

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM



TOPIC:

**COVID-19 & CRISIS COMMUNICATION: ANALYSING KEY GOVERNMENT OF
GHANA COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AS DEPLOYED BY THE MINISTRY
OF INFORMATION**

By

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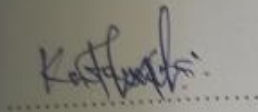
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FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my original research, and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this institute or elsewhere. I am solely responsible for any shortcoming. Also, the works cited in the study have been duly acknowledged.


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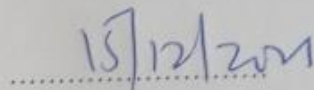
SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this dissertation was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines of supervision of dissertation laid down by Ghana Institute of Journalism.


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Dr. Godwin Etse Sikanku

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Date

DEDICATION

The successful completion of this work is dedicated to my dad Mr. Benedict Kojo Tandoh, my mum Emelia Duncan and my brother Kofi Tandoh for their continuous and tireless support towards the development of every facet of my life and the sense of belonging they offer me every day.

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ABSTRACT

Government communication across the world introduced vital steps and procedures for citizens to guard themselves against the novel Covid-19 pandemic. The Ghana government communication was based on a set of strategies which focused on the following directives: involving the community in the efforts to contain the pandemic; raising awareness about the government efforts; enhancing social initiatives and responsibility; informing and guiding people about the economic, educational, and social repercussions and solutions and their assurances that the government is assuming its responsibility of protecting everyone. Topical of these strategies were the Press Briefings, Presidential address, Back To School Campaign, #SpreadCalmNotFear campaign and Social media and website updates.

The aim of this study was to analyse these strategic communications implemented by government with the goal getting citizens compliance and attitudinal change as that was central to prevention and mitigation of the spread of the pandemic.

The objectives of the research sought to identify the overall communication strategy employed by Government of Ghana to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, assess the key communication approaches as deployed by the Ministry of Information, determine the perceptive effectiveness of these communication strategies, and assess the challenges in these crisis communications strategies and make recommendations.

The study revealed that the key communication approaches of the Ministry of Information was stakeholder engagement and mass media campaigns. An online survey conducted by Star Ghana Foundation clearly revealed that, the strategies choked over 80% their communication objectives and also the ultimate outcome of the communication strategy was to effect behavioural change. It was clear that citizenry gradually adjusted to the new norm albeit some compliance challenges. However, major feedback to the Ministry was the fact that

many Ghanaians were still not complying in full with restrictions and the safety protocols that were instituted despite the massive campaign activities. In response, the Ministry launched Below-the-line advertising campaigns to intensify awareness creation to get the needed cooperation. The Ghanaian government depended on accurate, confident, transparent, and trusted communication which are effective values during risks and emergencies. Also, it was revealed that political figures used some platforms for political jabs instead of relay information

Based on these findings, government needs to strengthen real-time surveillance and monitoring and greatly expand testing and vaccination capacity. Support should be provided to the most vulnerable populations to better control the spread of coronavirus. The government should also focus on health system strengthening and build its capacity for dealing with multiple crises and outbreaks to better respond to public health emergencies.

Additionally, government should also desist from politicizing every plan they implement. It breaches trust and distracts attention from problem solving.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an overview of the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and questions, the importance or significance of the study, the scope of the study, then finally how this study is structured, that is, the various chapters of this study and what it entails.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Communication amidst a period of crisis requires multiple tactical approaches fitting into a robust, carefully outlined strategy. Communication as a social science discipline trumps one single definition. There's however the common theme of exchange of information and shared meaning which runs through.

According to Katz and Kahn (1978) communication is the exchange of information and the transmission of meaning. It is the very essence of a social system of an organization.

Communication is not merely a process of creating shared meaning but also of constructing social realities in ways that are coordinated and actively managed (Pearce & Cronen, 1980)

Daniel (2016) asserts that it is when feedback which involves the receiver responding to the signal by initiating another circle of meaning exchange has been sent to the sender (source) that the communication process has gone full circle and become complete.

The term 'crisis' first and foremost has consistently seen a negative connotation in everyday life. Crises mostly is referred to or attributed to being a causative agent to fear, panic, insecurity, and powerlessness. Dealing with great uncertainty therefore challenges all those involved during a crisis; everyone expects instructions for action, planning, explanations and ultimately security. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman emphasizes all these factors of insecurity in his description of crises. Uncertainty primarily promotes the emergence of fear,

he claims: “Fear” is the name that we give to our uncertainty: to our ignorance of the threat and what is to be done – what can and what can’t be – to stop it in its tracks – or to fight it back if stopping it is beyond our power.’ (Bauman, 2006: 2).

The communication scholar Timothy Coombs (2007) defines crisis as ‘the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes.

Communication is the act of developing meaning among entities or groups through the use of sufficiently mutually understood signs, symbols, and semiotic conventions (Harper & Douglas (2013).

In Claude Shannon’s and Warren Weaver’s (1949) influential model, human communication was imagined functioning like a telephone or telegraph.

Accordingly, they conceptualized communication as involving discrete steps:

- The formation of communicative motivation or reason- this involves the thought process of why the need to send that message, what the message should be about and how it must be delivered.
- Message composition- this involves putting together what to convey across
- Message encoding (for example, into digital data, written text, speech, pictures, gestures and so on)- this process involves putting the composed message into a form as listed above.
- Transmission of the encoded message as a sequence of signals using a specific channel or medium- this is the process where the message in it encoded form moves form from the source to the receiver.

- Noise sources such as natural forces and in some cases human activity (both intentional and accidental) begin influencing the quality of signals propagating from the sender to one or more receivers.
- Reception of signals and reassembling of the encoded message from a sequence of received signals.
- Decoding of the reassembled encoded message.
- Interpretation and making sense of the presumed original message.

In the context of this study, communication is examined in terms of its public function within the context of government communication to and with the citizenry.

Democratic governments have increasingly become involved in intensive and extensive communication programs, directed at broad audiences of citizens and communities. (Head B. 2011).

Much of this is motivated by a genuine desire to provide useful information to citizens, including advice on changes in services and programs. Provision of useful information by government to citizens, together with citizens and organisations having free access to official information and opportunities to provide ongoing feedback to government, are clearly essential for efficient and effective democratic societies.

Indeed, healthy flows of information and feedback are regarded by international bodies such as the UN, the OECD and Transparency International as crucial conditions for good governance and accountability (Paris: OECD, 2003; Transparency International, TI Source Book 2000. (Berlin: TI, 2000); UNPD, Reconceptualising Governance. (New York: UNDP, 1997).

This study therefore analyzes the strategic communication measures implemented by government to get citizens compliance and attitudinal change as that was central to

prevention and mitigation of the spread of the pandemic as well as associated consequences on human life in general.

1.0.1 COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EVOLUTION OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST PANDEMIC YET.

Traces of doom loomed forth unto the world in early December 2019. China had recorded an increasing number of cases of the virus that was then identified as the Wuhan pneumonia by the local press in China because of the area and pneumonia symptoms. The symptomatology of these earlier patients included fever, malaise, dry cough, and dyspnoea and as such was diagnosed as viral pneumonia.

By end of January 2020, infections had been recorded in large parts of China with Wuhan leading the charts in terms of number of infections. Death kicked in rapidly spiking up immense panic and fear in most countries especially that of Europe.

As of 1 March 2020 (Three (3) months into 2020), a total of 79,968 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in mainland China including 2873 deaths. Since COVID-19 initially emerged in China, it is estimated that the virus had evolved for four months and rapidly spread to other countries worldwide as a global threat.

On 11 March 2020, the WHO finally made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic making COVID-19 the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic. (WHO 2020).

Most countries proceeded to instituted lockdowns, mass city fumigations and the eruption of emergency containment and treatment centers. In the case of the African continent, it took 98 days to record the continent's first 100, 000 cases but relatively only 18 days to reach to 200,000 cases. (WHO 2021). The trends acknowledgeable has not been the same for this part of the world. Ten out of the total of fifty-four countries are presently the ones recording

constant rise in the number of infection cases. This largely accounts for nearly Eighty percent (80%) of all the cases recorded on the continent. More than seventy percent (70%) of all the deaths recorded so far are taking place only in five countries namely, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, and Sudan.

1.0.2 COVID-19 IN GHANA

In Ghana, the Ministry of Health confirmed the first two cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on Thursday, March 13. According to the service, the individuals had returned to Ghana from Norway and Turkey. Further on to 11th April 2020, a total of 37,954 persons had been identified, traced, and tested with 566 turning positive for the virus.

Afriicanews.com illustrates the breakdown of the then 566 positive cases as follows: four (4) were treated, discharged, and tested negative, 552 cases had been categorised as mild disease on treatment, two (2) moderate to severe cases, none currently on ventilators and eight (8) died.

Of the 566 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 292 were reported from the routine surveillance, 159 from enhanced surveillance activities and contact tracing while 115 were from travellers under mandatory quarantine in both Accra and Tamale. Regions that recorded cases were Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, Eastern, Western, Volta, Northern, Northeast, Upper East, and Upper West. As of 30th April 2020, 2,074 cases of COVID-19 were confirmed, with 17 recorded deaths (0.82% case fatality rate).

