

**PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICES AND CORPORATE IMAGE; A CASE STUDY OF
WESTGATE SHOPPING MALL IN NAIROBI, KENYA**

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Declaration

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for an award of any degree in any other University.

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Operational Definition Of Terms

Corporate Image: Corporate image in this study was the collection of meanings and perceptions associated with an organization. It encompasses how observers elaborate, remember, and relate to the organization through traditions, emotions, perceptions, and impressions. It reflects the organization's reputation and the way the public perceives it.

Organization: In this study, an organization refers to a private or public business entity or a group of such entities operating with the primary motive of generating profit. Organizations include businesses, government agencies, and institutions providing services to the public.

Public Relations: Public relations, as used in this study, refers to deliberate, organized, and sustained efforts undertaken by an organization to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the organization and its various publics. It involves strategic communication practices to shape the organization's image and reputation.

Publics: in the context of this research, publics are specific groups of individuals or stakeholders who share common interests or concerns related to the organization's activities. These groups can include customers, employees, investors, government entities, and other parties connected to the organization.

Shopping Mall: As referred to in this study, a shopping mall is a complex of retail stores and businesses located within a single building or managed as a unified property. Shopping malls serve as commercial spaces where various retail outlets and services are available to the public.

Sustainable Image: In the context of this research, a sustainable image represents the set of corporate perceptions held in the minds of consumers and stakeholders, specifically associated with the organization's commitment to sustainable business practices. It reflects how the organization is perceived regarding its environmental, social, and ethical responsibilities.

Abbreviations & Acronyms

PR

Public relations

Abstract

Public relations are crucial to an organization's reputation, performance, and public perception. In light of this, this research study aimed to investigate the public relations practices employed by Westgate Shopping Mall after the September 2013 terror attack and the subsequent reopening in 2015. The study sought to examine how the management of Westgate Shopping Mall conducts public relations activities to build a sustainable image after the terror attack, the types of public relations strategies utilized in building a sustainable corporate image, and the extent to which the usage of public relation strategies contributed to building a sustainable corporate image of Westgate Shopping Mall. The research employed a descriptive design and a qualitative data collection approach. The study purposively selected Westgate Shopping Mall brand managers and the representatives of the Mall. The study was grounded on Kotler's theory of corporate image and used both primary data, Content, conceptual, and descriptive analysis were used to analyze the data.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

The chapter included the study background, statement of the problem, purpose, study objectives, research questions, the scope of the study, significance, justification, limitations, and delimitations.

1.1 Background of the study

Grunig (2012) suggested that PR practitioners have a central role as organizational boundary-spanners and engage in strategic management tasks. Public Relations goes beyond merely disseminating information; it also aims to foster mutual understanding and conflict resolution between an organization and its public (McCombs & Reynolds, 2012). In today's complex professional landscape, PR is practiced by numerous individuals worldwide, spanning government and private entities, businesses, government agencies, professional associations, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, hotels, and more.

As highlighted by Lusaka (2009), when an organization's portrayed identity doesn't align with the image perceived by its public, it can negatively affect the organization's reputation and overall management. Public relations practitioners play a crucial role in shaping their organization's corporate image and, in turn, contribute to its development, sustainability, and effective functioning.

From a corporate perspective, PR can help companies cultivate a positive image for their businesses. According to Michael et al. (2005), PR can foster goodwill among critical audiences, offer expertise in crisis management, and coordinate programs and services for government entities and businesses working with them. Corporate PR plays an integral part in marketing strategies, and media PR is particularly significant for profit-oriented organizations (Taylor et al. 2005).

Majken (2007) noted that PR primarily aims to persuade the public, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to maintain a specific viewpoint about the company, its leadership, and its products. Common PR activities include speaking at conferences, winning industry awards, collaborating with the media, and facilitating internal communication.

Ledingham (2003) emphasized that it is widely accepted that all business organizations aim for growth, increased turnover, assets, and profit. However, these goals heavily depend on the goodwill of the organization's various publics. Goodwill isn't just a result of an organization's existence but is achieved through strategic planning, execution, and public perception of the organization.

According to Lamb and McKee (2005), regardless of their size, every organization depends on its reputation for survival and success. Various stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, employees, investors, journalists, and regulators, can significantly impact an organization. These stakeholders form opinions about the organizations they engage with, and these perceptions influence their decisions about whether to support and collaborate with these organizations.

In today's competitive market, a corporate image can be a company's most valuable asset, setting it apart from the competition and providing a competitive edge. Effective PR can help manage communication and build strong relationships with an organization's stakeholders and the public (Heiman and Toth, 2004).

Lee and Lings (2008) expanded on the role of public relations as a discipline focused on reputation and crisis management. They argued that it's a result of an organization's actions and others' opinions about the organization. In our interconnected world, every organization must maintain long-term and trustful relations with the public and communities to tackle future challenges and ensure survival and success. Chirumalla, Oghazi, and Parida (2018) highlighted that public

relations involve developing, understanding, and nurturing positive relationships with various publics, including government, media, employees, investors, suppliers, customers, and more.

L'etang and Pieczka (2006) explained that public relations, in the context of organizational reputation management, is a systematized effort to build a business's image in a social context. The value of public relations in an organization cannot be easily quantified but is crucial for the organization's success. This research is especially important in the current economic crisis and depression due to the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic.

In Kenya, public relations in private companies and institutions suffer from a lack of public trust, making it challenging to capture the public's attention. Despite many private institutions' efforts to enhance their image, citizens, especially those with direct experience with establishments like shopping malls, tend to avoid them. Most businesses have had to auction off their merchandise due to economic challenges. Furthermore, shopping malls in Kenya have been targeted by terrorists, causing citizens to associate these spaces with fear. Despite the presence of PR departments within these malls, they have not been actively involved in public engagement, which could have helped them gain a competitive advantage. The public perceives shopping mall investors as lacking transparency regarding their operations, despite being significant stakeholders. Ahmed & Khan (2019) highlighted that public relations practices began over a century ago. Some experts believe that Edward Bernays initiated the practice in the 1920s, while others credit Ivy Lee with pioneering public relations after establishing a management office in 1904, which he officially announced in 1906 to enhance the organization's reputation. Lee sought to promote transparency using these approaches, which he adopted from Sigmund Freud.

McKie and Sriramesh (2017) emphasized that public relations is a discipline that is better understood than defined. It is both an applied professional practice and an academic field. It

employs communication-centered and research-based approaches to comprehend, inform, and intervene in building connections between ideas, people, groups, and communities. Public relations aims to influence the development, maintenance, and restoration of reputations and encompasses a range of perspectives and stakeholder groups. The practice encompasses operations such as issue management, crisis resolution, and risk communication. Public relations significantly impacts autonomy since its primary sphere of operation is the public sphere, especially in media, politics, and public opinion.

The Public Relations Association (1987) defines public relations as a continuous and strategic approach to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organization and its target audience. Gilaninia et al. (2017) underscore the crucial role of public relations as an organization's lifeblood and central driving force. Public relations in organizations helps the management achieve organizational objectives.

Nnamani (2016) states that the public relation concept is developed on the art and science of building and maintaining mutual understanding and acceptance among people, groups, and corporations. Public relation is not simply words or speaking without doing good; good actions must be supported by well-packaged and timely words directed at the right group (Onyiaji, 2016). Ukonu (2013) argues that public relation is a communication-related discipline that has experienced radical changes over the years. In that case, companies employ public relations to enhance goodwill and brand image by establishing a cordial interconnectedness between the company and the target audience. Further, public relations is explained as managing a company's communications with stakeholders. This helps a company manage reputation, compliance, advertising, risk, and crisis.

In 2013, Westgate shopping mall became a scene of terror attacks, security threats, destruction, and even death. Nine years back, on September 21, four young males of the Somali Al-Shabaab group, armed with automatic guns and grenades, got into Westgate shopping mall and went on a rampage. These men caused a four-day standoff with the Kenyan military, where over 68 individuals were killed and hundreds injured. On the fourth day, three floors collapsed following the attack. However, the Westgate mall began rebuilding and recreating itself, and on July 2015, the mall opened its doors again to the public. But, sections of the mall that had been severely destroyed remained closed until 2018 for further reconstruction. This means the mall has not fully claimed its past glory despite various communication strategies put in place. Thus, proper PR and communication strategies are required in disseminating information and establishing public trust. Gilaninia (2018) highlights that PR in an entity regarding the quality of work means assisting the management in attaining organizational goals, upholding transparency and accountability, and respecting the public's rights and preferences. Kamau et al. (2015) examined how online platforms, specifically Facebook played a part in the general election campaign. Kamau et al. (2015) highlight that social media is a crucial aspect and tool of communication and can be used by the public and corporate entities to communicate and reach a vast target group. Through PR practices, Westgate managed to retain many tenants by assuring them of their safety and protection against attacks.

Nevertheless, Sony Holdings, an Israeli company that owns the mall, highlighted that nearly 90% of the stores retained their leases (Zirulnick, 2015). In 2014, IRG, an Israeli security firm, was hired to provide security services and claimed that Westgate Mall is the most secure mall in Nairobi. Also, the Mall's security personnel have received training from Haim Cohen, the managing director's ex-Israeli commando team.

Gathara (2020) states that there is little to remind shoppers of the incident, except perhaps the heightened security and improved access plan. He argues that the Westgate Mall is monumental to general amnesia, forgetting, and moving ahead. Therefore, this indicates that Kenya has never been perfect at remembering the past, mainly when it can embarrass and implicate the people in high seats. The primary question was what the management has done to guarantee people's safety, and no such incidences will believe that their security was not under threat. Although some store owners presume that its time people moved on and got their lives going and resilience, some argue that the mall would have opened up as a memorial or religious site where the victims and injured can go (Kriel, 2015).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The reputation of any service-providing company is vital for its development. Grunig (2012) emphasized that public relations professionals serve as essential boundary-spanners within an organization, performing strategic management responsibilities. Companies allocate significant resources to restructure and cultivate an image, with the aim of generating and preserving public interest and confidence.. This study is essential to see the public relations strategies employed by Westgate shopping mall to redeem its image.

Lukusa (2009) posits that an organization's reputation and corporate image hang on the ropes if the portrayed identity fails to coincide with the image perceived by the public. As a result, both organizations' corporate image and reputation suffer, affecting the whole management. Creating a sustainable image cannot happen through media because different people use different information sources (Boyd, 1986). Therefore, the need to ascertain how the management of Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi conducts public relations activities in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack.

Countries and organizations employing suitable image-building and repair approaches after a terror attack build and repair their images less easily. This becomes possible if an organization has a well-planned and organized action strategy in a place where the right strategies are elements (Sönmez et al., 1999). For example, North Ireland overcame its terrorist-caused negative perception by developing strategies to raise visitation by developing new tourism commodities and attractions backed by heavy advertising (Witt & Moore, 1992).

From 1970 to 2010, Kenya experienced over 250 attacks. The attacks killed over 1,000 individuals and injured over five thousand individuals. More than half of the terror attacks in Kenya happened in six cities, with Nairobi taking the lead with 61 attacks, Garissa recording 27 attacks, Mandera had 19 attacks, Mombasa and Wajir recording 12 attacks each, and 11 attacks in Dadaab. Despite these terror attacks being non-frequent, the intensity and fear they leave in people are unmatched and unexplainable. The attack on Westgate shopping Mall in 2013 by the Al-Shabaab militants left people shocked and afraid of being in high-end public places such as shopping malls.

In Kenya, Westgate shopping Mall highlights the issue of a dented image in matters of security and has been a topic of great concern. The issue with many people visiting shopping malls is how secure these places are and how prepared and sound the security forces are. The association of locations with insecurity or killings considerably hinders their attractiveness. Thus, it will likely adversely impact public visits and investments (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

Werman (2015) states that despite the Westgate shopping Mall reopening, the terrorist danger in Kenya may be getting unpredictable. Additionally, the public is concerned about whether the security measures are enough or if attackers could outnumber them. In that case, it is upon

Westgate shopping Mall to effectively use appropriate public relations measures to ensure the public feels safe and chooses the mall over other alternatives.

According to Avraham (2013), organizations cannot change or recover overnight, apologize, or take responsibility for a dented image and the reality created by different aspects over time. He argues that it is hard to restore a positive image once the crisis is done because it requires devotion, resources, and a multi-step approach. The global broadcast of the Westgate 2013 attack negatively impacted Kenya's international reputation and discouraged tourists, leading to harm in a crucial economic sector. Ben Makori (2015) suggests that Kenya's humiliation was exacerbated by the security footage from Westgate, revealing soldiers engaging in looting at the mall after the militants had been neutralized. Thus, the need to establish the types of public relations strategies utilized by Westgate shopping Mall in Nairobi in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack.

The study is in line with Majken (2007). Public relations mainly tries to create a different image in the public's mind: investors, stakeholders, workers, etc. The image of an organization is all about how stakeholders see it, and terror-related events can dent this regard. Therefore, the survival of a business increasingly depends on how the people, investors, stakeholders, and others perceive the organization (Lamb & McKee, 2005). Organizations must be made carefully to avoid detrimental results.

Additionally, Ferguson (2012) states that denting the image and reputation of an organization leads to decreased stakeholder confidence in a country. Westgate closed for nearly two years after the terror attack, negatively affecting the stakeholder and investors. Therefore, the research examined how the Westgate shopping Mall can employ appropriate public relations strategies to build a solid corporate image to regain its former glory.

1.3 General Objective

To determine the extent to which public relations has been employed in building a sustainable corporate image for Westgate Shopping Mall.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To establish the types of public relations strategies Westgate shopping Mall tenants in Nairobi utilized in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack.
- ii. To ascertain how the management of Westgate shopping Mall and the tenants conduct public relations activities in building a sustainable image after the terror attack.
- iii. To compare and contrast local businesses' PR practices and international businesses' PR practices.

1.4 Research Questions

- i What public relations strategies were utilized by the Westgate shopping mall tenants in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack?
- ii How do the management of Westgate Shopping Mall and the tenants conduct Public relations activities in building a sustainable image after the terror attack?
- iii What similarities and differences exist in the practice of public relations by local businesses and international businesses in building a public image at the Westgate Shopping Mall.?

1.5 Justification of the study

Mboori (2008) states that although development is affected by available resources and infrastructure, human collaboration and communication play a vital mediation role, especially in post-crisis settings. A section he claims is insufficiently studied. Thus, the present research is important because it intends to fill this imperative research gap. In addition, nobody wants to give a clear perspective on how terror attacks and their uncertainties in Kenya affect public perceptions. Such comprehension is vital in policy development that deals with different security crises.

In addition, Grunig et al. (2002) also argue that different companies employ public relations practices in various ways, but the different fundamental queries concerning public relations' importance remain the same. How do companies employ different public relations available to them? And how do public relations use to change public perception and consumer loyalty? This research intends to illuminate and illuminate these queries concerning the public's perception of shopping malls' post-terror attacks. Thus, the study intended to fill a gap in scholarship by examining and linking the discipline of public relations, public perception, and sustainable corporate image in the case of Westgate Shopping mall in Nairobi in a post-terror attack context. A further significance of the study is grounded in its comprehensive understanding of the present-day post-terror attacks in Kenya. One must understand the current terror discourse. The development of the contemporary terror discourse necessitates perpetuating rooted and oppositional philosophical positions by decreasing complex conflicts to basic binaries. However, despite the various ideological oppositions between the terror and anti-terror narratives, the two discourses are increasingly similar in their underlying assumptions. In the recent incarnation of modern terror elaboration, both terror and anti-terror discourses agree when positing the religious

bedrocks of the several contemporary attacks. As Arian (2003) puts it, separating Christians from Muslims during a terror attack creates a perception of Muslims being terrorists.

Lastly, the study wanted to offer insights into how companies and businesses can employ different public relations practices to maintain a good image in an ever-changing industry. This was significant because, as the International Crisis Group (2017) reports, the terrorist attacks in Kenya remain uncertain, and hence, shopping malls are increasingly becoming target locations. Such information can then be used to inform on security polices such as pubic and vehicles search at shopping malls entrance and elsewhere in the globe.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study was concerned with the distinctive and influential role that public relations can play in building a sustainable corporate image for public institutions. It was limited to Westgate Shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya. This was to purposely serve as the primary target geographical location and premise for collecting the study data

1.7 Limitations

First, the research was to investigate the role of public relations in building a sustainable corporate image for Westgate Shopping mall in Nairobi. The limited information of the hierarchical management might constraint the researcher from acquiring authentic information. However, to overcome this limitation, the study will visit the mall to converse with the lead manager to get the needed information.

