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Investigating the Practices of the Roles and Functions of Public Relations' Practitioners in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions: Eight First Generation Public Universities in Focus

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Abstract

This study investigated the roles and functions of public relations practitioners in public universities in Ethiopia. A qualitative design was used to identify the practices of the roles and functions of the public relations practitioners at eight public universities and the respective university presidents' awareness of the values of the public relations practitioners. The participants of the study were directors/ senior directors of public relations and communications, the presidents, and the public relations workers at public universities. Eight first-generation public universities were selected using purposive sampling as they have more established public relations departments than the second, third, and fourth-generation public universities in Ethiopia. Data were collected using an in-depth interview with the directors/senior directors of the public relations and communications and /or the presidents at the eight public universities and focus group discussion with the public relations workers. The qualitative data elicited the roles and functions of public relations practitioners' implementations at their respective universities. The results of the study showed that the public relations practitioners at these public universities predominantly carried out their roles and functions as technicians in implementing their routine communication activities. The model of communication practiced is one-way symmetrical and press a gentry and public information model. Furthermore, the public relations practitioners did not execute their managerial roles and functions across all the universities in the study.

Keywords: /Executions/Functions/Managerial and technical roles/Public relations/Strategic communications/

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Public relations began playing an important and significant role in communicating the aims, objectives, and needs of higher education in the late 19[th century] (Cutlip, Centre, Broom, 1985; Bonfiglio, 1990). As a result of the universities expansion from two to fifty in the last two decades, Ethiopia has experienced a steady growth in its students' intake capacity of higher education institutions to obtain quality trained human powers needed for the country's national development endeavor. According to Saint (2004) Ethiopia is engaged in aggressive

higher education expansion and reform programs (p.88). This leads to creation of more new different generation universities and tripling of students' enrollment to address the trained human power need of the country. In line with these expansion public relations roles and functions become a lynchpin to for the universities to put in place the communications unit to disseminate information to the publics' and other stakeholders. This highlighted the importance of public relations (PR) in communicating the public universities' activities to the public's and stakeholders with the ultimate goal of enhancing their publics accountability and positive images building in executing the missions and visions entrusted to them to achieve the national development goals. Consequently, public relations is a management function that focuses on telling the story of the university, its mission, purpose, history tradition and requirements to a diverse publics and stakeholders important to the success of the university. In this regards, Wilson (2009) stated that public relations in higher education play a critical role in building prestige and securing support for the purpose of advancing the aims and objectives of colleges, universities through its relations with the public's, press and the government to promote the mission and goals of the institution. Similarly, Bonfiglio (1990) noted that public confidence in higher education across the board could sufficiently maintained by individual institution specific programs of public relations. In other words, the success of public relations at institutional level depends on the policies it initiates, its faculty, and staffs, and how it performs and the publicity it receives it (Cutlip et.al, 1985). This means effective public relations can influence an institution's publics into accepting the institutions' beliefs, ideas, mission and vision and philosophies.

In higher education, public relations practitioners communicates the public's what they do in teaching, research and community services to maintain community relations through upholding to the image of the institution or maintaining and promoting understanding and creating favorable relations with community at large (PRSA, 2012). This indicates that the government in general and the Ministry of Education in particular have realized the roles of a public relations in making the universities' needs and programs known to the public through using different communication tools. It also recommended to public universities in the country to use it to gain public support and to create transparency and accountability to the public and stakeholders. Accordingly, the eight first generation Public universities in Ethiopia have established their public relations and communication directorates to work towards this goal. Almost all public universities have established public relations directorates and the university presidents have assigned public relations directors to conduct the formalized communication activities to execute their roles and function as the public relations practitioners at their respective universities.

1.2.   Statement of the Problem

Public relations in general and education public relations in particular are given emphasis recently in Ethiopia. Solomon (2000) citedin Tesfaye (2018) stated that "a practice more or less resembles modern public relations is believed to have been started in 1960's in Ethiopia." The practice of public relations, which started to take shape during the 1960's in Ethiopia, continued for years without any change in form and content as the public relations at those times was so unprofessional (Tesfaye, 2018, P.28). The acute shortage of trained human power in the field seems to create poor understanding of the roles and functions of the public relations practitioners and make the practitioners to be limited to the routine communications activities at technician level in Ethiopia. However, the important roles public relations play in educational institutions are confirmed through studies all over the world. Accordingly, in recent years, numerous universities have established public relations units in Ethiopia. Grillis(1997) noted that the main reason a lot of universities have established public relations departments is to better communicate with their key publics. Kettman and Robson (1991) underscored that that public relations play a role to better communicate with students, alumni, donors, neighboring communities, and other publics. In addition, Hirsh and Weber (1999) declared that universities generally look to public relations departments to manage crises, boost rankings, increase donations, and carry out a variety of other tasks. Boakye, Nsor, and Tabi(2012) also agreed that public relations are very important in dealing with various

external and internal publics of the universities in achieving the institutional goals. Like excellent theorists, DeSanto and Moss (2002) asserted that research, strategic planning, effective selection of communication tools and evaluations of programs carried out are the core elements of all successful public relations practices.

It is, however, not clear if these elements are present in the public relations practices in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Due to the emphasis given by the Ethiopian government to democratization and the information access right of the publics and as stipulated in the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation No 590.2008, p.4334 (FDRE, 2008) stated that any public body shall publish information concerning descriptions of the services it provides for the public. Consequently, public relation activities are considered as a nucleus for developmental activities; thus, each governmental organization in Ethiopia is establishing the public relations office in (Tesfaye, 2018, p.29). Hence many public offices and public educational institutions are organizing the office of public relations and communication department or unit. Accordingly, the directorate for public relations and communication was realized to function its stipulated roles and function such as to plan, sustain, establish and maintain good will and mutual understanding through concerted efforts in disseminating information and events taking places at these universities' to achieve mission, visions and goals of the public universities to build images and reputation of the public universities to its publics and stakeholders in Ethiopia.

However, there is a paucity of research about their roles and functions implementation at these universities. According to Biniyam (2006), the primary role of public relations is to promote the activities of the organization (p.2). In addition, Tesfaye (2018) studied the practice and challenges of public relations in Ethiopia using the second generation state universities in Ethiopia. He identified the gap in the roles and functional practices and the challenges in these second generation state universities. Therefore, in Ethiopia context, the theoretical and professional foundation for public relations and its practical application of the roles and functions seem less functional. Our personal observation and experiences in Ethiopia tell us that many organizations that have public relations departments appeared nominal and seem rarely practicing their roles and function properly in two-way communication model strategically to execute the tri-tier missions of the public universities such as teaching, research and community services that the university renders to its stakeholders and publics.

These organizations consider public relations as an office for protocol and limit its function not to work in its full potential as a management function. This paper explores the technical and managerial public relations roles and work activities among higher education public relations officers and workers in the first generation eight public universities in Ethiopia.

Thus, this study tried to investigate the roles and functions implementation of the public relations practitioners. Besides, it tried to investigate the views of the universities' top management and the values and support they give to public relations practitioners to implement their roles and functions at the eight first generation public universities such as Addis Ababa University, Adama Science and Technology University, Bahir Dar University, Haramaya University, Hawasa University, Jimma University, Mekelle University and University of Gonder in Ethiopia. This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What roles and functions do public relations practitioners and directors in their respective public universities execute?
2. What are the views of the public relations practitioners and directors about their roles and functions implementations to boost the images of the university as management functions?
3. What are the organizational factors that inhabit the public relations implementations of roles and functions in public universities in Ethiopia?
4. What are the perceptions and value the universities presidents of the public universities have about the roles and functions of public relations practitioners as management functions?
5. What kinds of communicator roles do the public relations officers and practitioners at the eight first generation university perform?