The President through his national addresses indicated that the Government of Ghana has set out five key objectives to combat the pandemic in Ghana: limit and stop the importation of the virus, contain its spread, provide adequate care for the sick, limit the impact on social and economic life and inspire the expansion of its domestic capability and deepen its self-reliance.

Riding with these listed above as national objectives, the President on Monday 20th April, lifted the partial lockdown in the Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions that had been in place for three weeks.

As of 31st March 2021 however, 90,583 cases had been confirmed with 743 deaths and 2,410 active cases. On a flip side however, over 9.2 million children have since March 2021 began benefitting from schools being open.

One similar trait in the response to the rise in the number of infections and deaths was the closure of schools, educational facilities and associated educational activities. This was amongst the very first actions taken by most Government.

This is discussed further in the subsequent paragraph. It is worthy to note that along with the tourism and hospitalism sector, the educational sector was also hardly hit by the developments of the coronavirus pandemic.

These events had set into motion a series of far-reaching crisis events which communication will be needed in managing.

1.0.3 CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Crisis communication refers to the technologies, systems and protocols that enable an organisation to effectively communicate during a major threat to its business or reputation. Crisis communication is aimed at raising awareness of a specific type of threat, the magnitude, outcome, and specific behaviours to adopt to reduce the threat.

Combs, Timothy Holladay and Sherry (2010) define crisis communication, as “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis.

In the case of the COVID-19 crisis, uncertainty continues to play a salient role. The illness caused by the COVID-19 SARS virus was hitherto unknown. Successful treatments did not

exist at first; therefore, medical treatment was based on “trial and error”. Scientists across the globe started investigating the origin, composition, spread and ever new mutations of the virus (see Gallagher, 2020). In time, new knowledge surfaced and as a nation, progress has been made till this day.

This study provides context and explores the strategic measures implemented communication wise, to mitigate the impacts of the virus on social life and the Ghanaian community.

This study examines existing grey areas rendering a comprehensive assessment on the role communication plays in Ghana’s national effort first in controlling and communicating government measures and second to recover and build back the economy as well as return the general Ghanaian life to normalcy.

1.0.4 CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND PANDEMICS

Over the years, pandemics outbreaks continue to create uncertainty, stress, emotional disruption with severe repercussions to human health and global economic activity.

A pandemic is defined as a disease “prevalent over a whole country or the world- it is what happens when a disease outbreak, or epidemic, grows to a worldwide scale. The World Health Organization is the authority that declares when an epidemic has escalated to a pandemic. For instance, on March 11, 2020, they announced at a news briefing that COVID-19 had become a pandemic.

It is broadly recognized that communication during a health crisis such as a pandemic is critical for saving lives and for achieving an efficient resolution to the crisis (Glik, 2007; Health and Human Services [HHS], 2005; World Health Organization [WHO], 2004). In response to emerging diseases in the early 2000s such as SARS (Webster, 2004) and ongoing concerns about pandemics, many countries are creating pandemic preparedness plans that address many dimensions of pandemic responses. Communication strategies are also a key

component of most plans (Reynolds, Galdo & Sokler, 2002, WHO, 2005) and these strategies are based on established guidelines for effective crisis communication.

Communication experts largely agree on the importance of conveying information that the public wants to know and in a way that they want to receive it and the necessity of conducting audience research (Covello, 2003; HHS, 2005; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Sandman & Lanard, 2004; Vanderford, 2004; WHO, 2004).

This view is grounded by the fact that pandemics just like many crisis are volatile situations, fast paced, uncertain moments which requires accurate and timely communication that gives the public what to know, what to do and ultimately assuages their fears. Again, during a pandemic, various subpopulations of the “general public” will have specific concerns and questions that will have to be addressed by health communicators and educators who will be using communication and other strategies to foster behavioural change.

1.0.5 ABOUT MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

The Ministry of Information (MOI) is the principal organ responsible for the dissemination of Government’s development communication. As part of its core mandate, the Ministry ensures that feed-back information in respect of reaction to Government policies and actions, is brought to the attention of Government for quick response to help ameliorate and solve problems facing the citizenry.

The Ministry of Information exists to facilitate free flow of adequate, timely and reliable information and feedback between Government and the public for socio-economic empowerment and enhanced democratic citizenship.

MOI facilitates the formulation of government’s policies on the mass media. It sees to the development and improvement of the mass communication media in Ghana. It is the

responsibility of the Ministry to ensure that, the resources available are fully utilized for the dissemination of information on Government policies, activities, and programmes.

The Ministry ensures that the agencies in the mass media are used in accelerating social, political, and economic transformation within the country to keep pace with the tempo of accelerated national development.

The Ministry promote social accountability in the public policy cycle, mainstream development communication across the public sector, improve transparency and public access to information and enhance the capacity of the Media for sustainable development communication, accountability, and press freedom

The Ministry is headed by Honourable Kojo Opong -Nkrumah, the Minister for Information and Member of Parliament (MP) for Ofoase Ayirebi Constituency and ably assisted by Hon. Fatimatu Abubakar Esq. The bureaucratic head of the Ministry is Mrs. Mamle Andrews, the Chief Director.

1.0.6 PROGRAMMES OF MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

The Ministry of Information undertakes various programmes to accomplish its goals. The Ministry engages in press briefings; meet the press, social media bulletin, town hall meetings, and public education.

The Press Briefings is a platform the Hon. Minister uses to consistently keep the public apprised of Government work. Also, the Ministry undertakes meet the press, a programme designed to create opportunities for all Ministers to account to the public and stakeholders on development.

The Ministry uses social media bulletin to reach a wider range of the populace predominantly the youth who are more receptive on social media. These social media platforms are easier to

track and monitor with a variety of analytical tools and thereby target messaging appropriately.

It also holds designed to offer an opportunity for major Government policies, plans and programmes to be disseminated right at the local government level to the citizens by key government actors including the President, Vice President, Senior Minister, and selected Ministers.

Public Education are targeted public awareness programmes aimed at informing and educating the Public on specific programmes and activities to enable them to understand, accept and participate in those activities and programmes.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Crisis as indicated is a moment of uncertainty. It disrupts people's routine and has the potential to significantly affect the expectation of the stakeholders of any organization and in this case, Ghana, and its citizens.

As indicated, information dissemination and management in the pandemic was crucial to its resolution and the government of Ghana in an attempt to first curb the spread and second steer the nation to normalcy employed crisis communication.

Governmental crisis communication as the literature will show must first take on the socio-cultural context and historical tradition peculiar or evolving in that specific country. This means that the deployment of crisis communication strategies for a highly conservative but increasingly media-literate population like Ghana must be multi-dimensional and must lead to outcomes that safeguards not only public health and safety but the trust that the citizenry has in the government of the day.

While Ghana's overall strategy for handling the pandemic has received applause (see Sibiri et al 2020), its communication management has received some level of criticisms which shows the gaps inherent in the country's communications approach.

Kofi Quakyi et al (2021) for example assert that "risk communication and risk perception are inadequate, fuelling misinformation and poor compliance with infection and prevention control measures." This illustrates a need to further examine the various forms of risk and crisis communication strategies.

The begging questions therefore will be; how did the government of Ghana go about their crisis communication? What were the pitfalls? What are the implications of poor crisis communication in health emergencies? What lessons can be learnt for the purposes of policy formulation and the future?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

General Objective

The overarching objective of this study is to examine the crisis communication strategy behind Ghana's Covid-19 management and recommendations for the purpose of the literature and policy formulation.

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the overall communication strategy employed by Government of Ghana to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. To find out why these strategies were used.
3. To assess the key communication approaches as deployed by the Ministry of Information in line with the general Communication Strategy.

4. To determine the perceptive effectiveness of these communication strategies in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana.
5. To assess the challenges in these crisis communications strategies and make recommendations.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions will guide this study:

1. What is the overall Communication Strategy employed by the Government of Ghana to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. Why were these crisis communication strategies used?
3. What communication tactics have been used by the Government of Ghana to fight the Covid-19 pandemic?
4. How have these communication strategies been effective in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana?
5. What were the challenges to these communication strategies and what recommendations can be made in the light of these challenges?

1.5 SCOPE OF STUDY

This study focuses mainly on the communication strategies employed by the Government of Ghana. As such, the study concerns itself with the Ghanaian setting with key focus on happenings erupting from the emergence of the coronavirus in March 2020 till present times.

This research will be conducted with key focus on the measures deployed by the Government of Ghana and the effectiveness of such measures. It excludes attempts by quasi-government bodies or multinationals or any other institution(s) apart from central government.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

During this research, data and information gathered from this study will help researchers have a better understanding of appropriate means to communicate in times of crisis, with the Ghanaian perspective serving as a case study. The study focuses on a field gradually being updated with statistics and relevant literature.

It provides empirical basis for further researches and serves as scholarly reference for academic and corporate activities. The study would be of great significance to practitioners in the communication and health sector as well as government and policy formulation agencies.

The study would help practitioners in the communication and health sector to understand the interrelating roles communication and health play in the national scheme of things. It would be of great interest and valuable to practitioners when efforts from both ends are complimented and geared towards a single goal of utilizing efficiently individualistic skills in the fulfilment of the larger national interest. This when done will be a great step forward towards the recovery of the nation's education sector.