Second, the study assumed that only the public relation department staffs engage exclusively in crisis and conflict management. This was a limitation because other departments are involved in crisis management in the malls, and they all work together to manage a crisis. However, their contributions and perspectives were to be neither included nor analyzed.

Finally, the research was mainly anchored on the theory of corporate image and a plethora of different public relations theories dealing with the public relation effect on corporate image. The other theory is the system theory. There could be other theories, conceptual or theoretical frameworks beyond the current scope, that could give different approaches. Still, the researcher chose these two theories as the most appropriate for this research.

1.8 Organization of the study

The structure of the study was as follows: In the first chapter, the introduction encompassed the research context, problem statement, study objectives and queries, study importance, the study's extent, and its limitations. Chapter two delved into the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, an overview of existing literature on public relations, crisis and conflict management, a synthesis of the literature, and identified research voids. Furthermore, Chapter three detailed the study's methodology, covering the research design, the intended population, the sampling technique, data collection methods and tools, as well as the procedure for data analysis and presentation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

The chapter sought to give a detailed analysis of the literature on public relations strategies' effectiveness in rebuilding a company's corporate image. The main objective was to enhance the reader's understanding of sustainable corporate image and its foundations and establish how public relations affect it.

2.1.1 Public relations

The term "public relations" first emerged in the United States, particularly within the United States Post Office Railway, following the establishment and growth of public relations offices within institutions. In 1987, the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) provided a definition for public relations, which is still in use today. Public relations is a structured and continuous process aimed at fostering and sustaining a positive relationship and mutual understanding between an organization and its target audience (Skandari, 2004). The terms "planning" and "ongoing" emphasize that achieving goodwill and understanding is not a straightforward task.

The IPR's definition further elucidates public relations as the tactics employed by organizations to maintain the credibility of their products, services, or employees and gain recognition and support. Public relations professionals perform specific functions, which may encompass an administrative role, communication expertise, or a combination of both (Agility PR, 2013). The primary objectives of public relations include establishing and nurturing positive relationships with the organization's internal and external environments, comprising various stakeholders from individuals and private entities to governmental and societal institutions.

Oparaugo (2015) underscores the significant impact of public relations on public awareness, often at a minimal cost compared to advertising. Public relations practices are devised to foster trust and credibility with influential stakeholders. These strategies also serve to raise awareness of the organization's mission and allow it to shape, manage, and convey its message both within and outside the organization.

According to Travis (2018), effective public relations can serve various purposes, including promoting the organization, managing communication during crises, and defending the organization's reputation against media attacks. Ajala (2009) suggests that proficient public relations can enhance recruitment and retention efforts, particularly in the competitive graduate market. Public relations also contributes to creating a positive organizational culture.

On the contrary, Bayles (2008) illustrates that risk management is a vital component of many corporate strategies. He emphasizes that reputations, which may take decades to build, can be swiftly tarnished by incidents like corruption scandals. Such occurrences can also attract unwanted attention from regulators, legal entities, government bodies, and the media. Therefore, Bayles (2008) asserts that fostering a culture of ethical behavior and community engagement through effective public relations can mitigate these risks and bolster an organization's identity and reputation.

Theodore (2014) underscores that public relations serves as a leadership tool designed to garner support from an organization's internal and external stakeholders. The core functions of public relations include nurturing strong relationships with both internal and external parties. It is essential for organizations worldwide to recognize the significance of public relations in achieving their goals and objectives. As part of a comprehensive corporate strategic plan, public relations initiatives should be integrated in both the short and long term to prevent communication mishaps.

2.1.2 Corporate image

According to Abratt & Mofokeng (2001), the focus image is an external organizational aspect that focuses on the feelings and beliefs of different external stakeholders concerning a company. Consequently, a corporate image is created in the public's minds and can be viewed as a sign of a person's view of an organization. In other words, image is subjective and is created as the actors relate with the organization. In organizational theory, image is explained as how workers of an entity believe outside players perceive the entity. From that perspective, Dutton & Dukerich (2011) view the image as an illustration that an entity wishes to project to certain external players. An organization's image is increasingly connected to its vision and mission and is seen as a manageable resource.

Moreover, Abratt & Mofokeng (2001) posit that as the company is guided by its mission and vision and daily interaction with outside actors, those guidelines will logically reflect in the corporate image. Because it is believed that a corporate image is the visible aspect of a company's image, the company has the power to develop and manipulate its desired image in the public's minds. Nevertheless, organizations need to support and facilitate constant mutual communication with their target population to attain the desired corporate image. Thus, companies must thoroughly understand the image they communicate to external and internal audiences (Balmer & Stotving, 1997). Image impacts the public's perceptions of the company and the worker's perception of the entity.

Furthermore, Treadwell and Donald (2012) contend that it is essential to maintain a consistent image across various stakeholder groups. While it's prudent to emphasize different aspects of the company's identity to different audiences, projecting an inconsistent image should be avoided because the concerns and memberships of these stakeholder groups often overlap. For instance,

the financial community and shareholders share many financial and strategic concerns about the company. In fact, many shareholders heavily rely on guidance from financial experts. Similarly, both employees and the general public are concerned about the company's overall reputation and the quality of its products.

Another strategy, rooted in a fundamental principle of reputation management, recognizes the significance of each stakeholder in shaping the image and reputation (Elgesio, 2006). Therefore, when managing image and reputation systematically and purposefully, it is crucial to identify all stakeholders and assess their uniformity and importance. Typically, the following stakeholder groups play a role in image and reputation management: media, electorate, community, employees, leaders, government, public, experts, financial institutions, and others.

Bassey Henry et al. (2021) highlight that every entity has an image; whether organized or not, a good image can benefit an entity's success. Ferrand & Pages (1999) believe a corporate image to be so important that it can differentiate companies that, in other respects, may be identical. They argue that an image can create value and effects consumer conduct but can include perceptions which may or may not show the objective reality. Further, a corporate image is considered a strategic tool of high value for the financial industry since, besides assisting companies in attaining long-term goals; it can form a source of competitive advantage (Abratt & Mofokeng, 2001). Bassey Henry et al. (2021) state that image is everything, and Lewis (2001) states that reputation is an asset of great importance that helps firms charge a premium for their commodities and services.

Additionally, Schroff (2002) posits that a good image can attract and convince consumers to choose a commodity of a lower value through an equally good one. Boyd (2001) states that a good corporate image contributes to improved conduct and better employee attitudes, and Boyle (2002)

says it is a gem. Bassey Henry et al. (2021) contend that these perceptions greatly affect an entity's potential to survive in the changing and competitive marketplace.

2.1.3 Social media

Social media can be explained as computational aspects or tools that permit individuals to establish, share, or transmit information, and professional preferences, ideas and images in local communities and online platforms. Hence, it can be described as a series of online activities that leverage the theoretical and technical foundations of the internet, enabling the generation and dissemination of user-created content. Additionally, social media relies on established technologies and mobile devices to establish a collaborative platform where individuals and communities can exchange, contribute, deliberate, and modify user-generated content. These changes are driving significant and extensive shifts in communication methods among individuals and businesses. These transformations are a focal point of ongoing research.

However, social media sets itself apart from traditional media or industries in various aspects, encompassing factors such as content quality, accessibility, frequency, user-friendliness, and longevity (Kaplan, 2010). Consequently, social media is one of the public relations channels that companies use to build and sustain their image and reputation. Kamau (2015), in his study on *online campaigns in Kenya*, highlighted that social media played a huge role in political campaigns, with Facebook being a major platform. Therefore, social media is an important and monumental aspect of today's world, where most people use social media platforms daily.

Magic et al. (2012) researched the relationship between activities linked to electronic marketing and social networking sites in less-developed European areas. The study employed a descriptive-analytical method to attain the study objectives. The research focused on three kinds of companies: companies in the export business, companies that wish to export, and companies that

do not bother co-existing in the global arena and operate locally. The results showed a great difference in adoption levels among the three businesses. This means that these companies use social media and upcoming technologies differently in building the reputation of their businesses.

Similarly, Saeed et al. (2012) examined the impact of e-marketing and social media sites on a company's performance. The research used an analytical descriptive design to achieve the study objectives. However, the study identified that the online marketing dimensions of the target company were consumer relations, marketing study, and supply chain. The findings showed that the level of importance of the indicators was satisfactory. Also, findings showed that the indicators of the highest significance were: information about competitors and getting new ideas and recommendations for special commodities.

2.2 Public relations and conflict

Conflict is a ubiquitous occurrence within any organization. Research indicates that 85% of employees across Europe, America, and Brazil experience some degree of conflict. American workers, in particular, dedicate more than two and a half hours per week to addressing conflicts (CPP, 2008). Presently, businesses encounter increased challenges in conflict resolution due to two primary factors. Firstly, the advent of innovative communication technologies can hinder the communication of conflict management strategies (DiNardo, 2002). For example, social media can exacerbate conflict by providing a platform for collective behavior, which can be more challenging to control compared to individual actions (Moule et al., 2017). Secondly, conflicts between companies and the public are viewed as having both beneficial and detrimental effects. While conflicts were once considered avoidable, the 1970s marked a shift in organizational

conflict attitudes from dispute resolution to the management of ongoing controversies (Putnam, 1988). Consequently, conflict can be an integral part of generating creative and innovative solutions to challenges (Rahim, 2010; Tang et al., 2017). Hence, effective conflict management plays a crucial role in problem-solving and can be advantageous for the organization.

Additionally, Kamau's (2016) research on media content and diversity explores the role of Kenyan mass media in times of political elections and restlessness. The study found that people possess little political commonality in times of intense political commotions and competition. All the things that increase tension among them are patronized, and the things that bring them together are demonized. In that case, it is evident that during such times, conflicts among people are aggravated by the prevailing conditions and situation in a given setting. Mass media is an important public relation communication tool and can be used to build or ruin an organisation's reputation. As Kamau (2015) highlights, the 2008 poll conflicts in Kenya fearfully ruined the image and reputation of the Kenyan mass media as gate keepers of democracy.

Ertem-Eray and Ki (2020) emphasize that public relations is a strategic management process, requiring effective management by PR practitioners. This is because PR places a significant emphasis on cultivating relationships between organizations and their respective audiences. The skillful management of these connections becomes particularly crucial when disagreements arise among the involved parties (Ni et al., 2018). Ertem-Eray and Ki (2020) discovered that both American and Turkish PR practitioners are adept at strategically handling conflicts. They perceive their roles as constituting an early warning mechanism and are instrumental in elucidating to top management the outcomes of their conflict resolution interventions, while also providing guidance on societal values. In accordance with Plowman (1998), conflict resolution serves as an empowering process for PR practitioners, enabling them to become integral contributors to

organizational management. Consequently, PR practitioners play a pivotal role in the resolution of conflicts. Ni et al. (2018) further emphasize that negotiation is a critical aspect of conflict management, with PR practitioners focusing primarily on bridging the divide between their company and the public when employing negotiation techniques.

2.3 Public relations and crisis

O'Neal (2020) notes that PR is important during a crisis. This has been evident in economic uncertainty, with businesses and clients reacting differently. However, these reactions have ripple impacts since advertising approaches get altered, and budgets on marketing get slashed. But it can be argued that this short-sighted approach in an economic downturn and a global pandemic is necessary and understandable. This means that PR practitioners respond differently during a crisis, but their main objective entails salvaging an organisation's collapsing image. Broom and Smith (1978) first introduced the concept of roles in public relations and outlined five primary roles: the competent advisor, the provider of technical services, the enabler of the communication process, the facilitator of problem-solving and tasks, and the legitimizing of acceptance. Broom (1979) identified a noteworthy correlation among three roles: the competent advisor, the facilitator of communication, and the enabler of problem-solving processes (Dozier, 2005). As per Dozier (1984), the two predominant roles that feature prominently in public relations research are the managerial and technical roles.

Caramela (2021) notes that PR is a concept every business has to handle at some point. Part of the PR is effectively handling negative news and occurrences that relate to the business. Also, businesses encounter PR crises at a given time. Caramela (2021) explains that PR crisis is when an adverse occurrence or event that relates to the business gets traction in the open sphere. It could

relate to an unhealthy business operation, a client accident at the premises, a terror attack, or an internal employee-relates aspect. PR crises are significant because they help in tainting the business's image in the customers' minds. Therefore, business owners and managers need to understand the paradigms of PR to be able to control the outcome. While there are different approaches one can implement to mitigate the impacts, once the information is in the open, an organization will have to roll with the hits and do its best to correct its wrongs. AlSaqr (2020) agrees that managing a crisis is an essential aspect of organisational sustainability in the current era of globalisation. Coombs (2010) notes that crisis management has become an essential and dominant topic in the study of public relations. Coombs (2014) explained crisis as a perception of uncertain occurrences that threatens vital expectancies of stakeholders related to wellness, security, ecological and economic issues, and which can severely affect the performance of an entity and yield adverse outcomes.

Avery, Graham & Park (2016) note that although crisis communication has gotten extensive academic attention over the last few years, there is relatively limited research addressing the level of crisis readiness in PR literature (Hocke et al., 2010). Park et al. (2016) noted that before a crisis, and predominantly during the early phases of a crisis, organizational readiness and strategic planning could lower or restrict the effect of the crisis. The research agrees with Kitchin & Purcell's (2017) argument that a proactive strategy has grown from the literature "stealing thunder" permits an entity to self-announce a crisis. In this case, the goal is safeguarding the organization's reputation and image as the crisis response is established and already awaiting implementation. According to Snoeijers & Poels (2017), following credible and efficient communication practices, especially when an entity is the first to perceive a looming crisis, it gets the benefit of having

quality time to collect information and communicate proactively through organizational crisis communication (Coombs, 2014).

2.5 Empirical Literature

The literature review gives detailed information relevant to the study from various fields. The literature in this section will be guided by the research objectives, where the role of public relations in building a sustainable corporate image will be examined in detail.

2.5.1 How management conducts Public Relations Activities in Building a sustainable corporate Image.

Considerable evidence supports the idea that the practice of public relations within an organization plays a significant role in enhancing the company's identity, reputation, and image. Ajala (2009) suggests that effective public relations practices can positively impact recruitment and retention, particularly within the competitive graduate market. PR also contributes to fostering a positive organizational culture. Therefore, it can be inferred that PR contributes to the development of institutional identity, reputation, and image.

Bayles (2008) conducted a study highlighting the central role of risk management in corporate strategies. He emphasized that reputations, built over decades, could be swiftly tarnished by incidents like corruption scandals, attracting unwelcome attention from regulators, courts, governments, and the media. Bayles (2008) argued that creating a culture of ethical conduct through effective public relations could mitigate these risks, strengthening a company's identity and reputation.

In a study by Black (2006), public relations is portrayed as a license to operate. Black explained that organizations, through effective PR, can avoid unwanted interference from taxation or

regulations. By employing proper public relations practices, institutions can persuade the public to take critical issues like safety and diversity seriously, averting potential interventions.

These ideas align with the perspectives of Broom and Dozier (2006), who suggest that major institutions facing reputational challenges related to their core business activities may initiate high-profile PR initiatives to divert attention from their perceived negative impacts. For example, British American Tobacco (BAT) participates in health initiatives to enhance its image.

Furthermore, Cutlip et al. (2005) propose that institutional image is shaped when people perceive that their organizations excel in public relations, and perceptions of corporate citizenship significantly influence employees. Therefore, organizations that invest in improved public relations can enhance employee and public perceptions.

Despite recognizing the critical importance of demonstrating the value of public relations at the institutional level, it is often considered difficult to measure due to its intangible nature. Historically, public relations was viewed as a means to reduce costs rather than generate institutional revenues, according to L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Dozier (2002).

The challenge of assessing the value of public relations has concerned professional communicators for years, as it is often perceived as an intangible management function compared to other functions that can be more readily described, measured, and evaluated through systematic research (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000). Its intangibility has sometimes led to budget constraints, especially during financial crises, as its worth could not be easily demonstrated.