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Definitions of Public Relations.

A public relation is a broad term and lots of scholars and practitioners differ widely in how they define and describe public relations and organizational communication but also within the assumptions they hold about their purpose and effects. Some view the aim of public relations as manipulation. Others see it as the dissemination of knowledge, resolution of conflict, or promotion of understanding (Grunig, 1992). Cutlip et al (1994) elaborated that "public relations as a management practice that identifies, establishes and maintain reciprocal beneficial relationships between a corporation and also the different publics on which its success or failure depends" (p.6). Within the same token, public relations Society of America defines PR as a strategic communication process that builds interdependent relationships between the organization and their publics" (PRSA, 2012).

The above two definitions lay the inspiration of the profession of public relations squarely within management and elicited public relations as management functions within organization whose primary role is to spot, establish and maintain mutual lines of communication to form understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between the organization and its publics for the success of the mission and vision of the organization. Therefore, a public relation may be a body of management knowledge which best coordinates the activities of an enterprise to realize its goals. Second, it's a two-way communication where mutual communications lines are important meaning not only send a message to a receiver but also understanding the messages of others through listening and a conversation. Third, it's an organization; any group of individuals organized with common purpose like business, an organization, governmental agency, or a nonprofit group and schools and universities. Finally, it's a public and any group of individuals held together by a typical interest.

Therefore, in line with the above definition, public relation has moved radically from its historical roots in publicity and journalism to management of communication between a corporation and its public. Thus, consistent with the National School of Public Relations Association (2002), educational public relation is "a planned, systematic management function, designed to assist improve the programs and services of an academic organization. It relies on a comprehensive, two-way communication process involving both internal and external publics with the goal of stimulating better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and desires of the organization" (P.2). Public Relations Association of America (2012) also elaborated the roles and functions public relations as strategy that aims at assisting in interpreting public attitudes, identifying and helping shape policies and procedures within the public interest, and carrying on involvement and knowledge activities which earn public support and understanding. Similarly, Kowalski (2004) explains school public relations is used as "an evolving scientific discipline and leadership process utilizing multimedia approaches designed to make goodwill, enhance the public's attitude toward the worth of education, augment interaction and two-way symmetrical communication between schools and their ecosystems, provide vital and useful information to the general public and employees, and function an integral a part of the design and decision-making functions" (P.10).

Consequently, we understand from the above definition that public relations are part of the management functions that facilitates reciprocal relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends. Understanding the concept of role is a key to comprehending the public relations (Dozier cited

in Grunig, 1992, P. 327). Hence, it is crucial to investigate the public relations' roles to understand how public relations are practiced in educational setting (Petersen, Holtzhausen&Tindall, 2002, P.1).

2.2 The Functions of Public Relations in Higher Education Institutes

There is no specific list of universally acceptable functions of public relations for school (Yang &Chiou, 2010, P.224). However, several professionals such as Kowalski (2000), Kotler and Fox (1985), Keen and Greenal (1987) noted that the general functions of educational public relations involved media relations, community relations, image building, information management, public relations programming, and planning, internal and external communications, counseling, research, marketing, advertising, fund-raising, and students' recruitment. In a similar research, however in study he has done in Taiwan, Yang (2008) investigated twenty public relations functions in higher educational institutions and identified very high importance in the media relations, image building, crisis management, community relations, public relations programming, speech writing, counseling, researching, management public relations training, school publications, promotion of students recruitment, employee relations, government relations, work as a spokesperson, fund raising, alumni relations and guests reception. According to National School Public Relations Association, (2002) educational public relations function both internally and externally through its two separate and interrelated work units. One is the internal public relations that stand for public relations within the organizations and its employees and the external public relations that stand for maintaining favorable relations with its publics. Events are held within the organization for the members to build a good rapport amongst employees in the organization and smoothen communications between the organization and the public(s) and/or the stakeholders. Hence, Bowen (2010) stated that public relations is a conduit, a facilitator, and a manager of communication, conducting research, defining problems, and creating meaning by fostering communication among many groups in society (p.9).

2.3 The Public Relations Officers and Practitioners Awareness of their Roles

Public relations roles vary based on the organization, individuals and attitude of the society. Public relations functions and roles govern the practice of public relations and organizational communications system. Public   relations   functions   and   roles   play   a   pivotal role varies based on the organization, individuals and attitude of the society play a responsibility in the organizational communication success and effectiveness. Steyn (2000) noted that roles refer to the standardized patterns of behavior required of individuals in specific functional relationship. The organizations express their expectations through roles of the practitioners. Consequently, public relations practitioners' roles and strategic communication perceptions are vitally important to understand the functions of public relations. It defines their day-to-day activities of the public relations' practitioners. Accordingly, the public relations research focus on studies of public relations workers' roles and their activities (Steyn, 2000, P.24). For example, Grunig (2006) explained that public relations create good relationships with strategic publics, and organizations are more likely to develop goals desired by both the organization and its publics. It aims at more likely goals to achieve because it shares those goals and collaborates with publics. He further underlined that public relations contribute to organizational effectiveness when it helps to reconcile the organization's goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies (P.158). In the same token, , the major "the major determinant role of public relations in the organization decision making is the degree to which practitioners view the functions of as part of management (Cutlip et al., 2000).

According to Heerden and Rensburg (2005), "Public relations roles are the behavioral patterns of individuals in organizations practicing public relations. These roles set individuals apart and define

expectations from the organizations' perspectives." The concept of role is a key to understanding public relations (Dozier in Grunig, 1992, P.327). Grunig (1992) further elaborated that a study on excellence in the practice of public relations revealed that one of the major predictors of excellence was whether the role of the top public relations executive was a managerial role or a technician role. Grunig (2006) argued that those in the management role were much more likely to have a positive impact on the organization's public relations practice. In order for corporate communication to function strategically, the executive in charge of the function must have a place at the decision-making position. In line with this Moss, Vercic, and Warnaby (2000), noted that insufficient attention has been paid to examining the nature of 'managerial work' in public relations context (pp. 277-307) and they explained that how the public relations manager's role may vary at different levels between practitioners who play a senior executive role and those who manage operational practices (Moss & Green, 2001, p. 123).

According to Leichty and Springston (2012), for fifteen years researchers have worked to describe the different roles played by public relations (PR) practitioners. Dozier and Broom (1995) first investigated how different role behaviors affected clients perceptions of practitioners. They proposed the existence of four elaborated roles important for perceptions of the tasks performed by the public relations' practitioners for successful role executions. These are: (a) the expert prescriber defines and solves public relations problems independently; (b) the problem solving process facilitator collaborates with organizational remembers to solve PR problems; (c) the communication facilitator works to ensure two-way communication between the organization and its publics, and (d) the communication technician produces and disseminates organizational messages. A core principle of public relations study has been role theory (Broom & Dozier, 1986) that categorizes behaviors enacted by public relations practitioners into one or two primary roles namely: public relations manager and communication technician (Dozier & Broom, 1995).