Again, this study provides relevant data and insights worth considering when drafting policies regarding reopening of schools, lifting of border restrictions, public engagements, drafting academic calendars and schedules, syllabus and educational as well as national reforms.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter one of this study discusses the background of the study which provided an overview of communication and crisis, covid-19 pandemic, evolution the world's greatest pandemic yet, covid-19 in Ghana and a background information about the Ministry of Information and it programmes.

The statement of problem points out that government communication management has received level of criticism which shows the gaps inherent in the country's communication approach. The deployment of crisis communication strategies for a highly conservative but increasingly media-literate population like Ghana must be multi-dimensional and must lead to outcomes that safeguards not only public health and safety but the trust that the citizenry has in the government of the day.

In the light of this, the begging questions are How did the government of Ghana go about their communication approach? What were the pitfalls? What are the implications of poor crisis communication in health emergencies?

What lessons can be learnt for the purposes of policy formulation and the future?

The objective of the research seeks to identify the overall Communication Strategy employed by Government of Ghana to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, assess the key Communication approaches as deployed by the Ministry of Information in line with the general Communication Strategy, determine the perceptive effectiveness of these communication strategies in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana and assess the challenges in these crisis communications strategies and make recommendations. The research questions is also to find out the overall Communication Strategy employed by the Government of Ghana to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, what communication tactics have been used by the Government of Ghana to fight the Covid-19 pandemic?, how have these communication strategies been effective in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana, and what were the challenges to these communication strategies and what recommendations can be made in the light of these challenges?

The significance of the study is to help researchers have a better understanding of appropriate means to communicate in times of crisis, with the Ghanaian perspective serving as a case

study. The study would help practitioners in the communication and health sector to understand the interrelating roles communication and health play in the national scheme of things.

Again, this study provides relevant data and insights worth considering when drafting policies regarding reopening of schools, lifting of border restrictions, public engagements, drafting academic calendars and schedules, syllabus and educational as well as national reforms.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and literature review of the research topic under study. It presents concise information on theories and concepts that have underpinned Key Government strategies in covid-19 communication as deployed by the Ministry of Information.

The concepts related to this research have been discussed in this very chapter as well as the review of theoretical frameworks to this research work. The review of the related literature would provide an insight as well as background knowledge in relation to the research topic under study. These related works are largely from the West, Africa, Asia and Australia.

Theories as a term can be given a plethora of definitions and opinions that are usually driven from different angles and at multiple levels. For example, Gelso (2006) claimed that a theory can be thought of as a statement of a testable relationship that may exist between and among a set of variables associated with a certain phenomenon. Severin and Tankard (2001:11) also view theories as general statements that summarize our understandings of the way the world works.

According to Stem (2007), a theory is a group of logically organised sentences of a relationship that constitute a set of observations. Variations in thoughts continue but, in the end, one thing is certain. Theories are the main intent of science.

A lot of theories have been used in interrogating key Government strategies in covid-19 communication as deployed by the Ministry of Information. Notable among the lot include the Agenda-Setting theory, the Framing theory, the Mass Media theories and several other theories duly explained.

2.1 CRISIS COMMUNICATION

The unpredictable nature of crisis makes it imperative for restorative action to be taken as early as possible and in the best way. Communication has been identified as a key component when responding to crisis (Barton 2001, Fearn-Banks 2002, and Coombs 2009). Crisis communication, therefore, is the “collection, processing and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (Coombs 2010:20).

Crises can be divided into exactly four phases: the potential crisis phase, the latent crisis phase, the acute crisis phase, and the post-crisis phase. These classifications give the dynamics of a crisis. At the same time, when the characteristics of these different phases are understood, it becomes more apparent how to react to them.

- The potential crisis phase-

In the potential crisis phase, it is becoming apparent that a crisis event may be approaching in the foreseeable future – for example, the outbreak of the first COVID-19 cases in China. At that time, an outbreak of the disease was not expected in Africa (Ghana) (and certainly not such a serious one), but it was within the realm of possibility. In this phase, it was crucial for Ghana to prepare herself for the crisis, even though it was seen as a distant possibility. This was done by for example, by forming a crisis team and clarifying responsibilities.

This crisis team was responsible for using the information at hand to prepare for the situation as well as define concrete communication measures and standard language regulations.

Through targeted pre-emptive communication, the crisis teams strengthened the trust and sense of security of Ghanaians during the onset of a crisis. This provides a strong foundation when entering the latent and acute crisis phases.

- The latent crisis phase-

In the latent crisis phase the first signs of the crisis are evident (example. first COVID-19 cases in Ghana). This is known as crisis identification. Even so, there are still many possibilities to act and react to warning signs. If this is successful, the term used is crisis prevention. “Issue management” is a common tool at this level. This is defined as identifying the initial changes in the overall environment while still in the formation process.

Unlike in the potential crisis phase, responses and strategies can be based on known facts, and are therefore not purely speculative. At this stage concrete actions can be implemented, such as the closure of a facility or the setting up of home offices. This allows a crisis to be addressed proactively at this early stage and reduces the probability of a breakdown.

- The acute crisis phase-

In this phase, the crisis is now acutely felt. This is normally the case when the measures of the previous phases were not able to contain the crisis, or when a natural disaster or unforeseen event occurs. The current COVID-19 pandemic can be considered a unique case. The course of events in Asia – the potential and latent crisis phase – provided indications of the emerging crisis even before the acute outbreak in Africa.

At the same time, there was a rapid increase in the number of cases, little previous knowledge of the disease, and new information almost daily, to the point that the current situation exhibits the characteristics of a natural disaster. Here, communication is characterized by the swift reaction to new information. In this phase, crisis plan is developed. It must also be ensured that news and important announcements reach every individual. A mobile application can be of assistance at this stage.

- The post-crisis phase-

When a crisis is over, an evaluation must take place to assess which methods have proven successful, and how a nation or organization can better itself for future crises. This analysis is particularly important for the long-term success.

At the same time, the diverse experiences should be collected, and further insights gained. Interaction with the workforce, therefore, plays a decisive role in this phase. In this way, the crisis can lead to change and meaningful improvements.

Coombs (2009) explains that the major focus of crisis communication is how communication is used to manage information and meaning during a crisis. There are several theories which underpins crisis strategies but for the purpose of this study, two key theories; the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Organizational Renewal Theory, are analysed.

2.1.1 SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY

Situational Crisis Communication Theory is a theory in the field of crisis communication. It suggests that crisis managers should match strategic crisis responses to the level of crisis responsibility and reputational threat posed by a crisis.

Coombs developed this theory by linking attribution theory and crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Halladay, 2002). His theory “evaluates the reputational threat posed by the crisis situation and then recommends crisis response strategies based upon the reputational threat level” (p. 138).

The crisis response strategies in this approach are a synthesis of work on Corporate Apologia, Impression Management, and Image Repair Theory. He developed the list by selecting “those [strategies] that appeared on two or more lists developed by crisis experts” (p. 139). He describes four major communication approaches, including denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering. In all, he delineates 10 crisis response strategies.

The crisis communication strategies are then used according to the threat to the organization's reputation based upon "crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation" (Coombs, 2007, p. 141).

Coombs (2007) explains that crisis type can be defined by three categories: "victim crisis cluster, accidental crisis cluster, and preventable crisis cluster" (p. 142). The victim cluster involves crises such as natural disasters, rumours, workplace violence, and malevolence. Accidental crises involve challenges, technical error accidents, and technical error product harm. Preventable crises include human error, accidents, human error product harm, and organizational misdeeds.

Beyond crisis type, crisis response strategies should also be selected according to the organization's crisis history and prior reputation. Crisis history and prior reputation are important because organizations that have recurring crises or poor reputations are not likely to have their messages accepted by stakeholders.

Coombs's theory is based upon the ideas that, after a crisis, stakeholders "assign responsibility for negative unexpected events" (p. 138). Depending upon the crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation, Coombs provides crisis response recommendations to address the attributions of responsibility toward the organization.

With empirical evidence to support his theory, Coombs provided a summary of crisis response strategy guidelines for crisis managers. Situational Crisis Communication Theory provides crisis managers with an evidence-based guide to assessing and responding to crises, allowing them to make informed, strategic, and beneficial decisions.

Situational Crisis response strategy guidelines

- Informing and adjusting information alone can be enough when crises have minimal attributions of crisis responsibility (victim crises), no history of similar crises and a neutral or positive prior relationship reputation.
- Victimage can be used as part of the response for workplace violence, product tampering, natural disasters, and rumours.
- Diminish crisis response strategies should be used for crises with minimal attributions of crisis responsibility (victim crises) coupled with a history of similar crises and/or negative prior relationship reputation.
- Diminish crisis response strategies should be used for crises with low attributions of crisis responsibility (accident crises), which have no history of similar crises, and a neutral or positive prior relationship reputation.
- Rebuild crisis response strategies should be used for crises with low attributions of crisis responsibility (accident crises), coupled with a history of similar crises and/or negative prior relationship reputation.
- Rebuild crisis response strategies should be used for crises with strong attributions of crisis responsibility (preventable crises) regardless of crisis history or prior relationship reputation.
- The deny posture crisis response strategies should be used for rumour and challenge crises, when possible.
- Maintain consistency in crisis response strategies. Mixing deny crisis response strategies with either the diminish or rebuild strategies will erode the effectiveness of the overall response.

