Visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania".**

3. The period of the research is from **November, 2022 to November, 2023.**

4. Please accord her with your cooperation for expected results.

B.K. Nyamsenda
For: REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY
MWANZA

Copy to: Vice Chancellor,   K.n.y KATIBU TAWALA MKOA
The Open University of Tanzania,   MWANZA
P.O. Box 23409,
DAR ES SALAAM.

*   Ms. Kahenga Dachi,
STUDENT.

ST. AUGUSTINE UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA
P.O. BOX 307,
MWANZA, TANZANIA

SAUT/AD/VC/003/155   31st March 2023

Vice Chancellor
Open University of Tanzania
P. O. Box 23409
MWANZA- **TANZANIA**

RE: RESEARCH PERMIT FOR KAHENGA DACHI.

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 23rd February 2023 regarding the above subject.

On behalf of St. Augustine University of Tanzania, I am glad to grant the mentioned PhD student with registration number PG201705187 from your Institution permission to conduct her Research project at this University from March to November 2023 titled *"The Influence of Public Relations Strategies on Visibility of Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania"*.

Upon arrival let her contact Director of Research, Consultancy and Postgraduate Studies via Email address incase further consultation or assistance may be required.
postgraduatestudies@saut.ac.tz

Yours sincerely,

Amb. Prof. Costa Ricky Mahalu
VICE CHANCELLOR

Cc: Director of Research and Postgraduate Studies

Tel: +255 28 2981186; +255 2829 81187: Fax: +255 28 2981185
Email:vc@saut.ac.tz: website: www.saut.ac.tz

SERIKALI YA MAPINDUZI YA ZANZIBAR
AFISI YA MAKAMU WA PILI WA RAIS,

22279 Barabara ya Vuga,
Vuga, S.L.P. 239,
70460 Mjini Magharibi, Zanzibar

Tovuti : www.ompr.go.tz
Barua pepe : Info@ompr,go,tz

CA.33/411/01D/ 45

13/06/2023.

MAKAMO MKUU,
CHUO KIKUU CHA ZANZIBAR (ZU),
ZANZIBAR.

KUH: RUHUSA YA KUFANYA UTAFITI

Kwa heshima, naomba uhusike na mada ya hapo juu.

Serikali ya Mapinduzi ya Zanzibar imemruhusu **Ndg. Kahenga Dachi** mwanafunzi kutoka **Chuo Kikuu Huria cha Tanzania** anaesomea **Shahada ya Uzamivu (Phd)** katika fani ya **Mahusiano ya Jamii** kufanya utafiti katika mada inayohusiana na **"The Influence of Public Relations Strategies on Visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania"**. Utafiti huo utafanyika katika Chuo Kikuu cha Zaznibar (ZU) kuanzia tarehe **13/06/2023** mpaka **13/09/2023**. Tunaomba asaidiwe ili aweze kukamilisha utafiti huo.

Kwa nakala ya barua hii mara baada ya kumaliza utafiti, mtafiti anatakiwa kuwasilisha nakala (copy) 3 za ripoti ya utafiti huo, Afisi ya Makamu wa Pili wa Rais - Zanzibar.

Naambatanisha na kivuli cha kibali cha kufanyia utafiti.

Ahsante,

GHARIB H. KOMBO,
/KATIBU MKUU,
AFISI YA MAKAMU WA PILI WA RAIS,
ZANZIBAR.

NAKALA: Ndg. Kahenga Dachi (0714019628)

Kwa mawasiliano ya moja kwa moja;
Waziri 024 22 33100; Katibu Mkuu: 024 22 31826. Naibu Katibu Mkuu 024 22 31826, Tovuti ya Serikali: www.zanzibar.go.tz.

REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT OF ZANZIBAR

SECRETARY
ZANZIBAR RESEARCH COMMITEE
P. O. Box 2321 - Mazizini, Zanzibar
Tel: 024 2231869
Fax: 024 2231742

RESEARCH/FILMING PERMIT
(This Permit is only Applicable in Zanzibar for duration specified)

SECTION

Name   KAHENGA HILLARY DACHI

Gender   F

Date and Place of Birth   1986-06-07   ·   BAGAMOYO, DAR ES SALAAM

Nationality   TANZANIAN

Data Collection Duration   3 Month(s)

Research Tittle   THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES ON
                              VISIBILITY OF THE HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS
                              IN TANZANIA

Date of Issue   12-06-2023

Valid until   12-09-2023

FULL ADDRESS OF SPONSOR

Name of the Authorizing Officer

Signature and Seal

Institution   Office of the Chief Government Statistician

Address   P. O. Box 2321, Zanzibar

Printed Date   12-06-2023

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

ZANZIBAR UNIVERSITY

جــامعة زنجبــار

OFISI YA NAIBU MAKAMU MKUU WA CHUO (TAALUMA)

E-mail: info@zanvarsity.ac.tz
dvcacademic@zanvarsity.ac.tz

Ref. No: ZU/DVC/AC/SC.27/128

05/07/2023

Nd. Kahenga Hillary Dachi
Chuo Kikuu Huria cha Tanzania

KUH: RUHUSA YA KUFANYA UTAFITI

Kutokana na barua ya Ofisi ya Makamu wa Pili wa Rais, iliyomuamba Makamu Mkuu wa Chuo Kikuu cha Zanzibar (ZU) kukuruhusu kufanya utafiti wenye mada "The Influence of Public Relations Strategies on Visibility of the Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania", Utawala wa Chuo, baada ya kutafakari na kuzingatia umuhimu wa utafiti huo, umeamua kukuruhusu kufanya utafiti wako kuanzia tarehe 13/06/2023 hadi 13/09/2023.