In response, public relations scholars and professionals have long sought the key concept to prove the impact of public relations and develop appropriate measures. Specifically, the concept of relationships plays a pivotal role in measuring the value of public relations at the institutional level (Center & Broom, 2000).

2.5.2 Types of public relation activities in building a sustainable corporate image

Reputation management experts underscore the importance of cultivating a distinct and robust identity as a foundational element in building a positive reputation. Prioritizing identity minimizes the risk of a disconnection between the image projected and the actual institutional reality. Analyzing the environment encourages proactive measures. Identity embodies who an institution is and what it does, closely aligned with the organization's mission in the public eye, its vision, and the practical implementation of that mission. Identity should be seamlessly integrated into operational standards and reflected in daily actions (Dalton, 2006).

Achieving a sustainable image and reputation should not solely be the responsibility of institutional leaders or specific departments; instead, every member of a public organization or public officer should be seen as a reputation ambassador, exerting an influence on institutional reputation through personal interactions, effective communication, and more. This integration of desirable image standards into daily operations can be seen as a manifestation of holistic reputation management, akin to existing regulations governing ethical and behavioral conduct in some public institutions (Davies, 2003).

Another strategic approach aligns with a fundamental principle of reputation management, recognizing the significance of every stakeholder's role in shaping image and reputation (Elgesio, 2006). Therefore, in a systematic and purposeful image and reputation management, all stakeholders should be identified, and their commonalities and importance should be assessed. Stakeholder groups commonly involved in image and reputation management encompass media, the electorate, the community, employees, leaders, government, the general public, experts, financial institutions, and more.

To conduct a more comprehensive analysis of stakeholders, some propose subdividing each stakeholder group further. Various guidelines categorize stakeholders as primary, secondary, or marginal. The primary audience significantly influences an entity's image and reputation, while marginal audiences have minimal potential to impact image and reputation.

Dividing stakeholders into primary, secondary, and marginal audiences helps tailor image-shaping programs for each audience (Dalton, 2006). Messages directed at supporters and opponents should contain distinct content. Supporters can be engaged through internal and external communication campaigns that reinforce their positive perceptions. On the other hand, opponents and skeptics require particularly strong, persuasive, and rational communication efforts. Abeyance should not be neglected, as their opinions and attitudes are malleable and neglecting them can erode popularity and weaken the overall image. Through image-building and shaping programs, opponents can potentially convert this stakeholder group into strong supporters or, conversely, into more vocal opponents. Seitel recommends segmenting audiences into latent, aware, and active stages.

The latent audience is disinterested in the subject, its performance, or related phenomena, and is sometimes referred to as a non-audience. Nevertheless, the latent audience's potential to influence future image and reputation should not be overlooked. The active audience possesses a thorough understanding of the subject, its actions, plans, and actively participates in processes related to the subject (Parker, 2005).

Some public relations specialists introduce a fourth stage, the opinion elite, among stakeholders. These opinion leaders can exert a significant influence on how stakeholders perceive an individual or organization and can spark intense debates, attracting more attention to the subject. Opinion leaders, often referred to as elite audiences, can accelerate the process of shaping public opinion.

In certain situations, employing psychological tactics and suitable technologies, particularly in building, shaping, and maintaining the image and reputation of politicians and various business institutions, the media plays a crucial role. One of the pioneers in conceptualizing reputation management, Davies (2003), underscores the importance of proactivity and highlights the significance of establishing and maintaining relationships with the media in industries such as real estate and other diverse business sectors.

2.5.3 Public Relations Strategies

Public relations strategies are communication methods and actions an organisation uses to manage its image and reputation with the public (Young, 2020). These strategies may include Planning and Research, effective leadership, motivating internal communications, media relations, community relations, emergency communications, and social media engagement. Young's (2020) descriptive survey in the US, Aragón and Domingo's (2014) qualitative study in Spain, Dhanesh and Rahman's (2021) qualitative study in Iraq, Chon and Park's (2021) descriptive study in West Africa, Owino's (2022), and Mbithi's (2022) qualitative studies in Kenya Studies suggest that these strategies are essential in building trust, loyalty, and engagement with stakeholders, and can improve an organization's image and brand reputation. As argued by Young (2020), in the United States, surveying 830 full-time employees suggested that good leadership and communication are essential in maintaining a good image and reputation with the public. The study concluded that effective leadership can be considered an important component of an effective PR strategy because it can influence how the public perceives an organization and its messages. A leader who can effectively communicate the organization's values, vision, and mission can help build trust and credibility with the public, enhancing the organization's reputation.

Moreso, Aragón and Domingo's (2014) study in Spain used a qualitative research design to investigate the leadership perceptions of affiliate managers about adopting online interactions within the communication strategies of all businesses in one of the largest mass media markets in Spain. Europe. The study found planning and researching inform decisions on what action to take in creating and recovering a facility's brand identity. Also, the study found that online interactions can increase customer engagement, trust, and loyalty if the leadership is proactive. However, the study had a small sample size and focused only on the perceptions of agency executives.

Dhanesh and Rahman (2021) conducted a qualitative study in Iraq. They concluded that planning and researching informative social media strategies could be an effective public relations strategy for collaborating with stakeholders and building relationships with customers and supporters. Similarly, Chon and Park's (2021) study in West Africa examined public relations strategies using a descriptive research design. The study found that effective public relations strategies can increase brand image, reputation, and customer loyalty. However, the study did not examine the specific public relations strategies that were most effective in West Africa.

Additionally, Owino's (2022) study in Kenya used a qualitative research design with target communication officers. The study found that effective communication, media relations, and community relations were important for managing an organization's reputation. However, the study focused only on the perceptions of communications officers and did not examine the effectiveness of specific public relations strategies. In addition, Mbithi's (2022) qualitative study in Kenya reviewed the impact of social media as a public relations strategy. The study found that social media can be an effective tool for building relationships and collaborating with stakeholders. However, the study had a small sample size and only focused on one country.

The use of social media influencers in public relations tactics and strategies has been a topic of interest in recent years. As Block and Lovegrove (2021) noted, the rise of CGI characters has disrupted traditional PR and influencer practices, making it important for companies to find influencers with authentic voices and identities. Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman (2020) have provided a literature review and conceptual framework for the strategic use of social media influencers, emphasizing the need for companies to carefully select influencers who align with their brand values and objectives.

Niininen (2023) has discussed the use of social media for progressive public relations, highlighting the potential of influencers to bring attention to social and environmental issues. This aligns with the idea that influencers can affect people's behaviour and beliefs.

Zimand-Sheiner and Lahav (2022) have examined the disruptions of public relations in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of companies adapting to new technologies and trends to remain relevant and effective. One such trend is the employment of social media influencers, which, as the line in the original shows, can be a powerful component of PR techniques and plans. The research indicates that companies trying to engage with their target audience can benefit greatly from social media influencers. Therefore, to succeed in the digital age, businesses must choose influencers who align with their brand's goals and values and adapt to new trends and technology.

In addition, social media engagement strategies are employed to enhance user engagement on social media platforms (Chirumalla et al., 2018). Each tactic must align with the overall marketing strategy. Thus, effective social media engagement tactics enable businesses to develop

high-quality content that fosters a community of dedicated brand advocates and supporters in the long run.

Furthermore, Mbithi (2022), Zimand-Sheiner and Lahav (2022), and Dhanesh, and Rahman (2021), effective PR involves communicating with external stakeholders, such as customers, investors, and the media, and engaging and motivating employees within an organization. Mbithi (2022), Zimand-Sheiner and Lahav (2022), and Dhanesh and Rahman (2021) studies have similar conclusions that internal communication is critical in fostering employee engagement, morale, and motivation. Employees who feel informed, valued, and connected to the organization's goals and mission are more likely to be productive, innovative, and committed to achieving its objectives. This, in turn, can positively impact the organization's reputation and external communication efforts.

Similarly, Mbithi (2022) and Dhanesh, and Rahman (2021), concur that creating newsworthy content and distributing it through press releases is a well-established PR strategy that dates back to 1906. According to a recent study by the Nielsen Group, almost 92% of online consumers trust news content when it is featured in magazines, authority blogs, and news publications. Press releases can help create brand awareness and inform the public about upcoming changes, such as product launches. However, press releases' success depends on the content quality and the media agency handling distribution (Block & Lovegrove, 2021). It is crucial not to compromise on either of these aspects if you want to impact your business's overall profitability positively. Therefore, press releases remain relevant and integral to PR tactics and strategies for businesses seeking to make their mark in the industry.

2.5.4 Contributions to the use of public relations practices in building a sustainable corporate image

The common principles of public relations, based on theoretical accumulation and real-world experience, were developed through conscious, deliberate, and sustained efforts. Public relation contributes to an organization's and the general public's interests. This means that a firm's interest might be aligned with the challenges and wishes of the people. The belief in the organization's offer and its workers' quality will ultimately change into support and sympathy towards the firms' decisions. When these decisions have a target transformed into revenue, it becomes easy for the company to facilitate access to important financial capital. Occasionally, certain entities experience challenging situations because they restrict themselves from responding to what they encounter, forgetting the importance of trust. Morzan (2017) argues that the main world contemporary competitors understand that by employing public relations, they can improve in both individual and public interest.

Public relation plays a crucial role in growing sales income and emphasizing the positive impact of an organization's long-term preoccupations. In effect, even if the main goal is to increase revenue, every kind of organization feels the importance of being in contact with particular target populations, which will affect their future. Oparaugo (2021) highlights that public relation contributes to high awareness in a company since the organization and the public relation department increasingly focus on making the public know and understand the brand and its value. Also, public relation helps organizations in creating brand image and reputation. This means that the entity can enhance its image and manage its reputation with the public through PR practice.

2.5.5 Comparing and Contrasting Local Businesses and International Businesses

Li and Zhan (2015) conducted an empirical study on the public relations (PR) capability of Chinese corporations and found that domestic companies in China tend to have a lower level of PR expertise and are less likely to invest in PR activities than international companies. The study highlights the importance of PR training and staff development for domestic companies to improve their PR capabilities. Similarly, Zhao, Zhang, and Lu (2017) found that Chinese companies perceive PR as a tool for advertising and promotion rather than a strategic tool for building reputation and trust. This perception may explain why domestic companies have a lower appreciation for PR's role in image-building compared to international companies. Furthermore, Lee and Johnson's (2018) critical review and integrative model of PR strategy in international business suggest that international companies tend to develop innovative and creative PR strategies compared to domestic companies, who tend to rely on imitating successful strategies from other regions. These studies are done globally and require local context to make generalizing the findings for policy-making easier.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

There is no single theory that explains all public relations practices. Public relations practice considers several theories as guidance to make sound decisions for building a successful and sustainable corporate image. This study seeks to adopt system theory, rational choice theory, and theory of corporate image because it is deemed relevant to the study's objective and particularly in addressing the role of public relations in building the sustainable corporate image of West Gate Shopping Mall Nairobi Kenya.

2.6.1 System Theory

This theory, originally proposed by Ludwig, asserts that Systems theory offers a valuable framework for understanding public relations because it provides a means to analyze relationships. In essence, systems theory examines organizations as composed of interconnected components that adapt and respond to changes in their political, economic, and social contexts. These organizations have distinct boundaries within which a communication structure guides the constituent parts toward the achievement of institutional objectives. These internal structures are created and maintained by the organization's leaders.

Grunig and Dozier (1992), as referenced in Ree (2004), emphasize that the systems perspective highlights the mutual dependence of organizations on their internal and external surroundings. According to the systems perspective, organizations rely on resources from their environments, encompassing raw materials, sources of labor, and clients or customers for the services or products they generate, as mentioned by Ludwig (1983). Simultaneously, the environment also relies on organizations for their offerings. Organizations with open systems leverage public relations professionals to gather insights into the effectiveness of their relationships with clients, customers, and various stakeholders. In contrast, organizations with closed systems do not actively seek new information; instead, decision-makers rely on past experiences or personal preferences.

Organizations are part of a broader environment comprised of multiple interconnected systems. The environment imposes constraints on organizations, illustrated by examples such as customers boycotting an organization's products, legal actions requiring businesses to compensate individuals harmed by their products, or banks choosing not to extend loans to organizations (Thomé, 1993). When employing systems theory, organizations can identify their stakeholders and, by

transcending organizational boundaries, discern the relationship needs of each party. By keeping their systems open, decision-makers enable a two-way exchange of resources and information between the organization and its environment. This information is then used to adapt to the environment or exert control based on incoming data.

2.6.2 Theory of Corporate Image

Kotler articulated that "corporate image is the consumer's response to the total offering and is defined as a sum of the beliefs, ideas, and impressions that the public holds about an organization." This implies that corporate image represents how consumers react to the entirety of what a company provides, encompassing their perceptions, thoughts, and impressions regarding the organization. This viewpoint aligns closely with van der Merwe and Puth's (2014) perspective that an organization's image is the perception held by stakeholders about the organization. This distinction is crucial as it underscores the need for a dialogue to shape an organizational image. In essence, an organizational image is a product of ongoing dialogues between the organization and its stakeholders over time. To maximize their chances of success, organizations must maintain a positive image with their stakeholders, as several studies have shown that failure is more likely when an organization's image is tarnished, given the general skepticism towards the unknown (Englehardt, Sallot, & Springston, 2001).

Secondly, if an organization successfully crafts an image, it must work diligently to uphold it (Gilpin, 2010). Image maintenance is a continuous process that necessitates communication with organizational stakeholders. Organizations must actively seek stakeholder feedback and adjust their branding and communication strategies to preserve a favorable image. This process is inherently dialogic: organizations strategically communicate with stakeholders to influence perceptions, while stakeholders form their own ideas about the organization's image. Neglecting

to monitor and adapt to stakeholder feedback threatens the effective management of the organizational image.

The third stage of this process involves restoration, which often occurs when an organization faces a crisis. Although not all organizations reach this stage, the increasing frequency and severity of crises (Barton, 2008) have made it more common for organizations to restore their legitimacy (Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2014). When an organization enters this stage, it must engage in strategic communication to reestablish a successful image. A successful restoration process leads the organization back to the maintenance stage of image management, while an unsuccessful one could result in failure or the need for a significant restructuring (Massey & Larsen, 2006). At the very least, organizational restructuring involves the development of a new identity, and in extreme cases, it may lead to mergers, name changes, and other measures that require a return to the image creation stage of the process. In sum, organizational image management is a cyclical rather than a linear process, as depicted in Figure 1. Many organizations now recognize that the main challenge in today's marketplace of products and ideas is not just offering goods and services or taking positions on prevailing issues but doing so distinctively, enabling the organization to establish and validate its particular 'profile' and advantageous position (Cheney & Christensen, 2001).

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consists of the independent variable, public relations, and the dependent variable, sustainable corporate image, and the intervening variable, as indicated in Figure 2.1 below.