2.1.2 ORGANIZATIONAL RENEWAL THEORY

Organisational Renewal Theory is a crisis response strategy that focuses on the opportunity presented through the crisis. The forward-looking communication focuses on the actions an organisation will take in the future and finds the inherent opportunities in the crisis.

There is also potential for positive discourse following a crisis that emphasizes the opportunities inherent to crises. Reputation and image are important organizational concepts, but they do not always play a central role in resolving organizational crises. The core idea in this theory is that rebuilding, learning, and opportunity are more important than reputation or image. For this reason, it is argued that crises also carry the potential for opportunity. To illustrate this idea, the theory emphasizes learning, growth and opportunity following crises of all types. There are four theoretical objectives central to the discourse of renewal: organizational learning, ethical communication, a prospective rather than retrospective vision, and effective organizational rhetoric.

- Organizational Learning

Organizational learning requires the organization as a whole to take account of a crisis situation and consider what caused the crisis to occur and consider how it should have been handled. Crises often make the weak parts of an organization or an organization's response plans visible. This visibility allows these vulnerabilities to be examined and remedied in order to prevent similar failures from occurring in future crisis situations:

- Ethical communication

When responding to a crisis, organizations need to be honest, moral, and ethical in addressing the public and stakeholders regarding the status of the crisis and the information they know regarding its causes and consequences. If an organization engaged in unethical behavior prior to a crisis, “those lapses are eventually revealed during and after the crisis”. When an

unethical organization attempts to re-emerge after a crisis, full recovery of the organization becomes difficult because of the unethical acts committed previously.

- Prospective versus retrospective vision

In order for an organization to recover, actions taken by the organization throughout the recovery process must be forward-looking and address the faults the organization faced. With consideration to the type of crisis, “issues of responsibility, harm, victimage, and blame may be subordinate to a more optimistic discourse that emphasizes moving beyond the crisis, focusing on strong value positions, responsibility to stakeholders, and growth as a result of the crisis”. Movement to post-crisis and recovery stages suggests “organizations committed to renewal direct their messages toward the ultimate goal of rebuilding the organization so that it is more resilient to crisis, cleanly focuses on values of social responsibility, and more attentive to stakeholder needs”.

- Effective organizational rhetoric

Organizations in crisis must communicate with the public and with stakeholders who are affected by that crisis. By interacting with these groups positively and expressing messages with a prospective outlook, organizational leaders can express confidence regarding the organization's ability to overcome the crisis. For this confidence to be received by these audiences, organizational leaders must “frame the crisis in a way that inspires, empowers, and motivates” the public and stakeholders regarding the future of the organization. The language and information presented by organizational leaders possesses the ability to comfort impacted stakeholders when messages are delivered positively; however, negative deliveries can instill concern in the public and stakeholders. A lack of confidence from the public and stakeholders due to the information they received can drastically impact the outcome of an organization's renewal efforts as well as the relationship the organization has with future stakeholders in the post-crisis stage.

2.1.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Government's capacity to ideally build a nation's future is based on communication. To cultivate the support of the people, the government must communicate. Hewlett (2009) defines government communication as the use of government informational resources to influence and direct policy actions through the provision or withholding of information or knowledge from citizens of the country and other relevant societal actors. Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins (2007), posit that successful democracies are one in which the public is informed about government actions.

Writing on the theory and practice of government communication, (Young S. 2007) argued that government communication finds its roots in the Greek *Agora* and has always been regarded as one of the crucial elements of a democracy. This perhaps is the foundation of the idea of the public sphere, as (Habermas 2007) postulated a space for discussion and exercise of critique.

Although not a physical place of debate, (Khan, Gilani & Nawaz 2012) outlined three (3) prerequisites for the Habermas public sphere model, first being that the presence of media institutions as the foundation of the public sphere by providing and hosting the discussions.

Second, a sovereign state that is the public to whom the political actors were accountable, and finally, vibrant non-political actors forming the civil society to guide the public debate. Government communication runs through the second structure above, often defined by its relationship with the citizens.

Government communication is often broadly studied under political communication, which most researchers narrow down to election communication (Kim, 2019), and in this case, in essence limits it to politics: how to either attract or avoid media coverage (Johansson & Raunio 2020).

However, government communication goes beyond this, and it includes elements such as crisis communication, development communication, public health communication and social communication and this is expanded with some public sector marketing activities such as government advertising and political spin among others tailored to specific government agencies and personalities, example regulatory agencies, executive offices and business belonging to the state ((Head 2007). Reddy & Gupta (2020) cite the concepts of behavioural change communication and social marketing as other relevant elements of government communication.

Using approaches and methods within the fields of public relations, corporate communication, psychology, and marketing (Canel & Sanders, 2016) posit that the role of government communication mainly revolves around informing, advocating/persuading (for policies and reforms), and engaging citizens.

According to (Comm GAP Report 2009), communication represents an important function of government, as it is responsible for improving three principle elements of government: effectiveness (building broad support and legitimacy for programs), responsiveness (knowing citizens needs and responding to them), and accountability (explaining government stewardship and providing mechanisms to hold governments accountable).

Studying government communication as public health (risk) communication, (Kim & Kreps 2020) applied systems theory to study government communication in the US during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their approach was more towards recommending strategies to improve government communication in the face of citizen demand and appetite for timely and relevant information on the pandemic.

Nevertheless, government communication uses a variety of platforms nationally and locally to provide information to, as well as receive information from, individual residents and

communities. These include mass communications through television, newspapers, and radio, which are the most popular means of passing information to people due to their wide reach (Andani & Naidu, 2013).

As we live in an era of rapid change and great complexity, the challenges facing societies, communities and organisations are complex and difficult, and there is a general need for leadership in communication from the government. Government communications have a critical role to play in harnessing goodwill for productive purposes; in helping to shape the national mood and nation-building. Government Communication is an essential and the strategic element in service delivery.

2.1.4 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN HEALTH CRISIS

One key approach to managing a national crisis such as the present coronavirus pandemic is through effective Government communication. Hood (1986) asserts that Governments and Political leaders can use informational resources to influence and direct policy actions by either providing or withholding information from societal actors. Through consistent efforts, Governments across the world continue to find possible ways and means of communicating to citizens on the present fight against the virus. The Government of Ghana has not been an exception.

The Government of Ghana especially has been applauded for adopting effective communication machinery to communicate with citizens and to draw adherence and support in times of crisis, such as this pandemic. Osman Dar, the director of the Global Health Program at Chatham House, a London-based think tank, said Ghana has benefited from its demographics - the country is overwhelmingly young, with just 3 percent of the population more than 65 years old. But Ghanaian officials were also “quite proactive in using their own

budget to get a grip on the outbreak,” he said, drawing from a government emergency fund rather than waiting for international aid.

The President of Ghana received worldwide attention for a quote, “we know how to bring the economy back to life. What we do not know is how to bring people back to life” (Akuffo-Addo, 2020). This quote and others like it is vital in crisis communication. Even though short and precise, a realistic impulse is created that genuinely, the interest to safeguard and ensure safety of all is still paramount while further reiterating the message of surety and competence on the part of the communicator, which in this case is the President and his Government.

(Lee 2008), discussed Government communication during a health crisis. Examining the Hong Kong’s government response to the SARS outbreak, the researcher argued that government communication during a crisis or pandemic raises questions about the ineffectiveness of government authorities regarding prevention and containment, magnify the effectiveness or lack thereof of communication between government agencies, serves a reflection of how much the government prioritizes public good, and puts the strength of the country’s leadership under scrutiny.

He further argued that government communication during a crisis fails when government decisions are influenced by political interests. In a qualitative study into the role of effective crisis communication in the managing the Covid in Kerala, Sanjeev, Pande and (Santhosh 2021) described the merits of crisis communication when it is executed excellently.

They argue that effective crisis communication ensures proper information management where information is centralized or uniformed to avoid confusion or misinformation, media management, right supportive action, direct communication with the public and enlist active stakeholder participation in crisis management, resulting in, effective crisis management.

Crisis communication when implemented effectively helps the government to counter fake news. In a review of literature Holmes (2008), argued that effective government communication during a crisis or pandemic partly hinges how the communication is delivered.

The researcher posits that government communication based on merely informing the public about what steps to take to protect them is mistaken because it fails to consider broader issues in the society that influence how communication messages are received by the public.

Thus, the researcher argues, if the public do not respond to risk information in ways that health governments and scientists would like them to, it is not because they are irrational but because they process the risk of the diseases or virus in the context of their own lives.

Perceptions of risks during a pandemic or an outbreak are informed by social and cultural conceptions of the world as well as by the public's values and their specific concerns about the risk in question. Given that Ghana is a religious country where prayer is always encouraged and in relation to all events, Basyir, Haruna and Almuhajirin (2021) into the Indonesian government's management of the Coronavirus pandemic is very relevant to this study.

Analysing the context of two Indonesian news articles on the Indonesian government's communication response to COVID-19 outbreak in the country, Basyir, Haruna and Almuhajirin (2021) posit that crisis communication is not merely an information tool but in part a logical structure of texts and the context underpinning those texts.

Consequently, government communication that is framed around religion or imagination rather than other than empirical scientific evidence divides a country into those who believe what the scientists are saying and those who don't. Communication during a crisis or pandemic must be designed and delivered in a context that does not affirm the public theological beliefs and illogical imaginations.