Concerning the responsibilities typically associated with a public relations manager are counseling management, making communication policy decisions, evaluating program results, and planning public relations program (Toth, Serini, Wright, and Emig, (1998). Dozier and Broom (1995), underscored that the second role, communication technician, which is described as "a creator and disseminator of messages" (p.22). The role of the manager was conceptualized in the first three roles and the role of the technician was conceptualized in the last role (Steyn, 2000, p.16). Public relations is an art and social science of analyzing trends to predict their consequences through counseling organizational leaders and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization's and the public's interests (Jefkins,1992).

Therefore, in order to "carry out their complex functions, to development public relations, specialists must be part of the management team of the college or university" (Wilcox et al, 2000, P.114). In the same vein, Yang (2007) asserts that the participation of public relations in the decision making has a great deal of influence on the public relations practices of public relations in the university. She further suggests that when educational public relations' practitioners have sufficient authority and participate in the decision making process, public relations program can be implemented effectively and efficiently in university or college unless it suffers to execute its roles and activities.

2.4 University Managements' Value Attachment and Support for Public Relations

Public relations function is determined by the values the top management attaches and supports the university presidents give for public relations officers and workers matter. Yang (2007) identified that the president's value and support is influential to the primary function and working process of the Public relations unit in the university. The lack of knowledge and skills in public relations has a negative impact on the practitioners in executing their duties in an organization. This in turn also has its own impact on the perception of top management towards the practitioners (Nabukeera, 2006, 12). In order to advance and attain the institutional goals, the presidents of public universities should comprehend the roles and functions of their public relations officers and workers. Similarly, the public relations' officers and workers themselves also should understand their roles and functions clearly and have the appropriate knowledge and skills to act at the levels of technician and managerial roles. However, though many organizations have public relations or administrators charged with executing public relations activities. Cutlip et al. (2006) suggested that neither the presidents nor the officers themselves fully understand the roles and works of public relations officers. The universities' public relations office has also a gap. Most of the directors/senior directors are assigned based on the will of the university presidents' while the public relations workers are recruited based on the available applicant or management placement based on the civil service career structure and year of experiences he/she rendered at the university.

A university president plays the main role in the creation of public relations. Kotler (1994) points out presidents' influences on the creation of universities' image are bigger than that of formal public relations activities (p.356). The University should have an effective communicator and mediator to balance contradictory wishes and requirements of the society. The president has to be aware of the fact that public relations are an essential part of the universities' activities, because the president is the one who can represent the university, the best. He/she is a key to create relationships with society and achieve its support necessary to implement the mission of the university in the environment of global society (Cutlip et.al, 2006, p.461). The lack of knowledge in PR has an impact on the way practitioners carry out their roles and functions in an organization. Similarly, it has also an impact on the way top management views practitioners.

2.5 Organizational Factors Influencing the Practice of Public Relations

According to Kowalski (2000) the needs and idiosyncrasies of schools and communities determine the type of public relations to select for use. Therefore, he explained that the practice of educational public relations' practitioners is influenced by their needs and unique characteristics of the organization they serve. (P.12). Public relations practitioners not only play different roles in different organizational environments , but also enact these roles differently depending on a number of organization related and individual factors such as university presidents' support for and perceptions of educational public relations, public relations practitioners' participation in decision making, public relations' position in the organizational echelon, the organization's size and stability as well as its public, national ad private status (Hogg and Doolan,1997,p.599)

Considering the recruitment and allocation of students centrally to the public universities from the Federal Ministry of Sciences and Higher Education (MoShe) in Ethiopia, there is no fierce competition for students' recruitments in all public universities in Ethiopia. As a result, there is no conflict between the public and schools, and criticism and pressures from the representatives of educational communities, the media, and schools. They get more students every year without spending a penny on the image building for students' recruitments.

In a higher education institutions setting, the university presidents are generally deemed by educational practitioners as key people who manage issues for their universities. Moreover, the university presidents' value and support for public relations were influential to the existence and primary functions and working process of the public relations practitioners in the organization (Yang, 2007).

2.6 Theoretical Framework the Study

The theoretical framework used in this research is excellence theory to explore the roles and functions of public relations practitioners. The Excellence theory of public relations describes a set of characteristics of an excellent public relations roles and functions (Grunig, 1992; Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 2002). The Excellence theory explains the value of public relations to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics. According to this theory, for organizations to be effective, it must behave in ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of stakeholders as well as of the management. If it does not, stakeholders will either pressurize the organization to change or oppose it in ways that add cost and risk to organizational policies and decisions. However, most of the conditions that foster professional public relations may not exist in and around most organizations in the world (Grunig, 2006). These models will therefore, provide an understanding of the dominant world-view followed by public relations departments as well as PR practitioners. Research shows that public relations departments contribute most to organizational effectiveness when they practice on the professional continuum and emphasize the symmetrical model more than the asymmetrical one. Van and Fombrun (2007) elaborated that the models can also provide an understanding of the conditions that influence the practice of a particular model within a particular context (p.5). The Four Models of excellence theory describes distinct approaches to public relations that show how public relations roles and functions are implemented in an organization as follows:

A. The Press Agentry Model: It is one- way (information) dissemination focusing on publicity for persuasion and attention. With roots in the 19th century, press agents worked to influence public opinion by creating news.

B. Public Information Model: Started somewhere in the early 20th century. It is enlightened Public relations types shifted toward truth and accuracy in communication, but they did little more than distribute information. Acting in the role of "journalist in residence," a public relation practitioner under the public information model used no formal research to guide his or her work. But, he/she moves away from pseudo-events and half- truths were a significant shift toward more ethical practices. The focus of public information is one-way communication such as press releases, brochures, even static web content are tools used by these information dispensers. They tell the story and hope someone is paying attention. It is common model in higher education and in other governmental organizations; they do a lot of one way storytelling to "get the word out".

C. The two-way asymmetrical model: The post-World War II rise in consumer products created a need for targeted, scientific marketing and public relations played a role. In the two-way asymmetrical model, public relations' practitioners used research to get inside the head of the consumers and help to fashion the sell messages. Grunig and Hunt (1984) called it "scientific persuasion," and it remains the stock-in-trade of advertisers everywhere. While the asymmetrical communication is two-way, it is about persuasion to trigger a transaction in favor of the organization's interests. It is imbalanced and mainly works towards the interest of the organizations goal.

D. The Two-way symmetrical Model: Uses communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organizations and its public(s). The two-way symmetrical model casts public relations in the role of mediator versus persuader. Under this model, public relations pros listen to the concerns of both the client and key publics and help them adapt to one another. It is a utopian model for public relations' practitioners in representing the interests of all parties while being paid by only one. This model is more balanced as they are research based in terms of creating mutual understanding; moving in equilibrium. However, due to the mixed motives inherent in the public relations processes, public relations professionals will use most likely a combination of these models in public relation management. These models suggest an overall philosophy of public relations while situations require different approaches in different contexts (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

3. Methodology

In this study, qualitative method was used to gather the research data. The eight first- generation public universities in Ethiopia were selected using purposive sampling as these universities have well-established public relations and communications offices and public relations practitioners in the department of public relations at their respective universities. The public relations and communications directors and public relations practitioners at these universities were selected based on the availability sampling. Therefore, eight university presidents, eight public relations directors, and four focus group discussions were held with the public relations practitioners at the universities. Qualitative in-depth interviews were used to gather data from the directors of public relations and the university presidents. In addition, four focus group discussions were held with public relations practitioners at Jimma, Gonder, Hawasa, and Adama Universities to grasp their views and perspectives about the implementation of roles and functions of public relations practitioners, their understanding of their roles and functions and values in their strategic management functions.