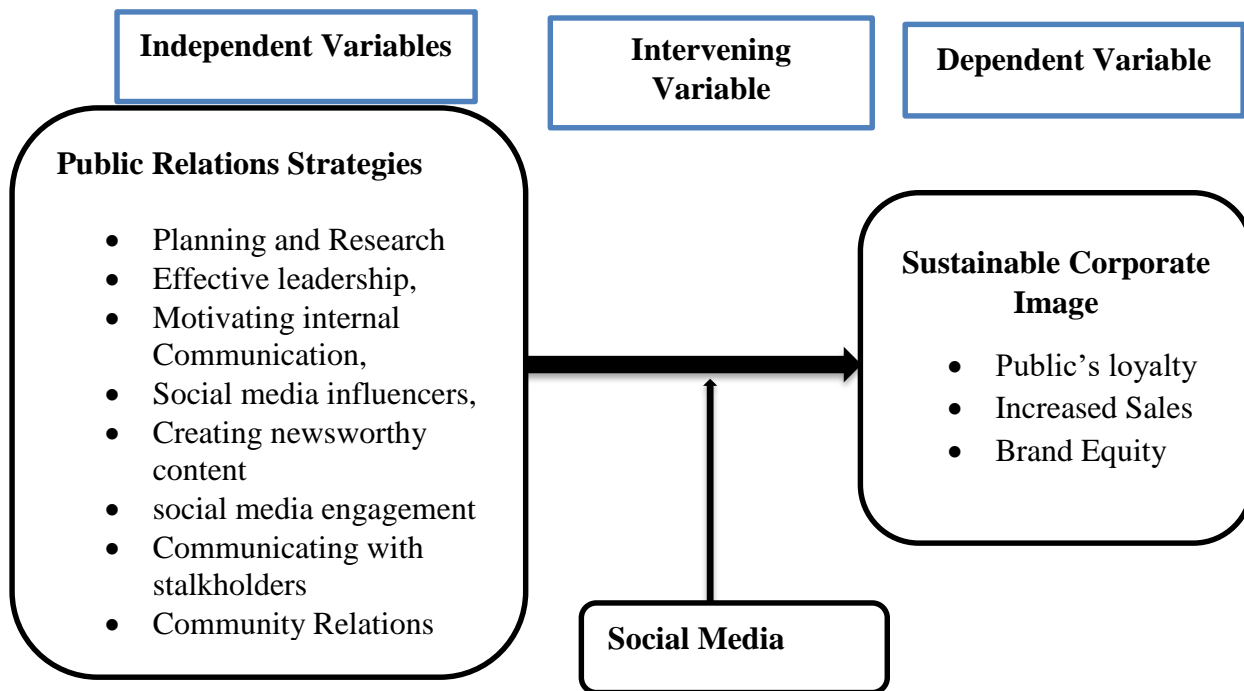


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

2.8 Summary of Literature

The image of an organization or institution is how people view its performance or how they perceive the institution. The primary objective of the Westgate Shopping Mall was to provide quality services and commodities to meet the wants and desires of the public and ensure that the public's safety is assured. However, this has been the contrary following the terror attack in September 2015, where about 68 people died and over 200 were injured. The public relation department is responsible for communicating with the public and ensuring that all doubts have

been erased. However, there has been minimum communication from the Westgate Mall communication and the government about the terror incident, which leaves the public in doubt about the safety of public places such as Westgate. Although the management of the Westgate Shopping Mall communicated that the security of the Westgate Mall was assigned to an Israeli firm, the security and the terror attacks remain unpredictable in the country, jeopardising the safety of this place. Gathara (2020) highlighted that the reopening of the Westgate Shopping Mall indicated that the public forgets fast and is willing to get over such a deadly incident without demanding accountability and responsibility.

According to the reviewed literature, These studies suggest that effective leadership, motivating internal communication, and social media influencers, creating newsworthy content, and distributing it through press releases are vital public relations strategies for maintaining a positive public image and reputation. The studies have also deduced that the importance of public relations in redeeming the image of public and private institutions has not been executed. It seems that most researchers fail to acknowledge the importance of the public relation department in any entity that deals with the public, yet this is a profession that performs the role of communicating to the people and getting people's attitudes and feelings concerning what the entity offers. Consequently, the public relation department gets responses from the people, communicates, and elaborates on the actions and decisions of the entity.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

The chapter content included research designs, target populations, sampling frame, sampling techniques and sample size, data collection instruments, pilot study, data processing, analysis, and data presentation. The chapter was vital because it gave a broad outline of how the study was carried out. Specifically, it outlined how the primary data were going to be collected. It was also crucial because it showed how the study was going to conceptualise and contextualise the study problem.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a case study design to determine the role of public relations in building the corporate image of Westgate Mall. According to Kothari (2014), a case study design is appropriate when the focus is on "how" and "why" questions, behavior cannot be manipulated, contextual conditions are relevant, or boundaries between the phenomenon and context are unclear. It majors on the qualitative approach to investigate the phenomenon under study by responding to why and what questions. . Therefore, the design allowed the researcher to collect qualitative data, test the anticipated relationships between variables, and make inferences of the study findings.

3.3 Study variables

The study examined various variables in line with the study theme of PR practices and sustainable corporate image and in line with its objectives. The development of those variables was based on two broad areas: PR practices and sustainable corporate image. They were as follows:

3.3.1 Public relation-based variables

Public relations practices were considered an independent variable capable of affecting sustainable corporate image, which was the dependent variable. Conceptually, the management's PR was used to ask several questions (see appendix) to establish whether a correlation could be made between an organisation's actions to build and improve corporate image sustainability.

3.3.2 Sustainable corporate image

The study used Public relations as an independent variable that impacts the corporate image. The research took the position that the kinds of public relations practices, the mode of execution, and the people responsible had a bearing on sustainable corporate image. Informatively, different questions were developed and directed to the Westgate Shopping Mall agencies' PR managers in probing this relationship. Public relations practitioners in any organisation play a significant role in building a sustainable corporate image. In that case, it was generally assumed that how they dispense and handle crises and conflicts affects a corporate image. From this standpoint, how PR practitioners conduct PR crises, manage conflict, and engage the public was generally explored to examine how it impacted corporate image sustainability.

3.4 Target population

The study population refers to the entire group of individuals, objects, or events that meet a specific set of criteria and are the focus of a research study (Kothari, 2014). The target population for the study consisted of the 50 PR department representative and assistant managers of Westgate mall, as well as brand managers, PR/marketing managers, and branch managers (tenants) of the mall's business stores drawn from over 35 active stores (see Appendix 4; Westgate Shopping Mall.). This classification of individuals was considered appropriate for the study, as they shared similar experiences, conditions, and structures at the Westgate shopping mall. They were also relevant to

the study by providing the necessary information. The distribution of this target population is shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: The Study's Target Population

Management of the Mall and Brand Stores	Target Populations
Management's PR Department representative	1
Management's PR Department Assistant representative	1
Local Stores Brand Managers	28
International Business Stores PR/Marketing Managers	20
Total Target Population	50

(see Appendix 4; Westgate Shopping Mall, 2021)

3.5 Study Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling in selecting the target population. Purposive sampling is an approach widely used in qualitative study for the identification and selection of data rich situations for the most efficient use of limited resources.

3.5.1 Cases Selected for the Study

The study used Purposive sampling techniques to select 35 local and international stores from the list shown in Appendix 4. The study recruited the Management's PR representative, assistant PR representative, and 28 local business store brand Managers in all 23 local stores. Furthermore, the study selected 20 international PR/Marketing managers from the 12 International stores. Therefore, 50 individuals were chosen to participate in the study, as shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: The Study's Sample Size

Management of the Mall and Brand Stores	Sample Size
Management's PR Representative	1
Management's Assistant Pr Representative	1
Local Stores Brand Managers	28
International Business Stores PR/Marketing Managers	20
Total sample size	50

3.6 Data Collection Tools

The interview guides were the primary data collection tools. The interview guide had ten open-ended questions, with the first set collecting demographic information and the rest on the study objectives (Appendix 2). The interview guides collected qualitative data from Westgate Shopping Mall's PR Department Manager and Assistant Manager as well as the tenants' marketing heads.

3.7 Data collection procedure

The study started the data collection exercise by recruiting and training a research assistants. The study collected qualitative data. The data was collected through interviews conducted by the researcher (facilitator) with the assistance of a research assistant who acted as an observer and note-taker. The questions were ordered to reflect the importance of issues in the research agenda.

The interviews provided detailed information on the respondents' perceptions, insights, attitudes, experiences, or beliefs on PR practices and how they impacted corporate image (Gill et al., 2008).

3.8 Validity and reliability

Validity relates to the accuracy of conclusions drawn from research outcomes. It involves aligning the representation of variables with what the data analysis reveals in the study.

Additionally, validity can encompass the degree to which theory and evidence substantiate the interpretation of results obtained through various tests (Genç & Sozen, 2020). During the validity examination, the researcher randomly selected a pre-study sample size comprising 10% of the total sample size to test the validity of the research instruments using Thika Road Mall (TRM). This approach aligned with Mugenda and Mugenda's (2003) recommendation for validating research instruments before conducting the main study. The use of the TRM was to avoid data collection contamination.

The validity and reliability of the study were crucial in ensuring the accuracy and consistency of the findings. Validity refers to the extent to which a research method measures what it is intended to measure. At the same time, reliability is the consistency of the research findings over time and across similar settings (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Therefore, to ensure validity, the study carefully examined the data and hypotheses for negative instances and checked for researcher effects, such as personal characteristics and language differences, that could influence the interview outcomes. Reliability was ensured by maintaining consistency throughout the interviewing, transcribing, and analysing processes.

3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation

According to Coakes and Steed (2009), data analysis involves applying statistical and logical techniques to describe, illustrate, interpret, condense, and evaluate study data. The study used qualitative data analysis techniques to analyse the collected data accurately. Qualitative data analysis techniques used were content and conceptual analysis. The data analysis involved coding the transcribed interviews and categorising them into themes (Kothari, 2014). These themes were then analysed using descriptive statistics, such as percentage descriptives, to analyse the categories of themes. The opinions categorized into themes were grouped into either strongly agreeing or agreeing or neutral or disagree and strongly agree which then descriptive statistics was used to analyze the various opinions based based on the interviews stands. This categories of opinions ranging from strongly agreeing to strongly disagreeing were then presented using pie charts, bar graph and tables for comparison purposes. These techniques helped to draw meaningful conclusions from the collected data.

3.10 Logistical and Ethical Consideration

3.10.1 Study's Logistical Consideration

Ethical approval is critical to any research project, especially involving human subjects (Kothari, 2014). The study sought ethical approval from the University of Nairobi's school of journalism..

3.10.2 Study's Ethical Consideration

The study's research ethical considerations help protect the rights and dignity of participants and ensure that the study's findings are reliable and valid (Kothari, 2014; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The study ensured the protection of the participants by keeping the information obtained

private and confidential, obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and avoiding harm to the participants.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Overview of the Chapter

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section (4.1) discusses the strategies employed by the businesses located at the Westgate Mall to build the corporate image of their business after the terror attack. The section also details the strategies' considerations before, during, and after implementation. Section two (4.2) presents the activities undertaken by the businesses at the Westgate Mall in pursuit of their already outlined PR strategies. Section three (4.3) demonstrates how PR activities are compared when local businesses are stacked alongside international businesses.

4.1.1 Research Objective 1: To establish the types of Public Relations strategies utilized by the Westgate shopping mall tenants in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack.

i. Planning and Research PR Strategy

The data analysis process was undertaken by analyzing the interview contents and the Likert scale to determine whether the sample population responses were strongly agreed, agreed, neutral, or strongly disagreed. The results were plotted as shown in Figure 4.1.

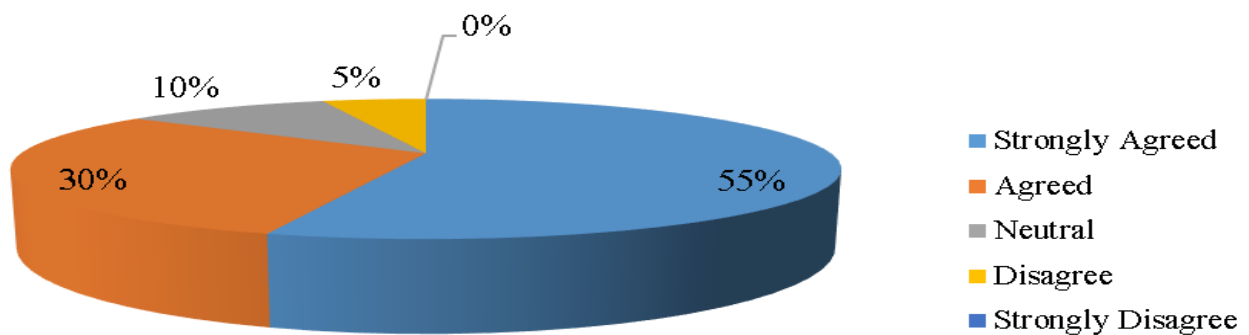


Figure 4. 1: Responses on Planning and Research PR Strategy

The data findings (Figure 4.1) showed that the majority of respondents (55%) strongly agreed with the planning and research PR strategy, indicating a high level of support for this approach. Additionally, 30% agreed with the strategy, reinforcing its effectiveness. Only 5% disagreed, indicating a small percentage of respondents may have concerns or reservations about the strategy. Notably, no respondents strongly disagreed with the planning and research PR strategy, suggesting a high level of acceptance and buy-in from the surveyed audience.

ii. Effective Leadership Strategy

The descriptive data results of the categorized themes were analysed using the descriptive strategy, and the findings were plotted as shown in Figure 4.2 below.

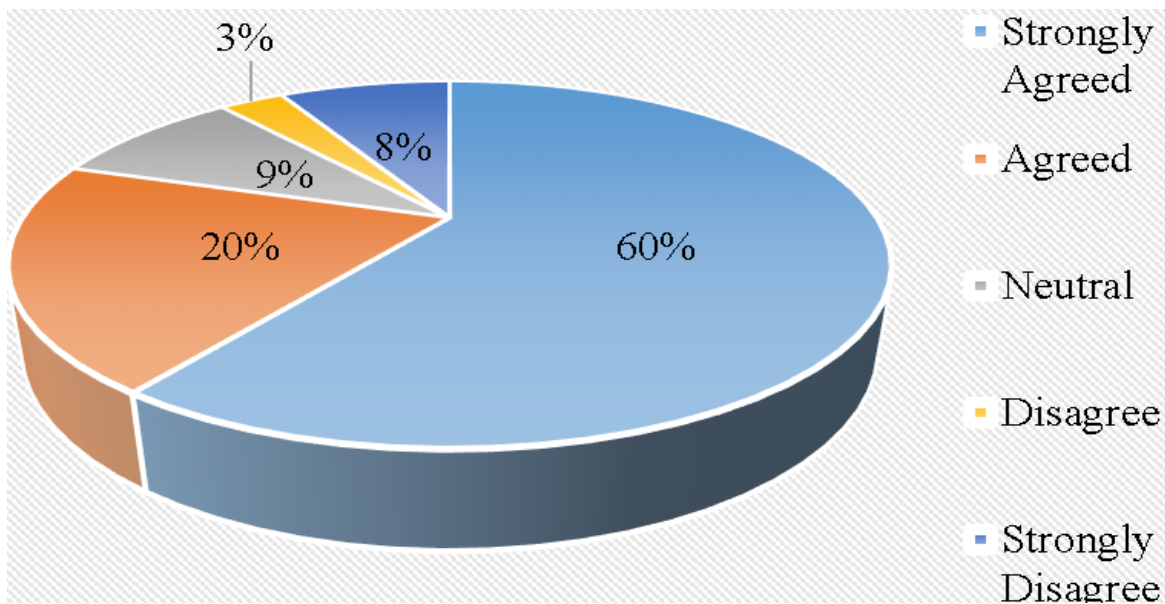


Figure 4. 2:Effective Leadership Strategy

Based on the data findings from Figure 4.2, it can be inferred that most respondents (60%) strongly agree with the Effective Leadership PR strategy, indicating a high level of support for this approach. Additionally, 20% agreed with the strategy, further emphasizing its effectiveness.