2.1.5 PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPAIGNS

Public health campaign is an effort to persuade a defined public to engage in behaviour that will improve health or refrain from behaviour that unhealthy. Public health campaigns involve strategically providing the public with information that can help them lead a healthier life through resisting imminent health threats or encouraging behavioural changes. Depending on the target audience, objectives and the budget, a wide range of communication channels, including television, flyers, billboards, promotional materials, radio, press, cinema, are used to promote the campaign. Educating the public is an important part of aiding prevention of disease. If people are aware of what causes disease, such as smoking causing lung cancer, then they are prompted to think about their current lifestyle. It gives the public the opportunity to make informed decisions about their behaviour and prompts change to improve their quality of life.

In Ghana, the Ministry of Health, and the Ghana Health Service in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other agencies have developed numerous public health campaigns designed to drum home the essence of adopting a healthy life. One popular campaign which gained fame in the year 2000 was the “Stop AIDS. Love Life” which aimed to foster compassion toward those with HIV/AIDS and to facilitate efforts to prevent the disease.

The programme worked to increase perceived risk and to reduce social barriers to preventive behaviors in 15-to 35-year-old single people and couple. As at the time of the campaign, HIV prevalence rate in Ghana was rapidly approaching the threshold of 5%. The Love Life Song and video which was played on television and radio spots focused on the ABCs of prevention: sexual Abstinence, Be faithful, and Condom use.

Also, traditional, and religious leaders and other influential and opinion leaders to lead the front talks on radio and television about HIV/AIDS. There was also a television series “Things We Do for Love”, an entertainment/education programme created by and for the youth dealing with sexual health issues.

In 2016, the Ghana Health Service revived the GoodLife brand, a mass media campaign to promote healthy lifestyle messages through television, radio, posters, and brochures. The USAID supported the Ghana Health Service to reach 17.5 million people with messages on reproductive health and family planning; nutrition; malaria prevention; maternal, neonatal, and child health; and water, sanitation, and hygiene.

The Ghana Health Service aired 14,900 television and 62,600 radio spots promoting healthy behaviour to improve the health and well-being of Ghanaians. In 2018, the First Lady of Ghana, Mrs. Rebecca Akufo-Addo, officially endorsed the “Slice of Life” campaign, lending her powerful voice to the GoodLife brand.

The “Slice of Life” campaign built on the GoodLife campaign by welcoming celebrities and influential figures as participants and spokespersons. USAID also supported the National Population Council, the Ghana Health Service, and others to develop three seasons of the hit series “You Only Live Once,” an educational and entertainment drama series promoting positive health behaviours directed at youth, including reproductive health, malaria prevention, and nutrition. Its positive living messages successfully trend in social media platforms among the youth in Ghana.

Sight Savers, a non-governmental organization in collaboration with the government of Ghana developed Covid-19 behavioral change communication campaigns- one designed to resonate with communities on the Togo/Ghana border, and the other to appeal to children across the country.

Again, Mobile Telecommunications Network, (MTN) Ghana Foundation launched a behavioral change campaign christened “Wear if for Me” and “BE WISE” aimed at increasing public awareness and encouraging Ghanaians to wear face masks to stop the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF GHANA GOVERNMENT’S COVID-19 COMMUNICATION

As indicated already, the Government of Ghana has been applauded for the manner with which it handled/handles the pandemic. In fact, Taylor and Berger (2020) report that when it comes to the coronavirus response, “the World Health Organization is studying some of Ghana’s techniques”. This affirms and makes it even more necessary to explore key communication strategies implemented by the government.

2.2.1 Regular Presidential Addresses

The first and arguably most evident approach was the regular national address by the President. On March 12th, 2020, a day after the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the COVID 19 a pandemic, the President of Ghana gave the first address to the nation on measures implemented in preparation for the pandemic. This will later become a regular feature in the government’s COVID 19 response agenda to the entire nation.

The President in the first address effectively presented the readiness of the Country, announcing the fact that the Government of Ghana (GoG) intends and has allocated an amount of One Hundred Million Dollars (\$100 Million) for the battle against the virus.

The said amount was budgeted to be spent on interventions such as public education and awareness creation, expansion of health infrastructure along with other sectors, and procurement of materials and equipment, among others. The first official attempt to deter foreign travel was made as the President advised the citizenry to avoid foreign travel as much as possible. Finally, the President remarked that the nation should be rest assured that all

points of entry including land borders and airports were ready to screen all incoming travellers.

The subsequent address came amidst confirmation of the first two confirmed cases of COVID 19 by the Minister of Health together with the Minister of Information on the 13th of March, 2020.

The President re-echoed the need for all and sundry to adhere strictly to the COVID-19 social etiquette and safety protocols outlined in order to prevent the spread. He further highlighted the nationalistic approach as he referred to the COVID - 19 fight as a fight not only a government fight but a fight that required all stakeholders and citizenry to get on board and cooperate with government.

So far, there have been Twenty-Five (25) of such presidential addresses with the most recent being on the 16th of May 2021. These addresses have so far been key in the pandemic communication tactics and have increasingly offered updates on confirmed cases, announcement of restrictions and lockdown protocols, Closure of borders, lifting of such restrictions and protocols and has further informed citizenry on pandemic related legislated acts and directives.

It is significant to highlight this approach as it is very effective at creating and institutionalising a national approach to the battling of the pandemic. The nation once addressed by the principal authority in the land is subjected to a single course of action which in this case has always been obedience and adherence. Individuals with ulterior motives and intentions become rapidly demotivated as they are hugely outnumbered and stand the tendency to be labelled or tagged as rebels of the national interest. This gives the government room to operate and lead the charge accordingly as it is easy to rally support of the citizenry through this approach.

Also, by often employing framing, this approach creates and drums into the minds of people, the picture of a “working Government”; a government in front and in charge of the pandemic, not behind, with the necessary techniques and professionals to steer the nation out of the crisis. This creates good political reputation for the government and the party in charge. Individuals and residents in the country are better off with the certainty of mind that they can rely on the government of the day to lead them out of the crisis. This lessens the burden and does not add to the already existing tension created by the pandemic.

2.2.2 Frequent Press Conferences

Another vital approach that adds to the effective communication plan rolled out by the Government of Ghana throughout the year 2020 was the joint press conferences held mostly by the Minister of Information, the Minister of Health, and the Director General of the Ghana Health Service. Kojo Opong Nkrumah, Dr Kwaku Agyeman Manu and Dr Patrick Kuma-Aboagye respectively took turns to address reporters and media outlets on a frequent (sometimes daily, sometimes weekly) basis.

Through these meetups, the Ministers of state and the Director General answered pertinent questions regarding the pandemic, government’s efforts and the state and level of exposure. Usually, up to date figures and numbers recorded were announced at these press conferences since a presidential address may not be in the offing till a long while.

Overall, this approach aided the initial slogan of “spread calm instead of fear” as intended by the Government. The aim however was to render extended forms of information and explanations to matters arising or spoken about in the Presidential address. In the end, this aided to achieve such underlying objective while helping to kick out rumours, misinformation and superstitious notations and ideas existing amongst the citizenry.

Media houses in turn benefitted as they received first-hand data and directives from the Ministries, aiding greatly in speeding up the publication of time sensitive news stories. This in an extended perspective shaped the national discourse and reportage on the pandemic in a tone and manner set or initiated by the Ministers through the press briefings. This cycle largely enables balanced reportage of figures and cases recorded, communicated restrictions and protocols, and eliciting unified nationalist responses.

These periodic press briefings led mostly by the Minister of Information with the Media has greatly served as a channel for information flow and a feedback mechanism from the Government to the Populace and vice versa. Most of the Media outlets in the country continue to offer free airtime and space for public education on COVID 19 and the response strategies.

2.2.3 Social Media and the Dedicated Covid-19 Website

Social media and internet-based tools were also at the centre of Government communication approaches. The Ghana Health Service (GHS) has been and continuous to be at the forefront of the battle and influencing government in decision making as far as the COVID 19 pandemic is concerned. This service is responsible for implementation of health-related national policies under the control of the Ministry of Health and together with the Ghana Medical Association has been involved in public education on COVID 19 prevention, testing and treatment.

To aid Government communication efforts, the Ghana Health Service (GHS) runs a real time online monitoring system for COVID 19 in Ghana. It also advises government on strategies for an effective contract tracing and management of COVID 19.

Social media campaigns have severally been rolled out capturing the need to wear a mask, essence of social distancing and essentially to provide first-hand data. Various hash tag

includes #Mask Up #Stay Safe were utilized to decentralised communication on the need to treat as essential, social distancing protocols and the general restrictions instituted because of the pandemic.

Notable amongst these technological efforts is the Covid-19 website created to provide authentic information on the virus, how it spreads, preventive measures and most importantly number of cases and deaths recorded. This became the main source of data for obtaining present standings of infection rates and media coverage. The total number of cases, number of deaths, and new cases recorded were all jointly designed in separate colours and uploaded on the website. It was then shared across all social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Citizens were seen uploading these designs on WhatsApp statuses and other personal messaging apps.

Along with the use of the dedicated website, the Vice President of Ghana launched the Ghana COVID 19 Tracker App. He indicated that the app is essential in the current battle against the crisis as “It will help us easily track people with the virus, and those who have had contact with others. It is also useful in quarantine reliability in case certain individuals need self-quarantine”.