The choice of the qualitative interview for this study was informed by the assertion that unlike other qualitative methods, in-depth interviews provide a unique research opportunity to get the root of the issue being investigated (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Moreover, Patton (2002) argued that interviews allow respondents to openly discuss their opinions, choices and motivation which made an in-depth interview the most appropriate methods for this study. Through communication experts criticism data validity/transferability and dependability was maintained.

3.1. Methods of Analysis of the Data

The data collected from the participants both through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion were transcribed verbatim in Amharic for data analysis. Then, the transcribed texts were translated into English. The English translated texts were described, analyzed and interpreted to elaborate roles and function of the public relation practitioners' implementations and the views of the public relations practitioners and the presidents' of the university towards the public relations department. The qualitative data is in-depth in its analysis and it has validity for transferability as the functions and roles implementation and values for public relations practices in Ethiopia were similar across most of the universities in Ethiopia.

3.2. The Ethical Clearance

The researchers have got a support letter from the Ethical Review Board of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities to collect information from these universities. In addition, the researchers have obtained the consent of all the research participants prior to the interview and focus group discussion.

4. Data Analysis and Discussions

The in-depth interview and the focused group discussion held with the participants at the eight first public universities revealed that the public relations roles implemented are at technician level. Therefore their main functions were routine communication practices such as publicity, media relations, event organization and management, facilitating expatriate staff visa and passport and residence permit. Moreover they write speech, develop website content, and act as the bridge between the public and the university. Moreover the director of the public relations acts as spokesperson. Besides, they accept visitors, show them around and see them off, manage graduation, workshops, and conferences and write press releases and write and publish in-house newsletter, brochure and leaflet to promote the activities of the universities and disseminate information to internal employees using information screen and to the external publics through radio, television and website. The focused group discussion we have held with the public relations practitioners at Gonder University stated that the public relations roles and functions they do were many such as publicity, publication, events management and reporting, media relations, press release, speech writing and other technician work in the

communication process of the university's activities. The case in point is the interview quote from the director of Adama Sciences and Technology University's International affairs and public relations elaborate clearly:

ወደ ሚሰሩ ስራዎች ስንመጣ የተሰጡን ስራዎች በግልጽ የተቀመጡ ናቸው።በኛ ቢሮ ውስጥ የሚሰሩ ሰዎች ከሚዲያ ጋር የተገናኙ ስራዎች ናቸው። የኛ አንደኛ ስራ ሚዲያ ፋሲሊቴት ማድረግ ነው።በዚህ በኩል ማንኛውም ኢቨንት ኦርጋናይዝ ሲደረግ በእኛ ጊቢ ውስጥ የሚመለከተው አካል ለ እኛ ጥያቄያቀርባል።በደብዳቤውም ሚዲያ አንደሚያስፈልገው በሚዲያው ላይ የሚገኙሰዎችን፣ፕሮግራሙን ዓላማውን እና ርእስ ጉዳይ አካቶ በድብዳቤ ጥያቄ ያቀርባሉ።ወይም ይጠይቁናል።ከሚዲያ ሌላ ኢቨንቱን ራሱን ኦርጋናይዝ እናደርጋለን። ኢቨንት ኦርጋናይዝ ማደርግ ማለት ወቅታዊ ዝግጅቶች አሉን ስልጠናዎች ሊሆኑችላሉ።ለምሳሌ የሚከበሩ ዓመታዊ በዓላት፣ የስንደቅ ዓላማቀን የምረቃ ስነስርዓት እና ስልጠናዎች አሉ።እነዚህን በሰላይነት የሚመራው የኛ ቢሮ ነው። ከድምጹ ማዳ፣ ከቪዲዮ መሳሪያዎች አክሰሰሪ ማቅረብ፣ መድረኩን ማስተካከል ሁሉንም እኛ እናስተካከለን።

The public relations office has a clear term of references to do. One of the activities of the offices of the public relations is to execute media relation issues. First of all, we facilitate media relations. When there is any event to be organized, we are responsible for event organization and management. The university body who organize the event requests our office in written. The letter state clearly who organizes an event, the type of media coverage they need, the participants on the events, the aim of the event, and the title of the event. Apart from the media facilitation, we also organize and manage the event itself. Events such as current issues, and trainings or for instance, it could be annual celebrations or observation of Flag Day ceremony, graduation ceremony, nation and nationalities and peoples' day or other workshops. All these ceremonies are master minded by our office. We facilitate and make sure the accessibility of microphone, video cameras, photo cameras, and accessories and laying the stages and management of the stages are our primary roles. This role of the public relations clearly deals with our technician roles effectively.
(***Director of International Affairs and Public Relation of Adama Sciences and Technology).***

Furthermore, one of the senior public relations experts at AdamaSciences and Technology University has the following to say about the managerial role of the public relations practitioners as follows:

አስካሁን ያለን እኛ የዓለም አቀፍ ጉዳዮች እና የህዝብ ግንኙነት ቢሮ ስራዎች ማናጀሪያል አይደሉም።እና ምናልባት ሮላችን ሊሆን የሚችለው ድጋፍ ሰጪ ወይም አማካሪ ነው።መሆን የምንችለው። ወሳኝ የማጌጀመንት ስራ አይደልም እኛ የምንሰራው። አንደኛ በዩኒቨርሲቲው እና በውጪ ባለርሻ አካላት መካከል ግንኙነት መፍጠር ነው። በህዝቡ እና በባለድርሻ አካላት መካከል ግንኙነት መፍጠር ነው።የዩኒቨርሲቲውን እንቅስቃሴ በተመለከተ ለህዝቡ ይፋ ማድረግ ነው።ስራችን። የዩኒቨርሲቲውን ስራዎች ለውሰጥም ለውጪም ሰዎች ማሳወቅ ነው ስራችን። ከዚህ ውጪ ማነጀሪያል ሮል የለንም እና የኛ ስራችን ፋሲሊቴት ማድረግ ነው።
(አዳማሳይንስእናቴክኖሎጅዓለምአቀፍኦፊሰርእናየህዝብግንኙነትዳይሬክተር)

The English translation of the Amharic interview with the director of International Affairsand Public Relations at Adama University goes:

So far, our main activities at Adama Science and Technology University are not managerial. Perhaps, our roles can be supportive or councilor to the management. Our roles are not key management functions. Our role in the university is creating communications between the university's external publics and stakeholders. Our prime job is to publicize the activities of the university to the internal and external publics. Except this, we don't have managerial roles. Our roles are facilitating the daily communication routines.
(Adama Science and Technology International Affairs and Public relations director)

The above interview quotation revealed that the public relations roles at the university are to facilitate and give support to the university's management. They don't have managerial roles and function except facilitating the communication between the internal and external publics and stakeholders which is mainly the technician roles and function of public relations' practitioners. Similarly, an in-depth interview with the president of university of Gonder also corroborates this idea. He has the following to say about the activities of the public relations officers and practitioners:

የኮሚዩኒኬሽን ሥራ ይሰራሉ ብል የሚበቃ ይመስለኛል።አንደኛ የዶክመንቴሽን ሥራ ይሰራሉ።
ማንኛውንም በዩኒቨርሲቲው ውስጥ የሚሰሩ ሥራዎችን ዶክመንት ያደርጋሉ።ያንን ዶክመንት
ያደረጉትን ደግሞ ለሚመለከተው አካል የማሰራጨት እና ኮሚዩኒኬት የማድረግ ሥራ ይሰራሉ።

I think it is enough if I say they do communications work. They document events.
They document any events taking place within the university
They also disseminate and communicate those activities and events they have documented.