However, 8% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the strategy, which is a relatively high percentage and warrants further investigation. It is also important to note that 9% of respondents were neutral, which may indicate a lack of clarity or understanding about the strategy. Therefore, the data suggest that the Effective Leadership PR strategy has strong support from most respondents, but some have concerns or doubts.

iii. Motivating internal Communication

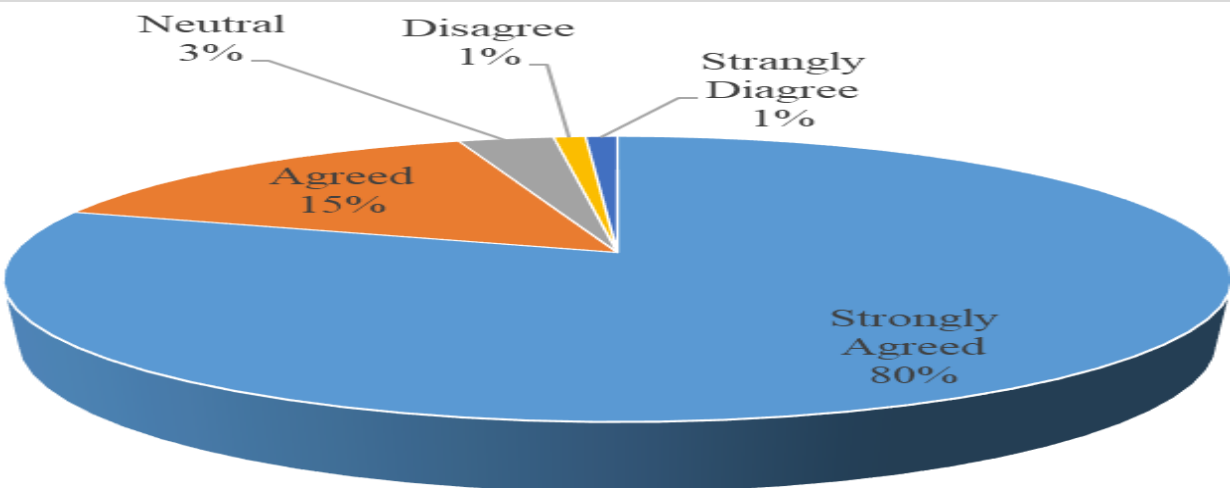


Figure 4. 3:Motivating Internal Communication

The data findings in Figure 4.3 indicate a high level of agreement among employees regarding the effectiveness of internal communication in motivating them. 80% of respondents strongly agreed that internal communication is motivating, while 15% agreed. The low percentages of neutral, disagree and strongly disagree responses suggest that most employees feel positive about the internal communication at their organization.

iv. Social media influencers

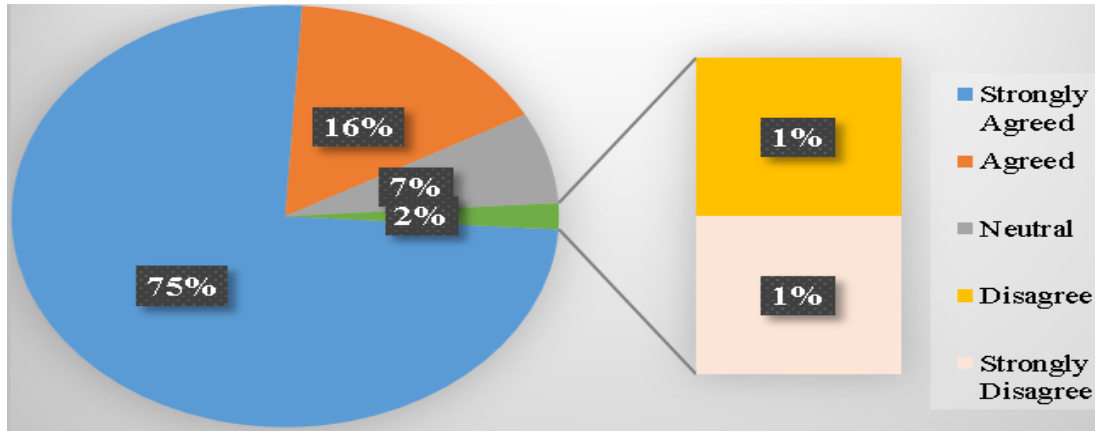


Figure 4. 4:Social media Influencers

Figure 4.4 shows that, according to 75% of those surveyed, an overwhelming majority of individuals strongly agree that social media influencers greatly influence their shopping decisions. Only 1% each opposed or strongly disagreed with the idea that social media influencers have an effect, while another 16% agreed. The remaining 7% of participants had no opinion on the matter. Thus, these results imply that social media influencers are becoming a significant element in customer choice, and companies should be aware of this development.

v. **Creating newsworthy content and distributing it through press releases**

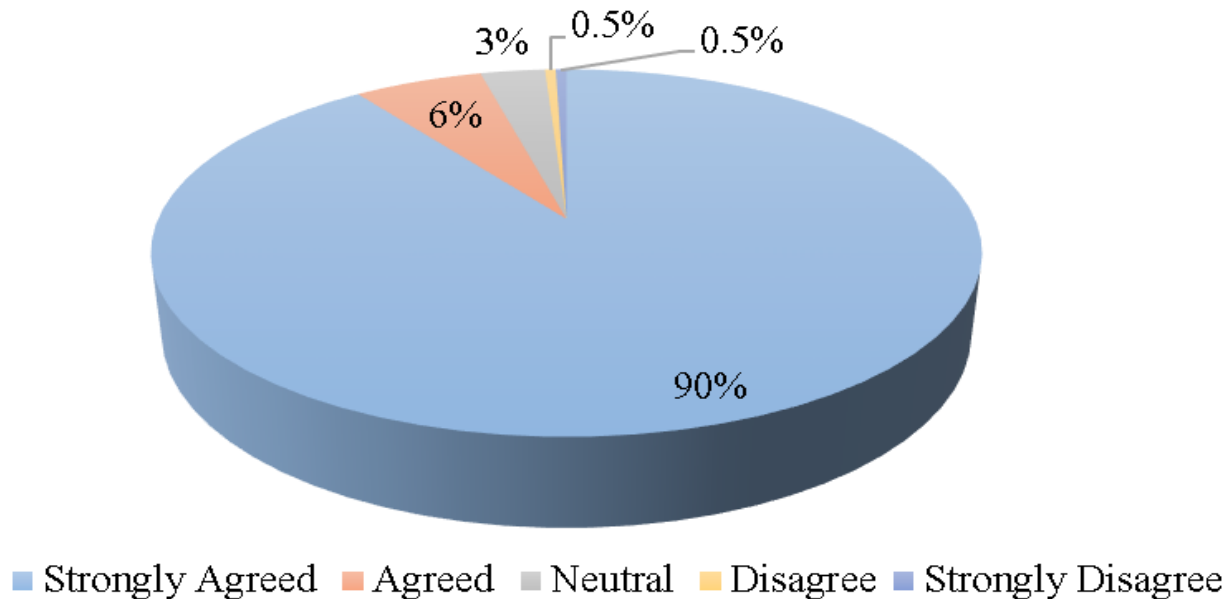


Figure 4. 5:Creating newsworthy content and distributing it through press releases

The data findings from Figure 4.5 indicate that creating newsworthy content and distributing it through press releases is a highly effective strategy for PR practitioners. The overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) strongly agreed with this approach, highlighting the importance of creating compelling content that captures the attention of journalists and media outlets. An additional 6% of respondents agreed with the strategy, reinforcing its effectiveness. Only a small percentage of respondents (0.5% each) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the approach, indicating high acceptance and agreement among those surveyed. With only 3% of respondents being neutral, the data suggest that this strategy is well-understood and widely accepted within the PR community.

vi. Social media engagement strategy

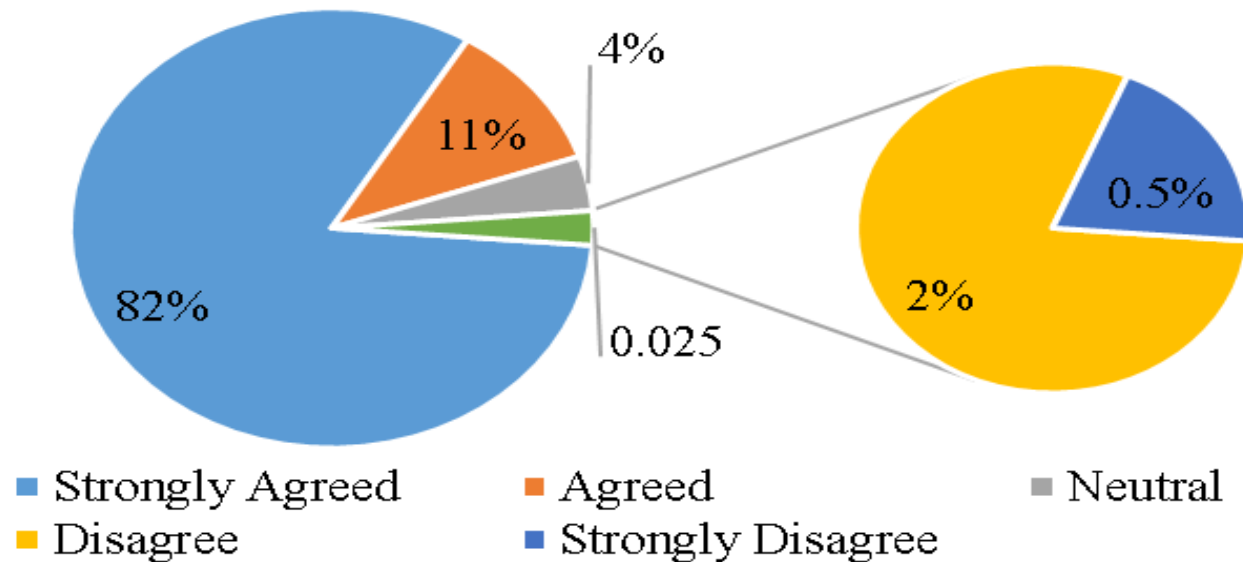


Figure 4. 6: Social media engagement strategy

The data results analysis based on Figure 4.6 illustrates the participants' responses regarding their agreement with the statement "*Social media engagement as a PR strategy*" both from the interviews and questionnaires. Most participants, accounting for 82%, strongly agreed with this statement, indicating high support for using social media engagement as a public relations strategy. Additionally, 11% agreed, emphasizing the positive perception of social media engagement in the PR context. Only a small percentage of participants, 4%, expressed a neutral stance, suggesting a degree of ambivalence towards the effectiveness of social media engagement in PR. Furthermore, a minimal portion, 2%, disagreed with the statement, implying a slight opposition to using social media engagement as a PR strategy. Strikingly, an extremely small percentage, 0.5%, strongly disagreed, indicating an almost unanimous consensus favouring social media engagement as an

effective PR strategy. Therefore, the data results demonstrate a strong endorsement and positive perception of social media engagement in the context of public relations.

vii. Community Relations

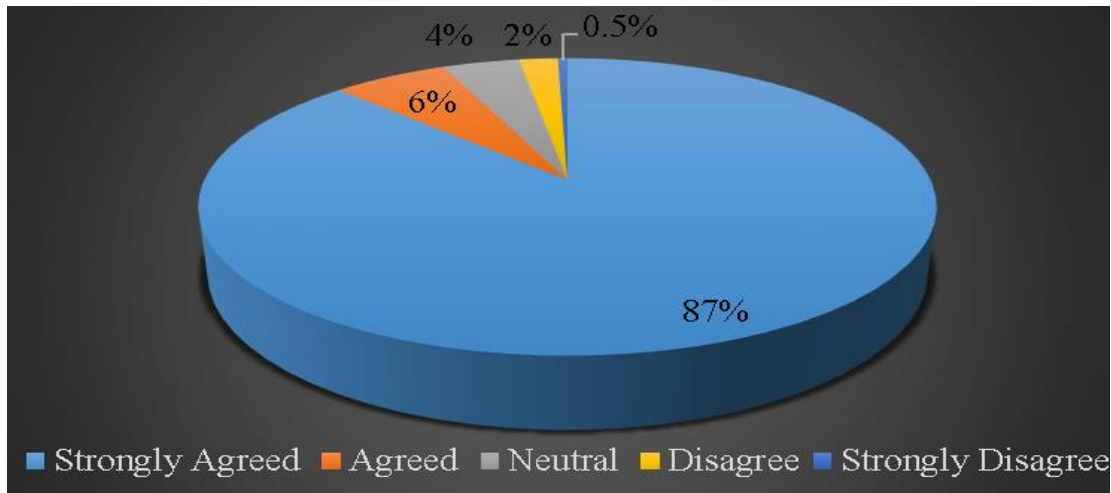


Figure 4. 7:Community Relations Strategy

The data results analysis (Figure 4.7) presents the participants' responses regarding their agreement with the statement "Community Relations strategy." Most participants, accounting for 87%, strongly agreed with this statement, indicating high support for implementing a community relations strategy. Additionally, 6% agreed, highlighting the positive perception of community relations as an effective strategy. A small portion of participants, 4%, expressed a neutral stance, suggesting a degree of uncertainty or lack of strong opinion towards community relations. Furthermore, 2% disagreed with the statement, indicating a slight opposition to implementing a community relations strategy. Strikingly, an extremely small percentage, 0.5%, strongly disagreed, implying a near consensus in favour of community relations. Thus, the data results demonstrate a strong endorsement and positive perception of community relations as a strategy.

4.1.2. Research Objective 2: To ascertain how the Management of Westgate Shopping Mall and the tenants conduct public relations activities in building a sustainable image after the terror attack.

According to the study, PR activities were a deliberate, regular effort to revive and rebuild the mall's image. Also, the study results indicate several activities were undertaken, including online and social media communications, community and consumer relations, media relations, strategic communications, and internal communications, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4. 1:Public Relations Activities for Westgate Mall Management and Tenants in Building Sustainable Image after the Attack

Main Themes	Respondents reporting similar themes	Percentage popularity
Targeted campaigns	8	16%
Interactive online session	12	24%
Intense social media campaigns	21	42%
Corporate Social Responsibilities	14	28%
Media engagements	17	34%
Press releases	6	12%
Intensive advertising	9	18%

According to Table 4.1, the data analysis reveals the popular public relations activities undertaken by the management of Westgate Shopping Mall and its tenants to establish a sustainable image following the attack. The most common activities reported include intense social media campaigns, which were mentioned by 21 respondents, accounting for 42% of the total. Customer service trainings were also widely used, as indicated by 17 respondents, representing 34%. Corporate social responsibilities such as infrastructure development, media engagements, press releases, offering free exhibition space, adjusting rental rates and terms, customer service training, and intensive advertising were reported by varying numbers of respondents.

The management of Westgate Shopping Mall and its tenants conducted various public relations activities to build a sustainable image after the terror attack. These activities included:

1) Targeted campaigns: The data results indicated that targeted campaigns were one of the strategies employed. These campaigns were likely designed to reach specific target audience segments and deliver tailored messages that resonated with them. The study response suggested that *"Targeted campaigns were one of the strategies employed to recover from the attack."* A good example would be the black Friday campaign as indicated below.



Figure 4. 8: The Black Friday Campaign
Source(Westgate Shopping Mall, 2020)

2) Interactive online sessions: The findings also highlighted using interactive online sessions. This could involve live chats, webinars, or Q&A sessions conducted through various online platforms. Such sessions provide an opportunity for direct engagement with the audience, addressing their concerns, and providing information. Interactive online sessions were also used, as the findings

highlight "Using interactive online sessions." The study results indicated that interactive online sessions were implemented, as one response from the management stated, "The shopping mall management has always conducted online sessions engaging different clients and customers hence attracting more businesses to the mall since the attack in 2013."

3)Intense social media campaigns: The study results indicated that intense social media campaigns were utilized. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be powerful tools for reaching a broad audience, generating engagement, and disseminating information during a crisis. 'intense social media campaigns was one of the major ways in which were able to push our products to our digital clients as well as promote the malls safety which allowed clients to see how safe the mall was,'as well as encourage them to come to the mall alluded a respondent.



Figure 4. 9: Intense Social Media Campaigns

Source: (Westgate Shopping Mall, 2020)

4) Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR): The management and tenants of Westgate Shopping Mall engaged in CSR activities, such as building roads and streetlights around the mall. These initiatives demonstrate a commitment to the local community and can help enhance the mall's reputation as a responsible and caring organization. *'We were quite keen on conducting corporate social responsibilities so as to relate and appeal more to the members of the community as well as create and maintain a positive image'* a respondent said.

5) Media engagements: Engaging with the media is essential to public relations. The management and tenants likely interacted with journalists and news outlets to share updates, provide accurate information, and address any misconceptions or concerns surrounding the attack. *'We had to engage the media so that we can portray the mall in good light as well as showcase the steps that we had taken to ensure that the mall is safe enough for visitors'* suggested a respondent.