Utawala wa Chuo unakutaka uwache nakala moja (1) ya utafiti wako ili iwekwe katika Maktaba ya Chuo kwa faida ya wasomaji.

Utawala wa Chuo umewaagiza Wakurugenzi wote wanaohusika na shughuli za wanafunzi kukupa msaada ili kufanikisha utafiti wako.

Kutokana na maelezo ya hapo juu, ni matumaini yangu kwamba hutapata shida yoyote wakati unafanya utafiti wako.

Nakutakia mafanikio mema.

Wako,

Dr. Mamudu Dallay
Naibu Makamu Mkuu wa Chuo - Taaluma
ZANZIBAR UNIVERSITY

[Stamp: THE DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS ZANZIBAR UNIVERSITY P.O. Box: 2440 - ZANZIBAR]

Nakala: Makamu Mkuu wa Chuo, ZU
Naibu Makamu Mkuu wa Chuo (Utawala), ZU
Afisi ya Makamu wa Pili wa Rais
Mkurugenzi Huduma za Maktaba, ZU

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
THE TANZANIA COMMISSION FOR UNIVERSITIES

When replying please refer
Our Ref. CD.244/325/01/28

Date: 22nd March, 2023

Kahenga Hillary Dachi
P.O. Box 23409,
DAR ES SALAAM.

RE: COLLECTION OF DATA FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF ADMISSION COORDINATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT.

Reference is made to your letter dated 27th February, 2023 in which you informed the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) that you are currently in pursuit of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programme at the Open University of Tanzania and therefore you are requesting to collect data from the Commission, particularly from the Directorate of Admission coordination and Data Management in order to fulfil the requirements of said programme.

2.   This letter is meant to inform you that the Commission could not establish the exact type of data that you require. Therefore, in light of the foregoing, you are requested to elucidate to the Commission the type of data that you are expecting to collect by submitting the Questionnaire or interview guide that will be utilised in the study so that the Commission can make an informed decision.

3.   Yours,

Dr. Fulgence Matimbo
For: **EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Building, P .O Box 6562,7 Magogoni Street, 11479 Dar es Salaam,
Tel: +255 22 2113694, 2113691, Email: es@tcu.go.tz, Website: www.tcu.go.tz

JAMHURI YA MUUNGANO WA TANZANIA

WIZARA YA ELIMU,SAYANSI NA TEKNOLOJIA

TUME YA VYUO VIKUU TANZANIA

Unapojibu tafadhali taja

Our ref: CD.244/325/01/30

14th April, 2023

Ms. Kahenga Hillary Dachi,
Open University of Tanzania,
P.O. Box 23409,
DAR ES SALAAM.

Re: Data Collection from the Department of Admission Coordination and Data Management

The Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) acknowledges receiving your letter with Ref.No. CD.244/325/01/28 dated 23rd March, 2023 requesting to collect data at the Commission on admission trends in various higher education institutions as part of your PhD studies at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT).

2.   This letter serves to inform you that TCU has granted you permission to collect data at the Commission as per your request.

3.   Yours,

Dr. Fulgence Matimbo
For: EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

THE TANZANIA COMMISSION FOR UNIVERSITIES

When replying please refer

Our Ref: CD.244/325/01/32

Date: 27th April, 2023

Kahenga Hillary Dachi,
The Open University of Tanzania,
P. O Box 2340,
DAR ES SALAAM.

RE; DATA COLLECTION FROM THE DIRECTORATE OF ADMISSION COORDINATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT.

Reference is made on your letter dated 19th April, 2023 by which you requested the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) to provide you with data on admission trends of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in particular the following; The University of Dar es salaam (UDSM) the University of Dodoma (UDOM), Tumaini University Dar es salaam College (TUDARCo), Mzumbe University (MU), Jordan University College (JUCo), St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), Zanzibar University (ZU) and the Institute of Rural Development Planning (IRDP)-Mwanza Campus for 2019/2020, 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 academic years for research purposes.

2.   Following examination of your request, the Commission has established that it will be appropriate if the requested data are acquired from the individual institutions. Therefore, with this letter, you are advised to collect the aforementioned dataset from the respective institutions.

3. Yours,

Dr. Fulgence Matimbo
For: EXECUTIVE SECRETARY