In the same token, the focus group discussion held with the public relations' practitioners at university of Gonder also articulated that the main functions of the public relations is communication. They work in event organization, and documentation of the event in photos, videos and any activities taking place in the university to the internal and external publics. The office organizes events such as graduation ceremony, annual research workshops, and conferences, participate in exhibitions, and bazaars and disseminate to the public via national and local media to promote the image of university of Gonder (FDG with the University of Gondar Public Relations Practitioners).

Therefore, we can infer from the above interview data with the public relations' expert, the vice president and the focus group discussion held with the public relations practitioners at the University of Gonder explain, the main functions and role of public relations office is mainly dealt with routine communication activities at technician level. With regard to their roles, all the public relations practitioners' interviewed agreed that their functions were in event organization and reporting, website content development, publications of brochures, leaflet, flyers, media relations, spokespersons and facilitation and coordination. Therefore, the interviews and focus group discussions revealed that public relation practitioners were executing their communication technician role.   Yet their managerial roles were not well understood among the top management. Thus, they were not encouraged to be engaged in the public relations survey research to identify the public opinion and attitudes. The public relations surveys enable the top management to make a right decision to satisfy the needs of the public, the stakeholders and the institute to avoid conflict of interest and management crises at the university and in communities.

Most of the public relations practitioners stated that they get the opinion of the public in the general meeting of the town they participate and record the public complaints and use for recommendation to the top management to make some corrective measures concerning the universities. Similarly, in some universities they have community radio and they have an hour air time on FanaBroadcasting Corporation (FBC) in which the public directly call and tell them about the grievance they have about the university. The case in point is University of Gonder has an hour broadcast air time to the public about the activities of the university and the

audiences can come in through direct phone call and express their grievance about the university's activities and corporate social responsibilities.

There was also lack of critical awareness and understanding of the roles and functions of public relations among the university's managements. For example, they merely consider the public relations practitioners' roles communication technicians with their functions as media relations in inviting the media house to cover the event of the university such as convocation ceremony, event management and reporting, press release, and in-house publications like brochures, magazines, newsletter, newspapers, leaflet, flyers to disseminate information about the university and to make images and good reputations in print and electronic media like website, face book, YouTube and twitters. There is also lack of clear and stipulated policy on the corporate identity management of the university identity marks such as logo, flag, letter heads, etc. and there is weak performance in the internal communication to inform the internal workers with what the university is doing to attain its goals and mission and vision. In addition, the interview data and the focus group discussion showed that there were variations in the structure of the office for public relations and communication at these universities.

የአዳማ ሳይንስ እና ቴክኖሎጂ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ኢንተርናሽናል አፌይርስ እና ፐብሊክ ሪሌሽን ዳይሬክተሬት፣ የአዲስ አበባ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ኤክስተርናል ሪሌሽን እና ኮሚዩኒኬሽን ቢሮ ሆን በሥሩ ፑብሊክ ሪሌሽን እና የውጪ ግንኙነት የሚያስተባብር ነው። የጎንደርዩ ፌቨርሲቲ ዓለም ዓቀፍ ግንኙነት እና ህዝብ ግንኙነት ዳይሪቶሬት ቢሮ፣ የጅማ ዩፌርሲቲ የህዝብ ግንኙነት እና ኮሚዩኒኬሽን ሲፌር ዳይሬክቶሬት ቢሮ፣ የመቀሌ ዩፌቨርሲቲ ኮርፖሬት እና ማርኬቲንግ ዳይሬክረት ቢሮ፣ የሀረማያ ዩፌቨርሲቲ የህዘብ እና አለም አቀፍ ግንኙነት ዳይሬክቶሬት ቢሮ እና የውጪ ግንኙነት፣ ፓርትነርሽፕ እና ኮሚዩኒኬሽን ዳይሬክተሬት ቢሮ በመባል በተለያዩ ስያሜዎች ይታወቃሉ።

One can see also variations of names among these public relations departments at these first generation universities as follows:

For example at Hawasa and Mekelle Universities, the name is "Corporate Communication and Marketing Directorate", at Jimma University, it is "Senior Directorate for Public Relations and Communications", at Bahir Dar university , it is "Office of the President for information and Strategic Communications", at Haramaya and Gonder Universities, it is "Directorate for Public and International Relations", at Addis Ababa University, it is the "Directorate for External Relations, Partnership and Communication" and at Adama Science and Technology University, it is "Directorate for International Affairs and Public Relations"

In most of the universities, they are accountable to the presidents. But, they were not empowered to act on their own with their own budget focusing on strategic issues. They always request the presidents in writing for budget whatever events they organize for publication and printing services they need. Interview with the director for international affairs and public relations at Adama Sciences and Technology can illustrate the case in point as follows:

እኛጋ እንግዶች በየቀኑ ይመጣሉ። ለእነዚህ እንግዶች የወሃ መግዣ ወይም የአበባ መግዣ ፒቲ ካሽ እንኳን የለውም።ሲ ኖረው ይገባል እንግዳን የምታስተናግድበት፤የዩፌርሲቲውን ገጽታ የምታስጠብቅበት።አበባ ለመግዛት ፕሬዚዳንት አስፈቅደህ ግዠ ቢሮ ዘሪህ ፕሮፎርማ ተሰብስቦ ነው የሚገዛልህ።

The English translation of the above Amharic interview quotes goes as follows:

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We have a lot of guests daily. We don't have petty cash for these visitors to invite them water or to buy flowers for our guests. I think this office deserves some money with which it entertains guests and maintains the image of the university. To buy flowers for reception of guests, you request the president office and you have to knock the doors of purchasers and have to collect Performa to have the purchase.

The response from the Senior Director of Public Relations and Communication at Jimma University is similar to the above idea. She stated that "they don't have mandate to reserve hotel for guests by themselves for those who were invited with the recognition of the university presidents. Thus, they request the office of the president for the hotel reservation to give direction on the hotel reservations to the purchasing department. Though their requests for events organizations, hosting guests and other issues were accepted and implemented through the presidents, they were not empowered to act on their own on the strategic issues to work on the public relations and communication strategic functions and roles. The public relations 'offices in all of the eight universities did not have their own budget to decide on what to do and in line with the allocated budget. They were entitled with the name but, they were not empowered to do their responsibilities and spend daily their time in executing routine communication and public relations functions through writing request letters for directions to the presidents to whom they were accountable. For instance, in the case of Jimma university, the three directors under these office write their request letters to do some public relations functions to their respective senior director and based on their request, the senior director writes a request to the presidents, thus, most of their time wastes in writing requests and sometimes they feel that public relations functions and roles as if it were writing requests instead of acting in doing the real functions of public relations.