A couple of weeks prior to this, Prof. Ellis Owusu-Dabo, the Dean of School of the Allied Health and his team at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) had developed a similar tracking app called Covid-19 TECHBOT. These along with social media and other digital approaches contributed to Ghana’s third communication approach explored for the purposes of this study.

2.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES / FRAMEWORK

The Sociological Approach to Literature was adopted in the analysis of relevant theories related to this research. This approach was employed with the chief objective of examining

literature in the cultural, economic, and political context within which it is written or received, while further exploring the relationships between the writers and their social contexts.

Most importantly, these sets of theories were analyzed within the context of their relevance to communication theories, especially theories of mass communication, Crisis Communication, persuasion, and influence.

2.3.1 Communication Process

Framing: The concept of framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition of theories, but it expands to a divergent scope by focusing on the essence of issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory lies on the fact that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field or in this case a frame of meaning.

The media draws the public attention to certain topics, it then decides where people think about; the journalists select the topics. This is the original agenda setting 'thought'. In news items occurs more than only bringing up certain topics. The way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is also a choice made by journalists. Thus, a frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided.

Frames are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news of the audience, this form of agenda-setting not only tells what to think about, but also how to think about it.

2.3.2 Public Health and Communication

The realization that both science and communication are essential to promoting and protecting the health of the public has been a major milestone in the emerging discipline of

public communication. Indeed, the American Journal of Public Health (2004) acknowledges that the application and study of communication and health is rapidly expanding.

Given the study and its context, it is clear that the relationship between communication and public health, especially in times of crisis, is one that is parasitic where the health discipline depends and uses the art, channels, and power of communication to provide important information on health issues to the public to ultimately protect the lives of the public.

Bernhardt 2004 defines public health communication as the scientific development, strategic dissemination and critical evaluation of relevant, accurate, accessible, and understandable health information communicated to and from intended audiences to advance the health of the public. As a joint discipline there two important theories can explain the intersectionality.

Health Belief Model: The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a psychological model that attempts to explain and predict health behaviours. This is done by focusing on the attitudes and beliefs of individuals. The HBM was first developed in the 1950s by social psychologists Hochbaum, Rosenstock and Kegels working in the U.S. Public Health Services.

The model was developed in response to the failure of a free tuberculosis (TB) health screening program. Since then, the HBM has been adapted to explore a variety of long- and short-term health behaviours, including sexual risk behaviours and the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

The HBM is based on the understanding that a person will take a health-related action (i.e., use condoms) if that person: 1) feels that a negative health condition (i.e., HIV) can be avoided, 2) has a positive expectation that by taking a recommended action, he/she will avoid a negative health condition (i.e., using condoms will be effective at preventing HIV), and 3) believes that he/she can successfully take a recommended health action (i.e., he/she can use condoms comfortably and with confidence).

The HBM was spelled out in terms of four constructs representing the perceived threat and net benefits: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, and perceived barriers. These concepts were proposed as accounting for people's "readiness to act." An added concept, cues to action, would activate that readiness and stimulate overt behaviour. A recent addition to the HBM is the concept of self-efficacy, or one's confidence in the ability to successfully perform an action. This concept was added by Rosenstock and others in 1988 to help the HBM better fit the challenges of changing habitual unhealthy behaviours, such as being sedentary, smoking, or overeating.

Protection Motivation Theory: Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) was originally (Rogers, 1975) proposed to provide conceptual clarity to the understanding of fear appeals. A later revision of Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1983) extended the theory to a more general theory of persuasive communication, with an emphasis on the cognitive processes mediating behavioural change.

Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1983) is partially based on the work of Lazarus (1966) and Leventhal (1970) and describes adaptive and maladaptive coping with a health threat because of two appraisal processes. A process of threat appraisal and a process of coping appraisal, in which the behavioural options to diminish the threats are evaluated (Boer, Seydel, 1996).

The appraisal of the health threat and the appraisal of the coping responses result in the intention to perform adaptive responses (protection motivation) or may lead to maladaptive responses. Maladaptive responses are those that place an individual at health risk. They include behaviours that lead to negative consequences (e.g. smoking) and the absence of behaviours, which eventually may lead to negative consequences (e.g. not participating in breast cancer screening and thus missing the opportunity of early detection of a tumor).

The Protection Motivation Theory proposes that the intention to protect one's self depends upon four factors: (1) The perceived severity of a threatened event (e.g., a heart attack) (2) The perceived probability of the occurrence, or vulnerability (in this example, the perceived vulnerability of the individual to a heart attack. (3) The efficacy of the recommended preventive behaviour (the perceived response efficacy (4) The perceived self-efficacy (i.e., the level of confidence in one's ability to undertake the recommended preventive behaviour). Protection motivation is the result of the threat appraisal and the coping appraisal.

Threat appraisal is the estimation of the chance of contracting a disease (vulnerability) and estimates of the seriousness of a disease (severity). Coping appraisal consists of response efficacy and self-efficacy.

Response efficacy is the individual's expectancy that carrying out recommendations can remove the threat. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to execute the recommended courses of action successfully. Protection motivation is a mediating variable whose function is to arouse, sustain and direct protective health behaviour (Boer, Seydel, 1996).

2.4 REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

To begin with Torjman (2005) explains that in times of crises, as opposed to proactive policies, reactive policies are critical to addressing health and environmental decisions. It is explained that with policy responses in times of these crises, potential solutions become formalized through program directives, creation of special initiatives, making new legislations, and amending existing legislations (Torjman, 2005).

As was evident in the case of Ghana, new legislations had to be made to back impose restrictions as special initiatives and subsidies were introduced. However, the best approach to managing crisis such as this is not through these legislations or special initiatives but rather through effective government communication.

Peci et al., (2020) indicates that because of the novelty of the corona pandemic, different researchers are being carried out in diverse fields of which public administration is no exception. 'Public administration as an applied field' offers more insights on how governments are responding to the pandemic.

Hood (1986) strongly asserts that government uses informational resources to influence and direct policy actions by either providing or withholding information from societal actors. In light of these Governments around the world continue to find possible ways and means of communicating to the citizens on the fight against the virus as indicated by Peci et al., (2020).

Hale et al. (2020) asserts that as governments around the world continue to respond to the Covid-19, "it is imperative to study measures they are taking and also either these measures have been effective or not. This is key as measure studied and proven effective can be adopted by others in order to curb the pandemic on a global level.

Amidst this assessment, it is relevant to mention the continuous emphases of nationalism by all governments around the world. A classic case of Austria is portrayed by Wodak (2021) to illustrate how effective this measure is. Wodak (2021) writes "At around 6 pm every day, 'I am from Austria', a famous pop song from the 1970s, was played on the streets by the police while some people waved red-white-red flags and the critical workers received much-deserved applause from the windows. This was an obvious return of the so-called 'banal', everyday nationalism (Billig, 1995; Lehner and Wodak, 2020; Corbett, 2020).

The many interviews and press conferences left no doubt that 'we as the Republic of Austria were one of the first countries in Europe to act with restrictive measures by reducing to emergency operation' (Kurz, ZIB Spezial, 30 March 2020).

Ghana's Case is no different as the various strategies implemented has been applauded for being an effective communication machinery. To communicate effectively with the citizens

and most importantly to draw their support in this time of the pandemic (Nationalism), a typical example was set by the President of Ghana's quote on "we know how to bring the economy back to life. What we do not know is how to bring people back to life" (Akuffo-Addo, 2020) which received worldwide attention.

The issue of Covid 19 and Government approaches have not yet received much documentation. The few in this field include Marian Asantewah Nkansah's Case Study titled Ghana's multifarious response to COVID-19: Through a citizen's lens, June 2020.

In concluding her study, M.A. Nkansah notes that; "The COVID 19 pandemic threat has shaken the core of human existence and countries have found themselves running after the pandemic instead of having a strategy to face it head-on. The interventions outlined here highlight what has been done for the benefit of the public. The successes chalked could be attributed to the prompt response by government and multi-sectorial engagement.

These responses have sometimes been saddled with challenges such as adherence to social distancing particularly in poorly structured markets and slums around the regional capitals, implementation challenges such as improper addressing systems for proper contact tracing, isolated cases of abuse of citizenry by enforcement officers with occasional outbursts by the Opposition when their expectations do not converge with those of government.

Weathering through the COVID 19 pandemic has shown the resilience of the Ghanaian people in adversity and has also laid bare the cracks in the society and the urgency to tackle them. There is no doubt that Science and Technology stands tall in this fight considering all the evidence before us. Governments all over the world therefore need to commit to the establishment of a National Research Fund to support basic and applied research. This chronicle of Ghana's COVID 19 response has key lessons for Africa and the entire developing world.

So agrees Boasiako et al (2020) through the indication that: “It is our considered view that the measures implemented by the Government of Ghana which have yielded the present results should be sustained and enhanced whilst ensuring that the broad range of social protection measures instituted is well executed. The Ghanaian case provides a good example for other African countries and the world at large.”

Relatively, available literature is highly limited since the pandemic is novel and as such these few were reviewed for the purposes of this study.

These works, even though worthy of the review fail largely to address issues specifically aimed at in this study. The case of Ghana is not adequately explored in these submissions and relatedly gives rise to the need for an intense documentation on the wholistic impact and analyses of communication strategies implemented by the Ghanaian government.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Sociological Approach to Literature is being used for this study. The theories above have fully been discussed at length. Various studies have proven different versions of strategies employed by different Governments.