6) Social media influencers ; The study suggested that the mall resulted to work with influencers to hold events in the mall so as to encourage people to visit the mall. *We had to look for an influential person to hold an event in the mall so that we can pull traffic in the mall.*

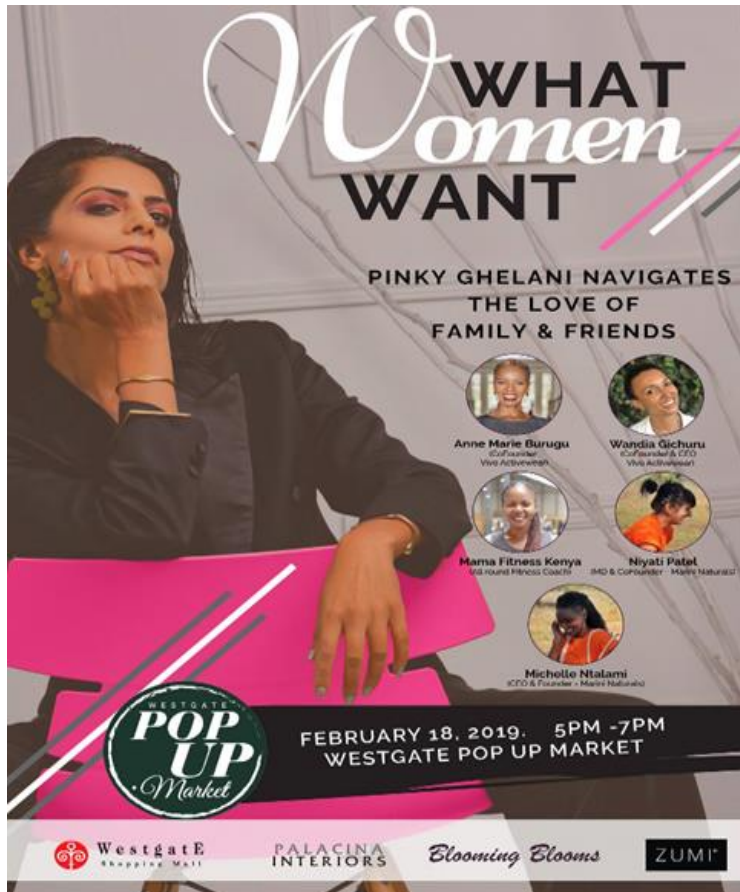


Figure 4. 10: Social Media Influencers

Source: (Westgate Mall, 2019)

7) Intensive advertising: The management and tenants may have implemented intensive advertising campaigns to promote the mall's reopening, restore public confidence, and attract customers. These campaigns involved various media channels such as television, radio, print, and digital platforms. Intensive advertising campaigns were implemented to promote the mall's reopening, restore public confidence, and attract customers; as one tenant mentioned, "*The management and tenants of the mall have implemented intensive advertising campaigns to help bring life to the Mall immediately after the attack.*"

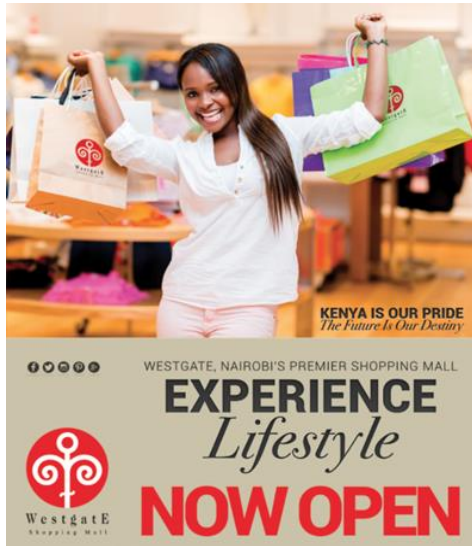


Figure 4. 11: Intensive advertising

Source: (Westgate Shopping Mall, 2015)

4.1.3. To compare and contrast local businesses' public relations practice and international businesses' public relations practice.

i. Budget allocation for PR activities

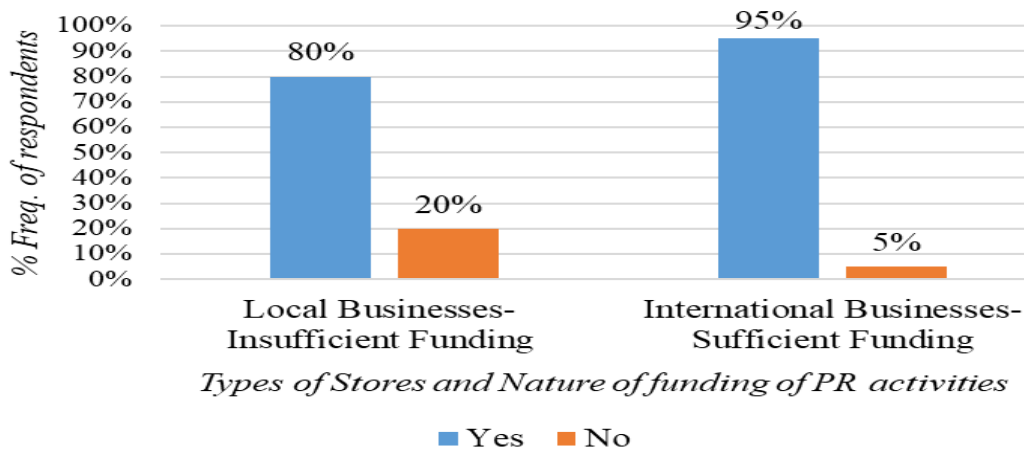


Figure 4. 12: Budget allocation for PR activities in local and International Stores

The data results analysis (Figure 4.12) illustrates the budget allocation for public relations (PR) activities in local and international stores. Among local businesses, 80% reported insufficient funding for PR activities, while 20% indicated adequate funding. In contrast, among

international businesses, a significant majority of 95% reported sufficient funding for PR activities, with only 5% indicating insufficient funding. These findings highlight the disparity in budget allocation for PR activities between local and international businesses, with international businesses generally having higher financial support for their PR efforts.

ii. Experience in dealing with PR crises

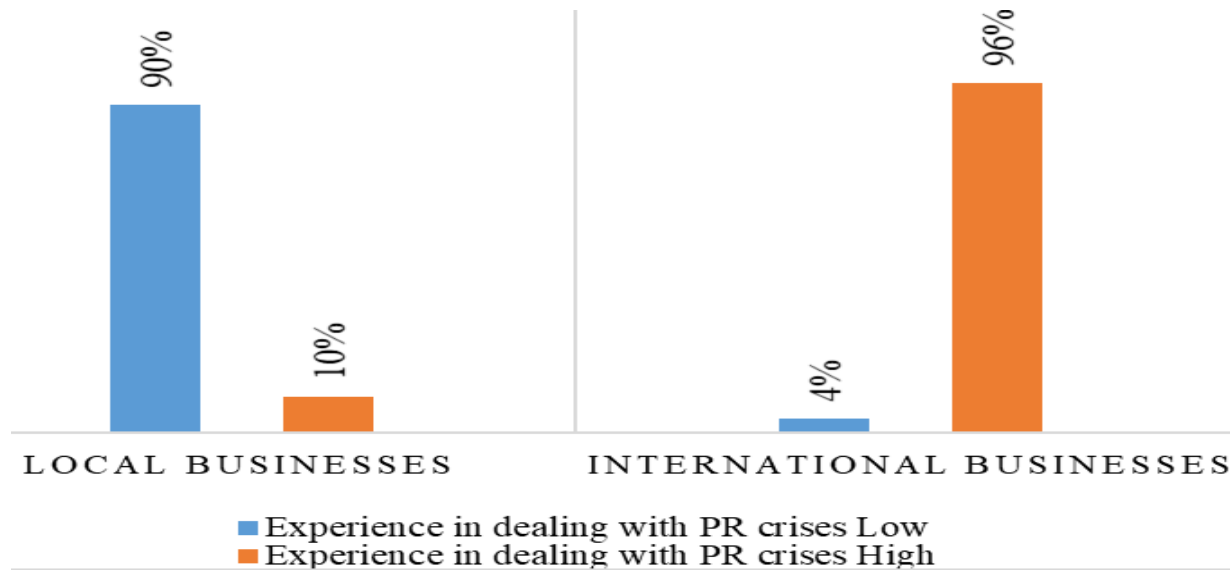


Figure 4. 13: Experience in dealing with PR crises in local and International Stores

The data results analysis (Figure 4.13) reveals the experience of local and international stores in dealing with PR crises. Among local businesses, a significant majority (90%) reported having low experience handling PR crises, while only a small percentage (10%) reported high levels. In contrast, among international businesses, a vast majority (96%) reported high experience in dealing with PR crises, with only a minimal percentage (4%) reporting low levels. These findings indicate that international businesses have a higher level of preparedness and expertise in managing and navigating PR crises compared to their local counterparts.

iii. Training and specialization of personnel

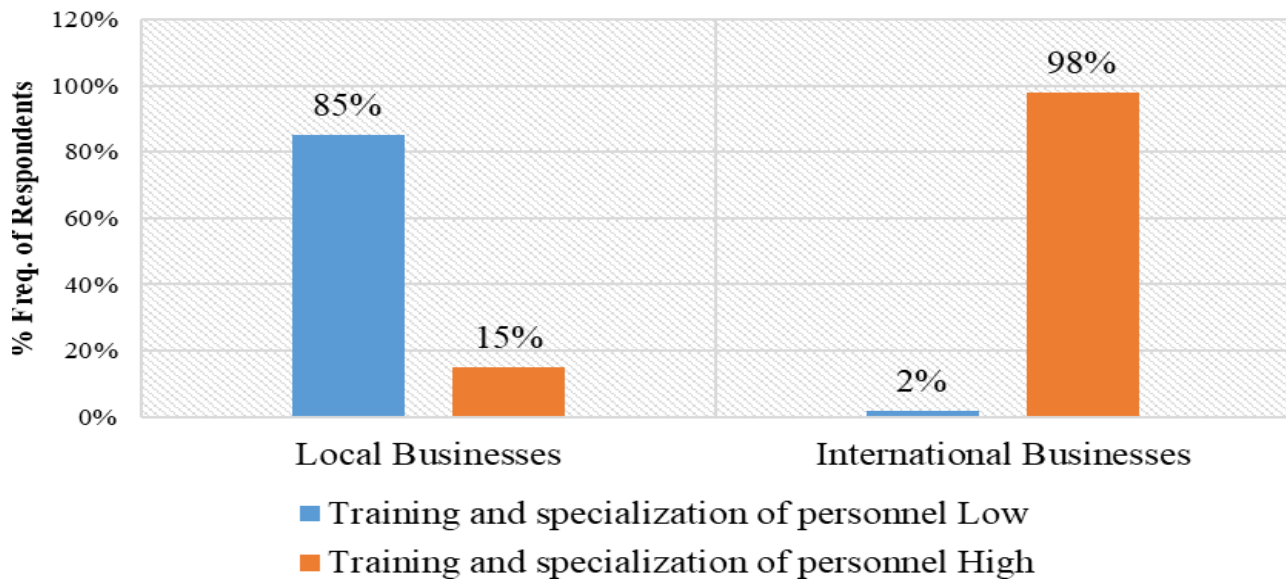


Figure 4. 14: Training and specialization of personnel in local and International Stores

The data results analysis (Figure 4.14) presents the training and specialization of personnel in local and international stores. Among local businesses, the majority (85%) reported having low levels of training and specialization for their personnel, while only a small percentage (15%) reported high levels. In contrast, among international businesses, a significant majority (98%) reported high levels of training and specialization for their personnel, with only a minimal percentage (2%) reporting low levels. These findings indicate a stark contrast in the investment and emphasis on training and specialization between local and international businesses.

iv. Time to recover the public image

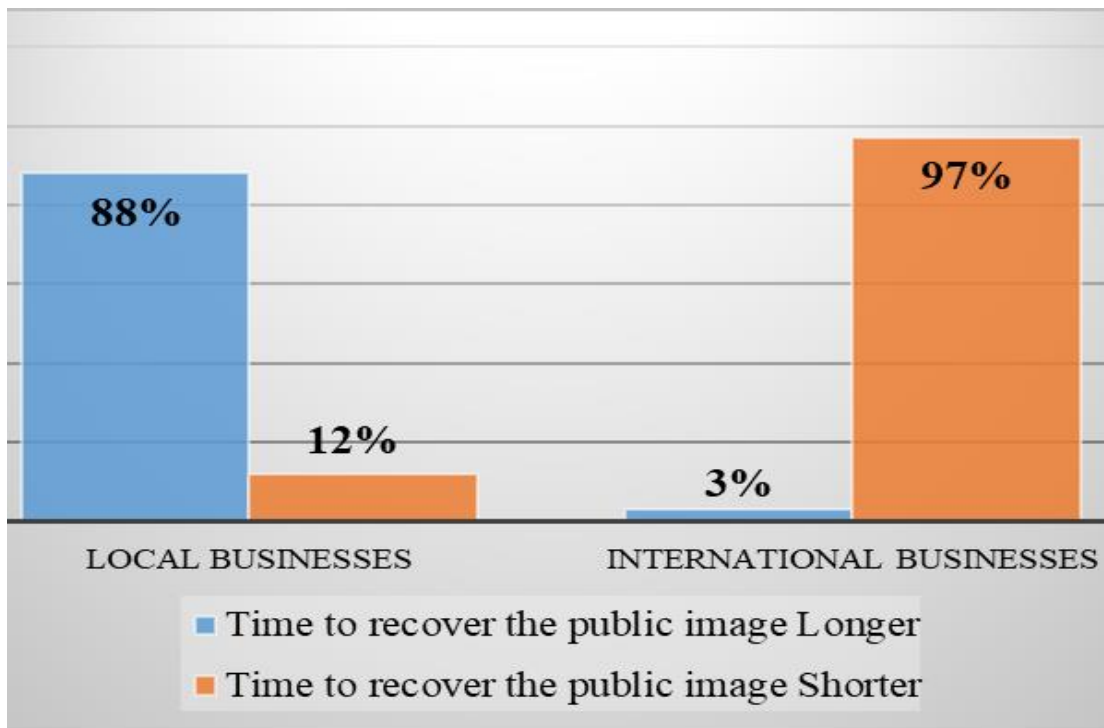


Figure 4. 15:Time to recover the public image in Local and International Stores

The data results analysis based on Figure 4.15 examines the time taken by local and international stores to recover their public image. Among local businesses, most (88%) reported longer periods for image recovery, while only a small percentage (12%) reported shorter timeframes. In contrast, among international businesses, most (97%) reported shorter timeframes for image recovery, with only a minimal percentage (3%) reporting longer periods. These findings suggest that international

businesses are more effective and efficient in restoring their public image than local businesses, as they can recover from PR setbacks in shorter periods.

v. Speed of PR exercise execution

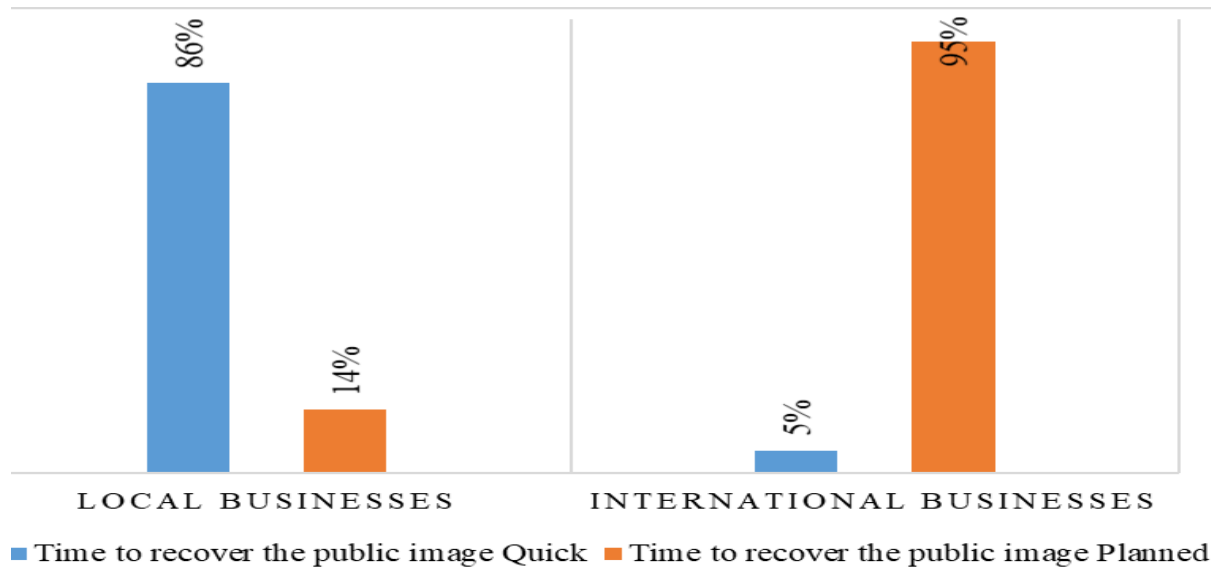


Figure 4. 16:Speed of PR exercise execution in Local and International Stores

The data results analysis (Figure 4.16) shows the speed of PR exercise execution in local and international stores. Among local businesses, the majority (86%) reported quick execution of PR exercises, while a small percentage (14%) reported planned execution. In contrast, among international businesses, a significant majority (95%) reported planned execution of PR exercises, with only a minimal percentage (5%) reporting quick execution. These findings suggest that international businesses tend to have a more strategic and planned approach to executing PR exercises compared to local businesses, which often rely on quicker and more reactive actions.