According to the interview and focus group discussion, all of the universities have good relations with the regional media in covering their universities' story and activities. For example, the university of Gonder and Bahidar stated that they have good work relationship with the local Fana Broadcasting Corporation through its radio and Gonder FM radio and Amhara radio and Television Organization do a lot of media coverage about the events and activities taking place in the universities at Gonder and Bahidar from graduation to other activities taking place in the university campus. Similarly, the focus group discussion held with the Hawasa and Adama and Haramaya Universities revealed that they have positive relationship with Oromia Radio, Southern Radio and Television and Harari Radio and Television and Dire Dawa Mass Media in covering their news and views about the university in their respective regions. In addition, the interview and focus group discussion at Mekelle University also indicated that they have good relationship with the media in the regions such as Tigray Television and Radio in reporting on their activities while the eight universities stated that they have a gap with the EBC in working with them as they did not respond to their request.

ከሚዲያ ጋር ያለን ግንኙነት ጤናማ ነው፡፡መልካም ነው፡፡ይህ ማለት ደግሞ ሙሉ በሙሉ ችግር የለበትም ማለት አይደለም፡፡ትንሽ ቻለንጅ የሚገጥመን ከኢቢሲ ጋር ነው፡፡ከ ኢቢሲዎች ብዙ ጊዜ ሽፋን ለማግኘት እንቸገራለን፡፡ጋዜጠኛ እንልካለን ብለው ካረጋገጡል በኋላ ልክ ሁነቱ ሊካሄድ ሲል ጋዜጠኛ የማናገኝበት ሁኔታ አለ፡፡እና በዚህ በኩል እነሱ በጣም ክሪቲካል ናቸው፡፡

 The relations we have with all media houses are healthy. It is good.But, this does not mean that there is no problem. We face minor challenges with EBC; we face problem to get media coverage from EBC. They promise you to send journalists, yet, you can't find the journalists are not there just when the events unfold. So, in this regard, our relations with EBC are critical challenge.

The public relations directors at all the universities revealed that they have problem with EBC in media coverage of their events. They sometimes confirm us to send journalists for the events but occasionally fail to send journalists who cover the events. Thus, issues to be covered by the media house which is important to the public left unreported due to these challenges.

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For instance, they did not know when to communicate, how to communicate and what to communicate and in what media and at what time to whom. For communication to be effective and efficient communicator has to know of the how and what to communicate with right time in a right channel to the right audiences. For example, public relations who tried to communicate a message to Ethiopian peasants through the website might be nonsense. In addition, trying to communicate the international audiences through Ethiopian Television and Radio might not be successful. So, there is a gap in identifying the right medium of communication and the right content to communicate with the audiences about the universities (interview with the president of Bahir Dar University).

From the interviews with the presidents and director for public relations of the eight first generation universities, we found out that the models common among these universities' public relations practices were press a gentry and public information models in acting as a bridge in disseminating the information and events happening in the universities to the public using media relations and other communication channels such as website and digital information screen to the internal employees about what has happened and what is going on in their respective universities. This fit into the two public relations models that the public relations scholars such as (Grunig et al., 1995). The two way-asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical modes are rarely practiced in the Ethiopian higher education context.

The public relations practitioners mainly deal with the image building and focusing on the positive achievements and deeds of the universities that the publics are supposed to know. They have no established experience in doing public opinion survey and public relations public information model and press a gentry without research to counsel the top university managements in their roles as the communication manager to enable them makes right decisions based on scientific study of opinion poll and attitude studies from the publics and the stakeholders to create conducive enabling environments to attain the goals, and mission of the university in teaching, research and community services and to fulfill their corporate social responsibilities. Most of the public relations directors also complain that the top management did not recognize their managerial role. The following interview quotes in Amharic indicate this reality clearly:

ለእኛ ቢሮ የተሰጠን ፓዋር የለም።ስራ ነው የተሰጠን።ትልቁ የኛ ችግር ሪከግኒሽን ነው። ሪከግኒሽን ካልተሰጠን በጀት ቢመደብልን ሌላም ነገር ቢደረግልን ዋጋም የለውም።ክንያቱም በቃ ከሪፕልድ ነን።

There is no power given to our office. We were given tasks to execute. Our great problem is lack of recognition, without recognition whatever supports given to us including budget, it is worthless because we are crippled.
(*Director of International Affairs and Public Relations Adama Science and Technology University).*

So, from this interview, the office of public relations lacks the managerial role as it is not empowered with the task of management functions and only there to execute the routine communications tasks. This finding is in line with that of Geremew (2017) that "the roles of public relations' practitioners rarely involved in strategic planning in decision making and implementations of plans in their organization" (p.152). Likewise the finding of this study revealed that the roles and functions of public relations 'practitioners are still dominated by publicity or press gentry, because practitioners are significantly involved in implementing public relations activities at technician roles such as writing press releases, organizing events, facilitating media relations, writing speeches for the president and reception of guests at their respective universities. The top managements have low perceptions of the roles, functions and values of public relations as a management functions and they did not recognize and empower them to full functions with their roles as a management functions.

Moreover, the interview with the Director of University of Gonder Public and International Relations succinctly catches the unfulfilled roles of the managerial roles of the public relations office in Ethiopian public universities in the interview:

አንግዲህ የዩኒቨርሲቲው አስተዳደር ካውንስሉ በዩኒቨርሲቲ ሌብል ከሴነቱ ቀጥሎ ጎን ለጎን ያለ ማለት ነው። አስተዳዳራዊ ውሳኔ የሚሰጥ ትልቅ አካል ነው። እኛ የህዝብ ግንኙነት ቢሮ ሃላፊው አባል አይደለም። እኛ የሴነት አባልነን።

The university administration council is labeled as the administrative body side by side with the university's senate. It is the administrative decision making body of the university. However, our office of the directorate of public relations is not on the university council. We are only on the senate.
(Director of University of Gonder Public and International Relations Office).

Therefore, the interview data above revealed that the public relations department has minor role in the management function to play managerial role in the university management functions. The publicrelations' directors at the eight public universities have minor managerial roles as they are not even on the council of the university at academic and administrative council levels to play their managerial roles in Ethiopia. A study conducted by Geremew (2017) concerning the public relations roles and function in Harar and Dire Dawa towns confirms that "the public relations practitioners are rarely involved in strategic planning, in decision making and in following up the implementation of plans in their organizations" (P.152).