Indeed, various works have been done, and the relationship between crisis communication and Governmental approaches will remain essential for studies.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methodology to be adopted for this study. It focuses on the research design, population and sampling, data collection tool, data collection procedure and method of data analysis, as well as ethical issues and considerations.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs the Qualitative Research Design approach. In the most basic form, Qualitative research design entails the use of what, how and why questions in the collection of data. This is to say questions utilized to seek responses in qualitative research involve aim to elicit a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. This approach is best used to gather data about lived experiences, emotions or behaviors, and the meanings individuals attach to them (Barnham, 2015).

As indicated, this study employs the qualitative research approach using Ghana government's COVID-19 crisis handling as a case study. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundary between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

In most cases, case study method selects a very defined geographical or very limited number of individuals as the subject of study. Case study approach in its true sense explore and investigates contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationship.

Research in the field of crisis communication has largelyqzzaz been dominated by case study approach as the main methodology (An & Cheng 2010; Elliot, 2010; Holladay; 2010; Kelly

2014; Claeys and Cauberghe, 2015). As a qualitative study, the instrument for data collection will be structured interviews from which the data collected is transcribed and presented and analysed thematically.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The population of this study comprises high ranking staff of the Ministry of Information and all persons who were at the forefront of the battle implementing and drafting communication strategies and materials for the Ministry and government. They also include communication experts who have industry experience in managing crisis.

Specifically, three (3) high ranking officials from the Communications unit of government are sampled along with Seven (7) other technical staff. These three will be the Director of the Ministry of Information, the Director of the Information Services Department and the Director of Communications at the Presidency or their respective representatives who were involved in conceiving and implementing government's COVID-19 communication strategy. The seven other members are members of the digital and social media teams at the Ministries of Information and Health as well as staff of the Directorate of Health Promotion at the Ghana Health Services.

Two industry experts; Madam Afia Drah, Communications Manager of the Trust Hospitals and Sadat Laminu who is a Director at Olgivy Africa, Ghana are the industry experts. These staff from the various Government agencies would provide insights on their day to day use and implementation of communication tactics to actualize government's strategies while the high-ranking staff would provide data only privy to top officials including objectives of the communication approach, progress chalked and effectiveness of outlined strategies. The industry practitioners provide an outsider but expert analysis which will help shape and enrich the discourse. This pool ensures a proper representation of the population.

According to Mason (1996), in the broadest definition, sampling technique and selection are principles and procedures used to identify, choose and gain access to relevant units which will be used for data generation by any method.

Simple Random sampling is used as the main techniques for the study. With this kind of sampling, individuals are chosen randomly and entirely by chance, such that each individual has the same probability of being chosen at any stage during the sampling process. (Starnes, 2008). Since interviewees will be selected randomly, the techniques will help reduce the amount of data to be collected and also aid in generalization from the subgroup.

The high-ranking government officials are however selected based on hierarchy and availability. The insights to be provided by these three are technical and can only be provided by few and as such random sampling would not be ideal for this situation.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Data Collection tools refer to the devices used to collect data, such as questionnaire, case studies, interviews, observation, focus group discussions and surveys.

Structured interviews will be employed. Interviews in general are particularly useful for getting the story behind a respondent's experiences (McNamara, 1999). Structured interviews are specifically conversations between a researcher and an informant focusing on the informant's perception of self, life, and experience, and expressed in her or his own words. The interviews would be guided by an Interview guide, which is a list of the topics and questions the researcher plans to cover during the interview. Interview guides are effective tools for maintaining consistency and direction during an interview, and they can range from highly structured interviews to relatively informal conversations.

3.3.1 In-depth Interview

An in-depth interview is an open-ended, discovery-oriented method to obtain detailed information about a topic from a stakeholder. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method, and its goal is to explore in depth a respondent's point of view, experiences, feelings, and perspectives.

It is useful when a researcher wants detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours or want to explore new issues in depth. Interviews are often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the program and why.

An in-depth interview is traditionally conducted in person or over the telephone with the researcher asking questions of an individual respondent. In-depth interviews can take place anywhere the respondents are- at work, home, a public location, a research facility or by telephone. In-depth interview has a flexible structure, interactive, deep, and generative.

The primary advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys.

They also may provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information -people may feel more comfortable having a conversation with you about their program as opposed to filling out a survey. In-depth interviews can uncover valuable insights and enable the researcher to find out "the real story" from the people in the know. Respondents are most likely to open up on a one-on-one basis.

In in-depth interviews, interviewers can respond to questions and probe for greater detail and questions can be added or altered in real-time if needed.

Boyce et Neale (2006) have outlined the process for conducting in-depth interviews. Boyce and Neale explain that the process for conducting in-depth interviews follows the same

general process as is followed for other research: plan, develop instruments, collect data, analyse data, and disseminate findings:

Process for conducting In-depth interviews:

- Plan - The planning stage involves identifying stakeholders who will be involved and also identifying what information is needed and from whom.
- Develop instruments- This stage involves the interview protocol- the rules that guide the administration and implementation of the interviews. (These are the instructions that are followed for each interview, to ensure consistency between interviews, and thus increase the reliability of the findings. Amongst the instructions for the interviewer included in the protocol are:
 - What to say to interviewees when setting up the interview;
 - What to say to interviewees when beginning the interview, including ensuring informed consent and confidentiality of the interviewee
 - What to say to interviewees in concluding the interview;
 - What to do during the interview (Example: Take notes, audiotape, or do both.
 - What to do following the interview (Example: Fill in notes? Check audiotape for clarity? Summarize key information for each? Submit written findings?).
 - Develop an interview guide that lists the question or issues to be explored during the interview and includes an informed consent form. An interview guide is a document that enables an interviewer to structure the way to conduct research. Interview guides are effective tools for maintaining consistency and direction during an interview, and they can range from highly structured interviews to relatively informal conversations.

- Collect Data - At this stage, the interview must set up interviews with stakeholders and explain the purpose of the interview, why the stakeholder has been chosen and the expected duration of the interview.
 - The interviewer must seek the informed consent of the interviewee (written or documented oral). The interviewer must re-explain the purpose of the interview, why the stakeholder has been chosen, expected duration of the interview, whether and how the information will be kept confidential, and the use of a note pad and/or tape recorder and if the interviewee has consented, the interview must be conducted.
 - Summarize key data immediately following the interview; and
 - Verify information given in interviews as necessary.
- Analyze Data – At this stage, the interviewer must transcribe and analyze data.
- Disseminate findings – Write a report and solicit feedback from interviewees.

Potential Sources of Information

In-depth interviews typically rely on multiple sources of information to provide as complete a picture as possible. Information sources could include:

- Policy Makers
- Community Leaders/Members
- Government Officials
- Experts
- Programme Participants/Clients
- Technocrats
- Professionals

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data refers to raw information that has not been subjected to interpretation by the researcher and is still in its original form (Rasanen & Nyce 2013). Data needs to be collected from respondents for processing and analysis and for this purpose a structured interview will be set up where researcher elicit relevant responses from interviewees and records them into audio files.

As a qualitative research, the researcher as an interviewer is a key instrument in the research process and must be authentic, intuitive, and receptive to the participant's responses (Stewart 2010; Dallas et al. 2005). Recording data into audio for onwards processing and analysis has its advantages and disadvantages. As an advantage, information is captured accurately as opposed to taking notes. As a disadvantage ambient noise can interfere in the proper functioning of the recorded audios (Shirindi, 2018). Interviews will be conducted in the offices of respondents. Respondents will have free will and be given room to give responses devoid of influence.

3.5 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis has been described as “the most complex and mysterious of all the phases of a qualitative project and the one that receives the least thoughtful discussion in the literature” (Thorne, 2000). According to Shamo and Resnik (2003) various analytic procedures “provide a way of drawing inductive inferences from data and distinguishing the signal (the phenomenon of interest) from the noise in the data”.

The data collected will be presented and analysed descriptively based on themes that will be set up in line with the objectives of this study.

Thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyse and report repeated patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is a

method for describing data, but it also involves interpretation in the processes of selecting codes and constructing themes (ibid).

The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes and place it under a category. The themes become variables that can be measured. A distinguishing feature of thematic analysis is its flexibility to be used within a wide range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and to be applied to a wide range of study questions, designs, and sample sizes.

Thematic analysis offers researchers great flexibility with respect to: (a) the type of research questions it can address, from personal accounts of people's experiences and understandings to broader constructs in various social contexts; (b) the type of data and documents examined; (c) the volume of data analysed; (d) the choice of theoretical and/or epistemological framework applied; and (e) the ability to analyse data with an inductive, data-driven approach or a deductive, theory-driven approach (Clarke and Braun 2013).

Thematic Analysis provides an entry into a way of doing research that otherwise can seem vague, mystifying, conceptually challenging and overly complex. It offers a way into qualitative research that teaches the mechanics of coding and analysing qualitative data systematically, which can then be linked to broader theoretical or conceptual issues.

The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e patterns in the data that are important or interesting and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it.

Thematic analysis can be used to analyse most types of qualitative data including qualitative data collected from interviews, focus groups, surveys, solicited diaries, visual methods,

observation and field research, action research, memory work, vignettes, story completion and secondary sources.