vi. The originality of PR strategies

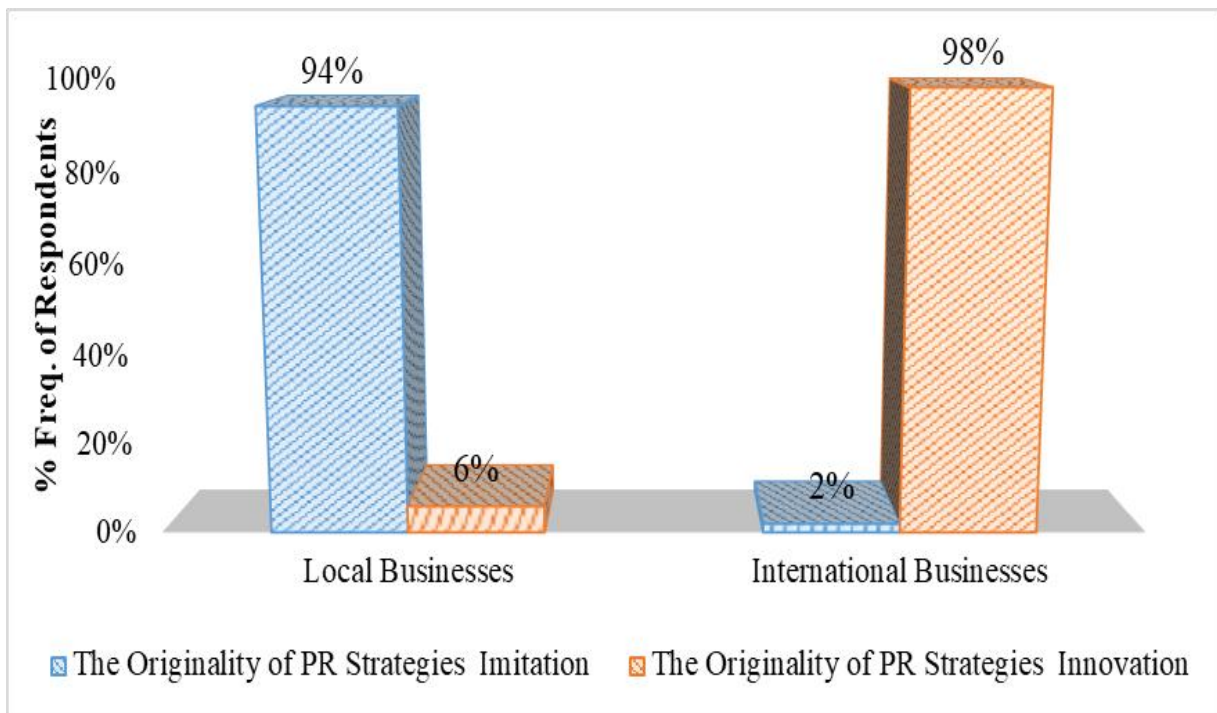


Figure 4. 17: The Originality of PR Strategies in Local and International Stores

The data results (Figure 4.17) analysis shows the originality of PR strategies in local and international stores. Among local businesses, a large majority (94%) reported using imitation strategies, while only a small percentage (6%) reported using innovative strategies. In contrast, among international businesses, an overwhelming majority (98%) reported using innovative strategies, with only a minimal percentage (2%) using imitation strategies. These findings suggest that international businesses are more inclined to develop and implement innovative PR strategies than local businesses, which rely more on imitating existing approaches.

vii. Perception of PR Role in Building Corporate Image

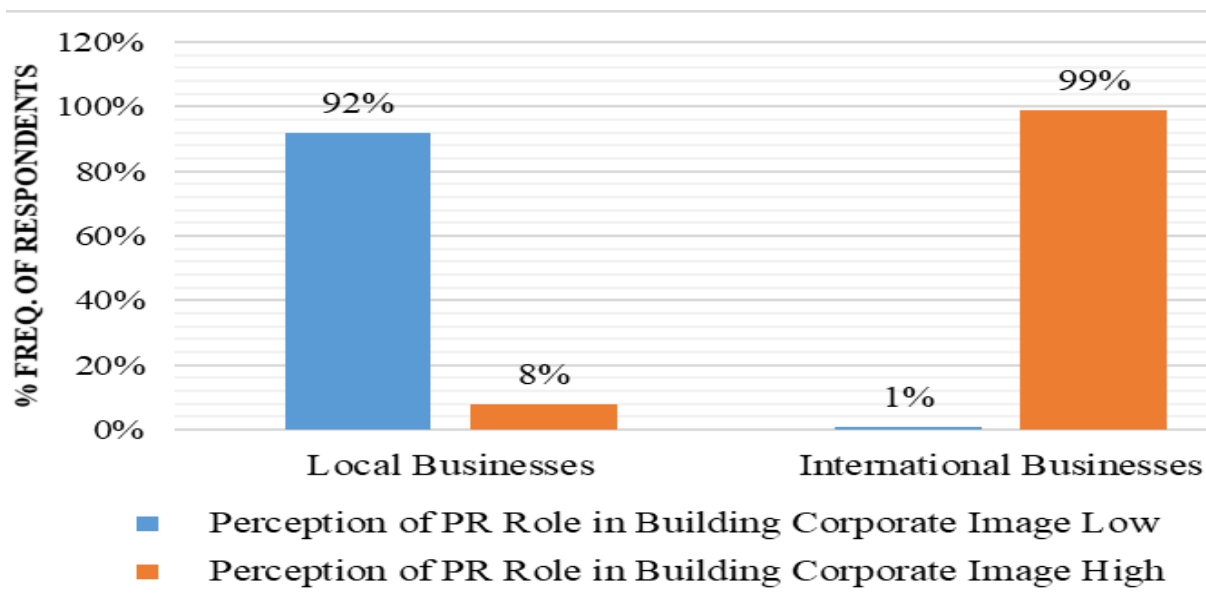


Figure 4. 18: Perception of PR Role in Building Corporate Image in Local and International Stores

The data results analysis (Figure 4.18) explores the perception of the PR role in building corporate image in local and international stores. Among local businesses, the majority (92%) reported a low perception of the PR role, while only a small percentage (8%) had a high perception. In contrast, among international businesses, an overwhelmingly high percentage (99%) had a high perception of the PR role, with only a minimal percentage (1%) reporting a low perception. These findings indicate that international businesses place a significantly higher value on the PR role in building corporate image compared to local businesses.

4.5 Discussion of the data results

PR Strategy

The study findings on the Planning and Research PR Strategy indicated that most respondents strongly agreed (55%) with the approach, with 30% agreeing with the strategy. A PR manager of one of the stores put it clearly when he said;

“We did our research and identified the demographics of our target audience. Then we tailored the PR elements of our campaign around these characteristics.”

It was clear that these companies thought about what they wanted to achieve, including setting goals in their PR strategy and creating an action plan with which they would achieve them.

One of the restaurant’s PR Managers was quoted saying:

“Once we knew who we were reaching out to and what we wanted to achieve, the next step was figuring out how to tailor our message to our audience to make our goals a reality. Because we had done our research and knew our audience, we knew the most effective ways to reach them.”

The research process was thorough for some companies, as explained by the Local bank PR executive who said:

“How we built our PR strategy after the terrorist attack by researching internal and external brand factors. This included; tracking media mentions, Reviewing influencer relationships and results, Evaluating social media engagement and traffic KPIs, and Reviewing buyer personas and customer insights. Next, we performed a competitive analysis to determine what worked best for other businesses at the Westgate Mall and surrounding businesses. Social listening tools also helped us speed up this process.”

During the research and planning process of building their PR strategy, organizations listed any internal or external factors that could have impacted their brand. These included: Feature, product, or pricing changes, Distribution shifts, Stakeholders and leadership changes, Employee sentiment, Legal factors, Political climate, Economic shifts, Trends, and Tech advances. As one of the banks brand managers said while describing the strategy for building its corporate image after the terrorist attacks that

"We used employee relations, also known as internal PR, to communicate with and cultivate positive employee perceptions of our company. This process included dedicated employee newsletters or communications, employee perks and benefits, free training, skill-boosting opportunities, employee appreciation events, and working with unions or employee groups."

These findings were consistent with the study by Aragón and Domingo (2014) on practitioners' perceptions of interactive communication strategies in public relations. The study also aligns with Chon and Park's (2019) framework of situational theory of problem-solving, which predicted public support for government actions in a public health crisis.

For the Effective Leadership PR strategy, most respondents (60%) strongly agreed, with 20% agreeing with the approach. However, 8% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the strategy,

and 9% were neutral, which may indicate a lack of clarity or understanding about the approach. One local food service brand manager said,

“I strongly disagree with the Effective Leadership PR strategy. I think it just gives leaders a way to avoid taking real action and accountability. It's just lip service, and stakeholders can see right through it. We need leaders willing to take bold and decisive action, not just talk about it.” While one international banking outlet wrote, *“I think the Effective Leadership PR strategy is a great approach. It shows that the leaders are taking responsibility and being transparent. However, I think more needs to be done to educate employees and stakeholders about the strategy to increase buy-in across the board.”*

The study findings were inconsistent with Block and Lovegrove's (2021) study findings where Block and Lovegrove's (2021) concluded that 100% of the business stakeholders must support effective Leadership PR strategy for it to apply in crises. This highlights the importance of considering context-specific factors and the diverse perspectives of stakeholders when developing and implementing PR strategies. It also emphasizes the need for further research to understand better the factors that influence stakeholder perceptions and support for PR strategies in different contexts.

The importance of effective communication in times of crisis is emphasized by Chon and Park (2019) in their study on predicting public support for government actions in a public health crisis. They found that organization-public relationship and fear were significant predictors of public support for government actions, highlighting the need for effective public relations strategies during times of crisis.

Employee internal communication was an effective PR strategy as 80% of the sample size strongly suggested that it helped the brand to stand out as a competitive edge. Not only the strategy kept employees motivated, hard-working, and loyal, but it also encouraged them to advocate for their business which brought in both customers and more high-quality employees.

One PR executive's words describe the strategy for building their corporate image after the terrorist attacks.

“We used employee relations, also known as internal PR, to communicate with and cultivate positive employee perceptions of our company. This process included dedicated employee newsletters or communications, employee perks and benefits, free training, skill-boosting opportunities, employee appreciation events, and working with unions or employee groups.” This overwhelming support for this strategy is inconsistent with Young's (2020) descriptive survey in the US, Aragón and Domingo's (2014) qualitative study in Spain, Dhanesh and Rahman's (2021) qualitative study in Iraq found that employees are more likely to be productive, innovative, and devoted to accomplishing the organization's goals when they feel informed, respected, and linked to those goals and mission. This can positively affect the organization's reputation and external communication initiatives.

The study data findings on social media influencers suggest that they greatly influence shopping decisions, with 75% of respondents strongly agreeing. This highlights the increasing importance of social media influencers in customer choice and implies that companies should take notice of this trend. The study results were consistent with Hudders et al. (2020) emphasizing the strategic use of social media influencers in PR campaigns. The study findings support this notion by highlighting PR professionals' need to stay current on emerging trends and technologies, such as

social media influencers, and adapt their strategies accordingly. However, the study findings disagreed with Zimand-Sheiner and Lahav's (2022) findings that social media were major disruptions of public relations in the digital age. Similarly, the study findings supported Zimand-Sheiner and Lahav's (2022) findings: PR professionals must stay abreast of the changing media landscape and adapt their strategies accordingly.

On the other hand, 90% of respondents strongly agreed that producing noteworthy content and disseminating it through press releases was a highly successful strategy for PR practitioners. The study findings are consistent with the literature on visual communication and public relations, as discussed by Dhanesh & Rahman (2021). Respondents in the study highlighted the importance of crafting a compelling story that resonates with the media and their audiences and developing relationships with journalists through personalized pitches and follow-up. This underscores the role of visual communication in shaping public opinion and building effective PR campaigns. Similarly, the study findings are consistent with Niininen's (2023) focus on social media for progressive public relations. This highlights how crucial it is to provide captivating material that will grab the interest of journalists and media outlets, and it also demonstrates that this tactic is well-known and widely regarded within the PR community. Therefore, the study findings suggest that effective PR strategies require a deep understanding of the media landscape, a keen sense of storytelling and messaging, and the ability to adapt to changing technologies and trends. These insights are consistent with the broader literature on the commercialization of social media stars and the disruptions of public relations in the digital age.

The data analysis highlighted participants' views on the effectiveness of social media engagement as a public relations strategy. A significant majority (82%) strongly agreed, while 11% agreed, indicating strong support for this approach. This concurs with the mall management, who said that

social media use, particularly for “live video, is viral, with nearly 5 billion daily views. It offers a unique opportunity to engage with users directly, fostering a personal connection. It is recommended to regularly host live videos, ideally at least once a week. The key is encouraging interaction and ensuring the video is captivating to keep viewers engaged.” Consistent with the recommendations of hosting regular live videos and fostering interaction, these results corroborate the findings of the Chirumalla et al. (2018) study, which underscores the importance of strategic social media engagement for effective public relations. These results suggest a widespread consensus favouring using social media engagement as an effective public relations strategy, reflecting a positive perception of its value in the PR context.

The data results showed strong support for implementing a community relations strategy, with 87% of participants strongly agreeing and 6% agreeing that community engagement is the best way to capture the attention of large communities that are the target clientele for the Mall. These findings indicate a near consensus favouring community relations as an effective strategy. According to Gilmore et al. (2020), the study's findings align with the idea that shopping malls can significantly impact the community. The researchers highlighted that when shopping malls create a central hub for diverse activities and position themselves at the heart of their communities, they effectively create appealing destinations that cater to a broader range of individuals and serve a larger surrounding area. The data results support this notion and underscore the potential benefits that shopping malls can bring to the community through their strategic location and multifaceted offerings.

Public Relations Activities for Westgate Mall Management and Tenants in Building Sustainable Image after the Attack

The management of Westgate Shopping Mall and its tenants implemented various public relations activities to establish a sustainable image following the attack. The findings reveal that Customer service training and interactive online sessions were the most popular strategies, mentioned by 42% and 34% of the respondents, respectively. Other activities such as intense Targeted campaigns , corporate social responsibilities, media engagements, press releases, offering free exhibition space, adjusting rental rates and terms, customer service training, and intensive advertising were also reported, with percentages ranging from 6% to 34%.

According to the study, the management of Westgate Shopping Mall and its tenants utilised various public relations activities to rebuild their image after the terror attack. These activities included targeted campaigns; the study response suggested that *"Targeted campaigns were one of the strategies employed to recover from the attack."* Interactive online sessions were also used, as the findings highlight *"Using interactive online sessions."* The study results indicate that intense social media campaigns were implemented, as one response from the management stated, *"The shopping mall management has always conducted intense social media campaigns attracting more businesses to the mall since the attack in 2013."* Engaging in corporate social responsibilities (CSR) initiatives, such as building roads and streetlights, was another activity observed by the study. This is seen from the one response from the tenants accounting on what the mall management has often done as notes, *"The management and tenants of Westgate Shopping Mall engaged in CSR activities."* As the study suggests, engaging with the media through interactions with journalists and issuing press releases were mentioned as well, *"Engaging with the media is essential to public relations."* Offering free exhibition space and adjusting rental rates and terms were additional strategies identified, with the data results indicating and Adjusting rental rates and terms is another strategy mentioned in the findings. Customer service training was also emphasized

as part of the public relations efforts. Finally, intensive advertising campaigns were implemented to promote the mall's reopening, restore public confidence, and attract customers; as one tenant mentioned, *"The management and tenants of the mall have implemented intensive advertising campaigns to help bring life to the Mall immediately after the attack."*

These findings align with the results of Saeed et al. (2012) examined the impact of e-marketing and social media sites on a company's performance. Similarly, the results agreed with Magic et al. (2012) in Europe and Kamau (2015) in Kenya that electronic marketing and social networking sites create a sustainable image post-crisis, mainly social media playing a huge role in political campaigns, with Facebook being a powerful platform.