With regards to the media relations, University of Gonder and Mekelle University have a media relation in which they gather the opinion of the local people. They have an airtime from Fana Broadcasting Corporation FMs located in their respective cities to broadcast about the activities of their university and also collect the opinions of the public to use it as a feedback to make corrective measures and listen to the attitudes and perceptions of the local community to make a right and justifiable decisions in the management functions. The following quotation from the interview at one of the universities can illustrate the case in point:

በግልጽ ለመናገር የተደራጀ ጥናት አልተካሄደም። ጥናት ለማለት የተደራጀ መሆን አለበት። ዘገባ የሆነ ግን አለ። በተለይ ከሚዲያ ተቋማት ጋር የምንሰራቸው ፕሮጀክቶች አሉ። እነዚህን ፕሮጀክቶች የኮሚዩኒኬሽን እና ጆርናሊዝም ድፓርትመንት አለ ከዛ ትምህርት ክፍል ጋር ለማገናኘት ሙከራ ይደረጋል። እንዳንዱ ግን ዩኒቨርሲቲ አቀፍ ስለሚሆኑ ኮርፖሬት ኮሚዩኒኬሽኑ ይመራል። ኢቨን የሬዲዮ ፕሮግራሞች አሉት። ለምሳሌ በሶስት ኤፍኤሞች በአማርኛ እና በትግርኛ የአየር ሰዓት አለን የህዝቡን አስተያየት የምናገኝበት መንገድ አለ። እነሱን በመጠቀም ለዩኒቨርሲቲው አመራር እናደርሳለን።
(የመቀሌዩኒቨርሲቲየኮርፖሬትኮሚዩኒኬሽንእናማርኬቲንግዳይሬከተር)

Honestly speaking, we have not conducted organized studies. To call it research, we have to have an organized research. We have reports; especially, we have different projects that we work with media institutes. We work these projects with journalism and communication department and we link it with them. The rest are university based activities that are executed by the corporate communication. Even, we have bought an FM radio programs airtime to broadcast in three languages namely Amharic, English and Tigrigna and we use the forum to gather the public opinion. We disseminate to the public and the top university management via the media
(Mekelle University corporate and marketing director).

In a similar vein, the researchers have looked at these universities' websites and most of the job description on the websites revealed only their roles and functions of technician roles. The dominant roles and functions that are stated on their respective websites indicate their daily activities such as communicating the events organized and activities executed at their respective universities such as news, photos, and videos of the events, inform and disseminate the information to internal and external publics and stakeholders. No research issues related to the public relations roles and functions displayed. There are no roles and function related to researching on the public opinion and survey of the clients 'polls about the publics' perception toward the universities on their websites. Consequently, it is possible to infer from the interview, the focus group

discussion and the website that the public relations' practitioners did not practice their roles and functions of public relations roles at managerial level such as counseling, lobbying, fund raising and researching about the attitude of the public's towards the universities. The public relations models used in almost all of the eight public universities were press a gentry and public information models.

The interview and the focus group discussion also revealed that mostly there was a one-way communication that flows from top to bottom except that of Addis Ababa University; however, sometimes, there was a feedback that the public relations practitioners' record the complaint from the employees and the external public through the community radio at these universities. In addition, the general meeting with the staffs and their views on the meeting enable the management to make the right decision and take corrective measures about the raised complaints and grievance from the local community and the employees.

However, the main challenge related to managerial roles of the public relations practitioners at these universities was that the universities' top managements think that the public relations practitioners were there only to report to media what they were told to do so. Such wrong perceptions of the top managements were expressed in the words of one of the interviewee from Gonder University. He has expressed the wrong perceptions of the top management in Amharic. The expression goes as follows: *"የነገሩንን የምንናገርላቸው እንጂ የምንፈጥር አድርገ ያለማሰብ ነገርአለ።"*

TheEnglish translation of this statement means that "the University's top managements think that "we speak what they have told us but not we are capable to create proactively." It is possible to infer from this statement that the university top managements consider the public relations as a tools in their hands to echo to the publics what they have told them but, they were not capable of managing and advising the top management as a communication manager even in advising what the top management can say, how they can say and to whom they can say and when they can say. But, the public relations' practitioners are there for the top management to council them what they can say and what they cannot say and what they can write and what they cannot write and even when they can say to the public. Moreover, the public relations practitioners are image builders and reputation managers of their respective universities. In the same token, one of the focus group discussion participants of public relations practitioners elaborated the views of the top management members' and the general public's views about the public relations as:

> የህዝብ ግንኙነት ሥራ ከፕሮቶኮል ጠባቂነት ያልዘለለ አድረጎ የማብ፣ ከራይሲሲ ማኔመጅንት ላይ ገብዮ ትልልቅ ሥራዎችን መስራት የሚቸል፣የምርምር ሥራዎችን መሥራት የሚቸል አድርጎ ያለማሰብ፣ ለተሰሩ ሥራዎች ብቻ ሚረር እንደሆነ አድርጎ ማሰብ፣ ገጽታ ሲባል የተገነባን ገጽታን አይደለም እኛ እንደመስታዎት የምናስተላልፈው ገጽታውን ኢሜጁን ቢልድ አድርገን ነው ማምጣት ያለብን። ክፈት አድርገን ነው የምናመጣው። የተፈጠሩ ብቻ አይደለም የምናመጣው እና እንዲህ አይነት የአስተሳሰብ ችግርአለ።
>
> *Most people think that public relations are a protocol keeper. Most of the university staffs and management team thinks that public relations practitioners can't solve critical management crises and can't do research. They have low perceptions of the public relations' practitioners as they consider them as a mirror reflecting the images already created by the top managements to the public's and stakeholders. However, image building is not only reflecting the already built images; but, we have to create and build the images through hard work and creativity.*

Similar views were reflected in the interview from the director for Public and International Affairs of Adama Science and Technology University about the attitudes of the top management to the public relation practitioners as follows:

አውነቱን እንነጋገር ከተባለ ለህዝብ ግንኙነት ያለው አመለካከት እና ግንዛቤ በኢትዮጵያ በአጠቃላይ የሚታየ እንደዜና ነጋሪነው።እኔ አስካሁን አስከገባኝ ድረስ፡ ዜና መንገር ቡ። ስብሰባ ተካሂደዋል ዜና ማድረስ ነው።በፎር ኃላፊነት ላይ ያለውም ሰው የእወቀት ክፍተት አለው። ስለህዝብ ግንኙነት ሚና እና ተግባራት ያለማወቅ ችግር ነው።እና ህዝብ ግንኙነት ለምንድ ነውየሚፈልጉት አንዳንድ ቢሮዎች ህዝብ ግንኙነት የሚጠራው ስብሰባ ሲኖር ነው። ህዝብ ግንኙነት የሚጠራው ስልጠና ሲኖር ነው። ህዝብ ግንኙነት የሚጠራው በሆነ ቦታ ላይ ዘገባ ወይም ማይክ ወይም ደግሞ ሳውንድ ሲስተም ወይም ካሜራ ሲፈለግ ነው።ስለዚህ ይህን ን በተቻለ መጠን ባለቤቶቹ እኛው ነን ማስረዳት ያለብን ባገኘነው አጋጣሚ ሁሉ የእኛ ሥራ ይሄ ብቻ አይደለም ብለን ልንነግራቸው ይገባል።የእኛ ሥራ በጣም ፈርጀ ብዙ እንደሆነ በግልጽ ከፕሬዚዳንቱ ጋር ተነጋግረናል።
(የአዳማ ሳይንስ እና ቴክኖሎጂ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ህዝብ እናአለም አቀፍ ግንኙነት ዳይሬክተር)።

To be honest with you, the attitude towards the public relations' practitioners and the recognition given to them in Ethiopia in general is considered as news breakers. They view the public relations workers are news reporters and news tellers. We have to inform them that our roles and functions are not telling news only or providing to the meeting camera, sound system, or microphone. *I have discussed openly with the president about our roles and functions clearly.(Director for ASTU Public and International Affairs and Public Relations).*

From the above interview, the perception of public relations' practitioners in Ethiopia in general and in universities in particular considered the profession news announcer and news makers. These perceptions of public relations practitioners' roles, function, and values consider that their work is telling news only. This shows the knowledge gap and lack of critical understanding of the roles and functions of public relations. Therefore, they need the public relations' practitioners when there is a meeting and training for news making and publicity and event management. They call the public relation practitioners whenever they need some reporting, microphone, sound system or camera.

Moreover, concerning the public relations roles as management functions, one of the universities presidents has the following to say:

It depends on the nature of work; partly attend the management team when we have to prepare some big events and also anything related to international affairs and public relations. Partly, they do and partly, they just carry out the kinds of things assigned to the directorate. For instance, in other words, what I say is like initial contact, the progress on international collaboration and international cooperation are done by the academic side and also research wing. So, the primary contact is not from the international affairs, but, academic and research wing. Once it is done as I mentioned logistics, to actually hand the foreigners, the guests, and the staff members are handled by this directorate. In that sense, instead of participating in the decision making of management rather they carry out the actual public relations activities and performance (*Interview with president of Adama Science and Technology University).*

The Director of Public Relations and International Affairs mentioned that they have strong publication problems in printing quality promotional materials due to rules and regulations of purchase policy at the national level and recruited staff capacity to produce quality public relations writing to the department. This is due to the fact that the purchase rules and regulations opt for the cheapest price and it is usually difficult to get quality print and publication with the least price. There is a lengthy bureaucratic red tape to participate in the international bid for publication and printing of promotional materials (ASTU Public and International Affairs and Relations Director). He further elaborated that the office doesn't make survey and research on the public opinion and attitude towards the organization based on the objective information to counsel the top management.

Almost all of the interviews and focus group discussions we have had with the eight public universities presidents, the directors for public relations and the public relations practitioners indicated that they spend most of their time in daily routine event organizations and reporting and communication works at communication

technician level. For example, the verbatim statement taken from Hawasa University Public relations workers FDG reveals this fact:

"አብዛኛውን ጊዜ ሥራችንን የምንስራው ከስተቶች ላይ፣ ሚዲያ ሥራዎች ላይ እና የህትመት ውጤት ስራዎች ላይ ነው ትኩረት አየሰጠን ያለ ነው።"(የሀዋሳ ዩኒቨርሲቲ የህዝብ ግንኙነት ሰራተኞች የቡድን የተኩረት ወይይት)

The FDG statement in Amharic is translated into English as follows: *"We waste most of our time in doing event*
organization, media relations and publications."

(FDG of Public Relations' Practitioners of Hawasa University).

From this interview, we can conclude that the public relations practitioners mainly concentrate and emphasize on their daily routine of communications and technical roles of the public relations. In the same vein, the in-depth interview with the directorate of Mekelle University revealed the roles and functions daily in clear terms as follows:

አሁን ባለው ደረጃ እንደ አመራር ቡበዛት እንግዳን በማስተናገድ እናሳልፋለን።ትብብር ጥያቄዎች
ይመጣሉ።የእገዛ ጥያቄዎች ይመጣሉ።ከዛ በመቀጠል ሁኔቶች ስራ ላይ ሁኔቶችን በመዘገብ በፎቶ
እና በቪዲዮ በመቅረጽ ዜና ዘገባ በመጻፍ ወዘተ…።ይህም የኮሚዩኒኬሽን ቴክንሽያኒ ሚናችን
ይገላል።

We, in our current situation, as management functions, we spend most of our daily works on hosting guests. The collaboration and support requests come to our office and we facilitated. Next comes, we spend our time on event organization and management and recording of the events in photos, videos, writing news and press releases to disseminate information to the publics and the stakeholders etc…. Consequently, our technician roles are the dominant one.
(Interview with director of corporate communication and Marketing of Mekelle University and Hawasa University.

The roles of public relations' practitioners within the organizations can be seen as a communicator, a mediator, an interpreter or communication link between the organization and all its stakeholders. Challenges such as lack of sufficient budget allocations, lack of understanding and misconceptions towards the roles and functions can greatly affect the organization's overall aims and objects.
Intuitional factors that inhabit their smooth functioning were shortage of professionally trained public relations' practitioners on the market to fill the job vacancy for their offices, the shortage of cars for easy movement to facilitate the different events taking place in their universities' different campuses, location of the universities to attract capable public relations practitioners and the poor salary scale for public relations practitioners based on the Civil service salary structures, and lack of career development path determined structurally for public relations workers.

5. Conclusions

In all the first generation eight Public universities, there is implicit similarity of the functions they execute. The perceptions, understanding, and the values the president of their respective universities give them was similar because the presidents have a positive attitude and a good working relations with the office and they most of the time approve for them what they requested, but, the great bottleneck was the implementation of the approved purchase request and other material supply for the office which were not solved by the other sections of the universities' management. Concerning the perceptions of the top management, there was lack of critical

understanding and awareness of the roles and functions of public relations among the universities' managements and they do not consider public relations the management functions that can advise them in what they should communicate and what they should not to the public's. Rather, they consider the public relations practitioners who echo what they were told to do so to the publics and only there in the university to record events and incidents when there is a meeting or graduations.

This lack of critical understanding of the public relations' values and support given was observed even among the top management because most of the universities under studies found to be not member of the management team. For example, some of the public relations and communication directors were not member to the senate, or the university managing council where the strategic issues both academic and administrative decisions is made. In most cases, the public relations were informed to execute their functions after the decisions were made without involving them in the decision-making process and through their line of command to which they are accountable.

There was also lack of trained manpower to fill the human power need of the public relations practitioners as it was not possible to get such experts on the market in the current Ethiopian situations. Thus, Public relations practitioners were not executing their roles and functions at managerial roles, but, they are partially doing their roles at technician roles with the lack of experts trained in the field. They mostly function in their roles of communication technician and they execute communication works such as publication, media relations, event organization and management, website content development, writing press releases and other routine daily communications.

Limitation of the study: As the study was qualitative, it was limited in the data collections and does not claim representativeness as the entire sections of the universities were not included in the data such as the faculty, the college deans and other directors and students who are working with the public relations in the universities.   Therefore, this data were limited in this regards, however, as it is qualitative study which incorporates the eight first generation public relations directors university presidents and the public relations practitioners with in-depth interview and focus group discussions, the data are valid to understand the public relations roles and functions and the attitudes and values the top managements attach to the practitioners can be transferable to other universities in the country. It is also used as stepping stone for further researchers to conduct detailed studies on the roles and functions of public relations in Ethiopian public universities throughout the country using cross sectional studies with mixed methods.

4.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend the following ideas as a way forward: the public universities should support their respective public relations directorate director and the public relations practitioners in involving them at the level of management function to help them play their managerial roles.

 The public relations' directorate staffs should give training to the university staffs to understand and realize the roles and functions of the public relations so that they can develop positive and corrective values of the department as a management function to collaborate with them for the university communication and image makings.

The university top management should empower the directorate to full function with the power vested in it both at technician and managerial roles and function to promote the image of the university and work as a bridge between the university and the general public's and the stakeholders.

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Authors' contributions:

1. SalilewAbebe: Developed the proposal, transcribed the interview data, interpreted the data and wrote the terminal report.
2. KassahunKebede: developed the proposal, collected the data, transcribed the interview data, analyzed the data and wrote the terminal report.
3. YemanebirhanKelemework: transcribed the data, translated the data into English, interpreted the data and wrote the final report.
4. MezemerSeifu: developed the proposal, collected the data, transcribed the interviewed data, and validated the translations.
5. MelkamuDumessa developed the proposal, transcribed the interview data, translated into English, analyzed the data and wrote the final paper.

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