The finding that social media campaigns were particularly effective in communicating with customers suggests that companies should invest in their online presence and utilise social media to reach their audience effectively. This study's results imply that companies and organisations facing similar crises should consider investing in a comprehensive public relations strategy that includes online and social media activities to help rebuild their image and reputation. It also highlights the importance of social media in crisis communication and how it can effectively communicate with stakeholders during a crisis.

Comparing and Contrasting Local Businesses' and International Businesses' PR Practices

Several key findings emerge in comparing and contrasting local businesses' public relations practices with those of international businesses. Firstly, there is a notable disparity in budget allocation for PR activities, with international businesses having a significantly higher percentage (95%) of sufficient funding compared to local businesses (20%) that often face budget constraints. Secondly, international businesses demonstrate a higher level of experience (96%) in dealing with

PR crises, while local businesses (90%) often lack the necessary expertise in managing such situations. Thirdly, training and specialization of personnel are prioritized by international businesses (98%), whereas local businesses (85%) lag behind in providing comprehensive training opportunities. Fourthly, international businesses exhibit a faster recovery time (97%) to restore their public image compared to local businesses (12%) that typically experience longer recovery periods. Lastly, international businesses emphasize planned execution (95%) of PR exercises, while local businesses (86%) focus on quick execution. These findings underscore the distinct approaches and resources employed by international businesses in contrast to local businesses, highlighting the need for local businesses to enhance their PR strategies and resources to compete on a global scale. For instance, according to one respondent from a local business:

“Management called us to a meeting and instructed our team to ensure we had more sales and customer visits within the next few months. We were not given instructions and budgetary allocation.”

While another respondent from an international business had this to say:

“The guidelines and instructions of what is expected from us are spelt out. We were allocated funds to begin carrying out our activities while a discretionary fund remained for strategic planning. Management knew exactly what to expect from us.”

The strategies adopted by international firms were well thought-out and planned as opposed to local companies that opted to copy or imitate what organizations had practised in other jurisdictions.

This was well articulated by a respondent from a local business who said:

“When we launch a PR exercise, be it an event or a social media campaign, the greatest consideration is usually the money available for the work and how quickly we can get people to sign up and demonstrate we successfully reached our allocated quota of deliverables.”

This was quite a revelation considering that their competitor, an international business that was located on the same floor in the Westgate shopping mall complex, had this to say:

“The first thing we do consider is the goals of the campaign. We produce a message that will appeal to our target audience while considering the medium of communication we will employ. It is important too that we have mechanisms to deal with responses and reactions from our audience as we have to measure the impact of our campaign with specified periods.”

The study results align with previous research, such as Li et al. (2015), who found that domestic companies in China tend to have a lower level of PR expertise and are less likely to invest in PR activities than international companies. Similarly, the results aligned with Zhao et al. (2017) found that Chinese companies perceive PR as a tool for advertising and promotion rather than a strategic tool for building reputation and trust. This perception may explain why domestic companies in the Westgate Shopping Mall study had a lower appreciation for PR's role in image building compared to international companies.

Furthermore, in terms of PR strategy, the study results have supported Lee and Johnson's (2018) findings that international companies are more likely to develop innovative and creative PR strategies than domestic companies, which rely on imitating successful strategies from other regions. Lee and Johnson (2018) suggest domestic companies must invest in research and development to create unique and effective PR strategies that align with their target audience and organizational objectives.

The difference in PR practices between local and international businesses can have significant consequences, as PR plays a crucial role in managing a company's reputation and building trust with stakeholders. As noted by the study, underfunding and unrealistic expectations of PR in local businesses can lead to a slower recovery of their public image, ultimately impacting their bottom line

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter is the last of the study. It summarises the study's findings and provides valuable insights into the public relations strategies employed by Westgate Shopping Mall and its tenants to build a sustainable corporate image after the 2013 terror attack. These findings offer several recommendations for businesses facing similar crises, including prioritizing planning and research, investing in effective leadership and internal communication, leveraging social media influencers, developing a comprehensive PR strategy, and investing in PR staff and resources. By following these recommendations, businesses can effectively manage crises and build a sustainable corporate image that inspires stakeholder confidence and trust.

5.1 Study Conclusion

An organization's image is crucial for its growth and success, and events such as terror attacks can severely dent its reputation and affect stakeholders' confidence. The study intended to investigate the theoretical implication of public relations strategies using a case study of Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi employed to build a sustainable corporate image following the 2013 terror attack. Through a thorough review of the literature and analysis of data, the study aimed to provide insights into how Westgate Shopping Mall could effectively utilize public relations measures to regain the public's trust and confidence.

The study aimed to determine the extent to which public relations has been employed in building a sustainable corporate image for Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi after the 2013 terror attack. The study examined the types of public relations strategies employed by the mall's tenants and the

management, compared and contrasted the PR practices of local and international businesses, and analysed the attack's impact on the mall's image and reputation.

The study findings on the questions:

a. What public relations strategies were utilised by the Westgate shopping mall tenants in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack?

The study explored the effectiveness of different Public Relations (PR) strategies used by various organizations during crises. The study findings were obtained from 50 respondents who had experienced a crisis in their businesses at the Westgate Mall Shopping Mall. The PR strategies under analysis included Planning and Research, Effective Leadership, Employee Internal Communication, Social Media Influencers, and community engagement. The study results indicated that Planning and Research were highly effective, with most respondents strongly agreeing with the approach. Effective Leadership also received high scores, although a few respondents strongly disagreed with the strategy. Employee Internal Communication as a PR strategy was highly effective, with overwhelming support from the respondents. Social media influencers were found to be highly influential in shopping decisions, suggesting their growing importance in customer choice. The study findings highlight the importance of context-specific factors, stakeholder perspectives, and the need for effective communication in times of crisis. Lastly, community engagement was considered an effective strategy for capturing the attention of large communities. By positioning themselves as central hubs and engaging with the community, the tenants of Westgate shopping mall aimed to create appealing destinations that serve a larger surrounding area.

b. How does the management of Westgate Shopping Mall and the tenants conduct

Public relations activities in building a sustainable image after the terror attack?

The management of Westgate Shopping Mall and its tenants conducted various public relations activities to build a sustainable image after the terror attack. These activities included:

Targeted campaigns: The data results indicated that targeted campaigns were one of the strategies employed. These campaigns were likely designed to reach specific target audience segments and deliver tailored messages that resonated with them.

Interactive online sessions: The findings also highlighted using interactive online sessions. This could involve live chats, webinars, or Q&A sessions conducted through various online platforms. Such sessions provide an opportunity for direct engagement with the audience, addressing their concerns, and providing information.

Intense social media campaigns: The study results indicated that intense social media campaigns were utilized. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be powerful tools for reaching a broad audience, generating engagement, and disseminating information during a crisis.

Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR): The management and tenants of Westgate Shopping Mall engaged in CSR activities, such as building roads and streetlights around the mall. These initiatives demonstrate a commitment to the local community and can help enhance the mall's reputation as a responsible and caring organization.

Media engagements: Engaging with the media is essential to public relations. The management and tenants likely interacted with journalists and news outlets to share updates, provide accurate information, and address any misconceptions or concerns surrounding the attack.

Press releases: Press releases are a common tool used in public relations to disseminate official statements and critical information to the media and the public. The management and tenants likely issued press releases to provide updates, express condolences, and communicate their commitment to recovery and rebuilding.

Customer service training: The study results suggest that customer service training was part of the public relations efforts. This training likely aimed to ensure that staff members were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively provide exceptional service and address customers' needs.

Intensive advertising: The management and tenants may have implemented intensive advertising campaigns to promote the mall's reopening, restore public confidence, and attract customers. These campaigns could have involved various media channels such as television, radio, print, and digital platforms.

Therefore, this study results show that the public relations activities conducted by the management and tenants of Westgate Shopping Mall encompassed targeted campaigns, interactive online sessions, intense social media campaigns, corporate social responsibilities, media engagements, press releases, offering free exhibition space, adjusting rental rates and terms, customer service training, and intensive advertising. These strategies aimed to rebuild the mall's image, engage with stakeholders, and demonstrate a commitment to recovery and community support.

c. What similarities and differences exist in the practice of public relations by local businesses and international businesses in building a public image at the Westgate Shopping Mall.

The study findings have revealed that international businesses have more experience in dealing with PR crises, better-trained staff, more appreciation of the role of PR in building the corporate image, adequate budget allocation for PR activities, earlier strategies of PR, and planned implementation of PR exercises. On the other hand, domestic businesses have a low appreciation of the role of PR in building their corporate image, insufficient budget allocation for PR activities, imitation of PR strategies, rapid implementation of PR practices, and long turnaround times. The study highlights the importance of investing in PR staff and resources, as well as developing a clear understanding of the role of PR in building and maintaining a company's image. Local companies must invest in research and development to create creative and innovative PR strategies to bridge the gap with global companies.

5.3 Study Recommendations

Based on the research results on the public relations strategies used by Westgate Shopping Mall and its tenants to build a sustainable corporate image after the 2013 terrorist attack, several recommendations can be made for businesses facing such crises. These recommendations are supported by data analysis and insights gained from the case study.

i. Prioritize Planning and Research

The study found that Planning and Research was an effective strategy since 55% of the respondents cited that the same worked for them. Therefore, businesses should prioritize planning and research as the first step in their crisis management by allocating the necessary budgets at the beginning of every financial year so as to cater for the different campaigns planned for the year . This involves thoroughly assessing the situation, identifying key stakeholders, and developing a comprehensive crisis management plan.

ii Effective Leadership

The research found effective leadership was also a good public relations strategy. 6 out of ten people recommended the strategy .Therefore, businesses should invest in developing effective leaders who can guide the organization through conflicts, make difficult decisions, and communicate effectively with stakeholders.This can be achieved by training managers and organizing workshops for them occasionally .

iii Internal Communication

The research found that 8 out of 10 respondents agreed that Employee Internal Communication was very effective in building a sustainable image of the organization. Therefore, businesses must prioritize internal communications during times of crisis by organizing internal meetings regularly to review the progress of the organization.This involves making employees aware of the situation, listening to their concerns, and providing them with the support they need. Effective internal communication can also help prevent rumors and misinformation from spreading.

iv Social Media Influencers

The research found that Social Media Influencers significantly influenced purchasing decisions. Therefore, businesses must leverage the power of social media to reach their audience effectively. This involves identifying the right social media influencers by monitoring their reach an engaging them, and creating content that resonates with their followers. Companies must also monitor social media channels for feedback and immediately respond to any negative feedback.

ii. Comprehensive PR Strategy

The study found that a comprehensive PR strategy that includes online and social media activities can rebuild a company's image and reputation after a crisis. Therefore, businesses must develop a comprehensive PR strategy that covers all aspects of public relations, including opening social media accounts for their businesses, media relations, community and consumer relations, strategic communications, and internal communications. The strategy must include online and social media activities to reach a wider audience.

iii. **Investment in PR Staff and Resources**

The study found that international businesses have more experience in handling PR crises, well-trained staff, and adequate budget allocation for PR activities. Therefore, businesses must invest in PR staff and resources, including training, technology, and equipment, to effectively build their capacity to handle crises. This involves developing a clear understanding of the role of PR in building and maintaining a company's image and allocating sufficient resources in terms of finances and capacity building activities to support PR activities.

5.3 Study Limitations and Future Study Recommendations

One potential limitation of this study was the use of a case study Approach. Although the study provided important insights into the public relations strategies used by Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi to rebuild its image after the 2013 terrorist attack, the results may not be generalizable to other contexts. Future studies may consider using larger sample sizes and more diverse types of case studies to gain a broader understanding of the effectiveness of public relations strategies in different industries and regions.

Furthermore, future studies can also examine the effectiveness of public relations strategies in other types of crises, such as natural disasters or product recalls, to provide a broader understanding of the role of PR in crisis management. Additionally, as social media plays a more important role in shaping public opinion, future research could examine how social media can build and maintain an organization's image and reputation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participants' Informed Consent Letter



University of Nairobi

Irene Nzilani Kyumwa

Reg No: K50/35103/2019

Faculty of Journalism

Dear Participant,

We are studying Public Relations in Building Corporate Image, explicitly focusing on Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. As a valued member of the business community, we would like to invite you to participate in our study.

The objectives of our study are threefold: to establish the types of public relations strategies utilized by Westgate Shopping Mall tenants in Nairobi in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack. To ascertain how the management of Westgate Shopping Mall and the tenants conduct public relations activities in building a sustainable image after the terror attack. To compare and contrast local businesses' PR practices and international businesses' PR practices.

Your participation in this study will provide valuable insights into businesses' PR strategies and practices after a crisis. All information gathered from this study will be confidential and only used for research purposes.

We assure you that your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. We will endeavour to share with you the result of the study.

We appreciate your consideration of our request and look forward to your participation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Irene Nzilani Kyumwa.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Introduction

Good [morning/afternoon], my name is Irene Nzilani Kyumwa, and I am a researcher from University of Nairobi. The purpose of this interview is to gather information on public relations strategies utilised by organizations at Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, to build a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The information gathered will be used for research purposes only and kept confidential. Participation in this interview is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. What age bracket do you belong to?
 - Below 25 years ()
 - 26 - 30 years ()
 - 31 - 40 years ()
 - 41 - 49 years ()
 - 50 - 56 years ()
 - 60 and above ()
2. What is the most advanced level of education you have achieved?
 - O Level Certificate ()
 - College Certificate ()
 - College Diploma ()
 - Undergraduate degree ()
 - Post Graduate ()
3. What position do you currently occupy at your company?
 - Manager ()
 - Assistant Manager ()
 - Supervisor ()
 - Staff Worker ()
4. How long have you been working in the position you have given me?
 - Below 5 years ()

- 6- 10 years ()
 - 11 - 20 years ()
 - Over 20 years ()
5. What public relations strategies were utilized by your organization as a tenant of the Westgate shopping Mall in building a sustainable corporate image after the terror attack?
 6. How does the management of Westgate Shopping Mall and the tenants conduct public relations activities in building a sustainable image after the terror attack?
 7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the PR activities carried out by local businesses compared to international businesses?
 8. What practices have you observed in international businesses that are uncommon in local businesses regarding PR activities and vice versa?
 9. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements by selecting the appropriate option for both local businesses and international businesses:

 10. Is there any other information you think is relevant to this study that you would like to share?

Conclusion: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your contribution will be valuable to the success of this study. If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Appendix 4: Westgate Mall Stores/ Brands

List of stores

- 1 Kenya Commercial Bank
- 2 Westlands Forex Bureau
- 3 Haandi Restaurant
- 4 Sir Henrys
- 5 Diamond Watch Company
- 6 Fazal The Luxury Boutique
- 7 Mocca Shoes
- 8 Trevor Collections
- 9 Basic Intimates
- 10 Little Red
- 11 Sona Shoppe
- 12 Hotpoint
- 13 Gametroniq
- 14 Salute I World
- 15 Miniso
- 16 Goodlife Pharmacy
- 17 Health U
- 18 Aquapet
- 19 Educate Yourself Limited
- 20 Irita Jewel
- 21 Gemessence
- 22 Ashleys
- 23 Fragrance Lounge
- 24 Lintons Place
- 25 Blooming Blooms
- 26 Bonfire
- 27 Optica
- 28 Safaricom

29 Lorenzo Dry Cleaners
30 Diamond Trust Bank
31 Stanbic Bank
32 Absa
33 Pizza Hut
34 The Grill Shack
35 KFC
36 Ocean Basket
37 Subway
38 Chicken Inn/Pizza Inn
39 Pretty Ballerinas
40 Converse Ltd
41 Nike
42 Puma
43 Adidas
44 Hugoboss
45 Clarks
46 Lacoste
47 Sketchers
48 Mango
49 Springfield
50 Women Secret
51 Samsung
52 Bose
53 Carrefour
54 Swarovski
55 Yves Rochers

Source: (Westgate Shopping Mall- Website)