What is a theme?

After explaining what thematic analysis is, its goals and its advantages, it is important to explain what a theme is before explaining the steps involved in thematic analysis.

A theme is a subject of discourse, discussion, meditation, or composition. A theme is a 'patterned response or meaning' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 82) derived from the data that informs the research question. When engaging in thematic analysis, researchers can identify themes irrespective of the number of times a particular idea or item related to that theme appears in a data set.

Furthermore, the importance or centrality of a theme is not necessarily reflective of the frequency of its appearance within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Nowell et al. 2017). Themes can be classified as either semantic (also often labelled as manifest), which address more explicit or surface meanings of data items, or latent, which reflect deeper, more underlying meanings, assumptions, or ideologies (Boyatzis 1998; Braun and Clarke 2006).

The researcher has great flexibility in which themes to identify and strive to identify themes that provide important insights that address the research question (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Researchers can employ an inductive or deductive approach to theme identification. An inductive approach is where the researcher begins with as few preconceptions as possible, allowing theory to emerge from the data. In deductive research a hypothesis is derived from existing theory and the empirical world is then explored, and data are collected, in order to test the hypothesis. Inductive approaches are generally associated with qualitative research, whilst deductive approaches are commonly associated with quantitative research.

In the inductive approach, the researcher begins by collecting data that is relevant to their topic of interest. Once a substantial amount of data has been collected, the research will now look for patterns in the data and work to develop a theory that could best explain the patterns.

Stages in Thematic Analysis

The six steps prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to carry out a thematic analysis are guidelines researchers use when engaging in thematic analysis.

- Familiarizing yourself with your data - This step requires the researcher to be fully immersed and actively engaged in the data by firstly transcribing the interactions and then reading the transcripts and/or listening to the recordings. Initial ideas should be noted down. It is important that the researcher has a comprehensive understanding of the content of the interaction and has familiarized him-/herself with all aspects of the data. This step provides the foundation for the subsequent analysis.
- Generating initial codes - Once familiar with the data, the researcher must then start identifying preliminary codes, which are the features of the data that appear interesting and meaningful. These codes are more numerous and specific than themes but provide an indication of the context of the conversation.
- Searching for themes- The third step in the process is the start of the interpretive analysis of the collated codes. Relevant data extracts are sorted (combined or split) according to overarching themes. The researcher's thought process should allude to the relationship between codes, subthemes, and themes.
- Reviewing themes- A deeper review of identified themes follows where the researcher needs to question whether to combine, refine, separate, or discard initial themes. Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while

there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. This is usually done over two phases, where the themes need to be checked in relation to the coded extracts (phase 1), and then for the overall data set (phase 2). A thematic ‘map’ can be generated from this step.

- Defining and naming themes- This step involves ‘refining and defining’ the themes and potential subthemes within the data. Ongoing analysis is required to further enhance the identified themes. The researcher needs to provide theme names and clear working definitions that capture the essence of each theme in a concise and punchy manner. At this point, a unified story of the data needs to emerge from the themes.
- Producing the report- Finally, the researcher needs to transform his/her analysis into an interpretable piece of writing by using vivid and compelling extract examples that relate to the themes, research question, and literature. The report must relay the results of the analysis in a way that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis. It must go beyond a mere description of the themes and portray an analysis supported with empirical evidence that addresses the research question.

3.6 ETHICAL ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

In the process of collecting data, respondents will constantly be assured that information gathered from them will be kept strictly confidential. Respondents will be assured that their responses would be used for the purpose of this study only. Anonymity of respondents will be adhered to in storing and processing of data.

All throughout this study, all scholarly work consulted including books, journals, thesis, and research materials are and will be duly acknowledged.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Data for this study will be conducted using a qualitative approach. The main set of respondents in this study is staff of the Ministry of Information, Ghana. Respondents will be selected partially through simple Random sampling and purposive sampling. The instrument to be used for data collection is a structured interview. Anonymity of respondents will be adhered to in storing and processing of data. All scholarly works consulted for the study is and will be duly acknowledged.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to transcribe the in-depth interviews, analyze or interpret and present the empirical data and discuss key findings. It analyses the various responses from two Communication experts as well responses from the Ministry of Information and Ghana Health Service.

4.1 AN OVERVIEW OF GHANA GOVERNMENT'S COVID-19 COMMUNICATION

Ghana Government's handling of the pandemic has been applauded by the World Health Organisation. In fact, Taylor, and Berger (2020) report that when it comes to the coronavirus response, "the World Health Organization is studying some of Ghana's techniques". This affirms and makes it even more necessary to explore key communication strategies implemented by the government.

4.2 **Regular Presidential Addresses**

Communication is the backbone of the society and is stemmed from the act of speech which plays a huge role in our daily lives. A speech allows forming connections, influence decisions, motivate change, entertain, stimulate and convince and persuade people. It is a very effective way to change the mentality of large number of people, or strengthening their believe in a speaker. Public speaking helps to persuade and win over the crowd. Speech helps us resolve issues, convey messages and helps structure the way of communicating.

Speeches was one of the key communication strategies that the Ghana government employed to manage the Covid-19 pandemic is the use of the Presidential Addresses. With this, the President of Ghana addresses the nation in a pre-recorded televised address which is shared on traditional media and social media platforms.

On March 12th, 2020, a day after the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared the COVID-19 a pandemic, the President of Ghana gave the first address to the nation on measures implemented in preparation for the pandemic.

This broadcast later become a regular feature in the government's COVID 19 response agenda to the entire nation. As the cases sharply increased, the Presidential addresses became more frequent (almost every weekend) with some as early as four-day intervals. According to Communications Expert 1,

“I am nearly 40, I have never seen any timings in the lives of the country that we have seen a President talking to us almost biweekly. It was very novel, it was very good, the President was in our homes, he was encouraging us, the father of the nation was with us...”

The novelty of the Presidential addresses afforded the President to demonstrate leadership in crisis by empathizing with Ghanaians and sharing in their sentiments. The addresses by the President in the emotional and tensed Covid-19 environment placed confidence in Ghanaians that Government was on top of issues. It emboldened Ghanaians to be each other's keeper in watching out for those who breached Covid-19 protocols.

This communication strategy even-though reignited hope in the Ghanaian, on whether it was effective in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana is debatable. The response from Communications Expert 1 suggests that the President understood the assignment.

However, according to the findings from this study, it discovered that halfway into the implementation of this strategy, government detoured. The addresses were beginning to sound politicized and scheduled timelines for relaying information were shoddily adhered to. In one of Communications Expert 2's response, he highlighted the importance of timing saying.

“...my concern was with the consistency. It wasn't not consistent as it should have been and the timing too was wrong, the address is the evenings.”

Communications Expert 1 also added on to the fact that, when she realized the strategy started earning political marketing tags, she felt it had lost its relevance.

“the President showed leadership in crisis. However, there was a little drift off because they started using that as a political tool that did not augur well with a lot of people because it drifted the attention from the crisis we wanted to solve, and it went off to using the platform as a political jabs to his opponent John Mahama and some people who have criticized them especially when people criticized the feeding, the free water and electricity. These were all good things but when people started criticizing them then the platform was used for other things which I think that's how come it lost its relevance.”

The frequent addresses were used to assure citizens that everything was alright and therefore their responsibilities were to adhere to the protocols outlined by the Ghana Health Service which the President in most instances repeated them. Critical to these presidential addresses have been the several policy announcements associated with them. The president used these addresses to announce several government policies that it intends to embark on in the fight against the pandemic. These policies have ranged from total lockdowns at selected places (mostly those with Covid-19 infections), different forms of social restrictions (bans on weddings, funerals, theatrical performances), closure of beaches, tax reliefs, CAP, testing, allowances for workers, free water for all citizens, subsidized electricity for the vulnerable, among many other policies.

With the pandemic being novel, assessments from respondents generally suggests satisfaction with how the government handled affairs. The data collated also highlights the satisfaction on how effective these tactics and strategy by Government helped reduce anxiety during the

peak period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is significant to highlight this approach as it is very effective at creating and institutionalizing a national approach to the battling of the pandemic. The nation once addressed by the principal authority in the land is subjected to a single course of action which in this case has always been obedience and adherence.

Also, by often employing the framing theory, this approach beats drums into the minds of people, the picture of a “working Government”; a government in front and in charge of the pandemic, not behind, with the necessary techniques and experts to steer the nation out of the crisis. This creates good political reputation for the government and the party in charge. This lessened the burden of anxiety in citizens and reduced drastically the already existing tension created by the pandemic.

4.3 Frequent Press Conferences

A press conference is one of the most commonly potent tool of Public Relations to advance the cause of an organisation and gain coverage in newspapers, magazines, and blogs and on Television news broadcasts. Rather than setting up interviews with individual reporters or sending out press releases, press conference allow an entity to interact with a roomful of journalists all at once and thus is an effective way to quickly disseminate public relation messages. This indispensable approach adopted by the Government of Ghana throughout the year 2020 was effective. The press conferences were a joint effort held mostly by the Minister of Information, the Minister of Health, and the Director General of the Ghana Health Service. Mr. Kojo Opong Nkrumah, Dr Kwaku Agyeman Manu and Dr Patrick Kuma-Aboagye respectively took turns to address reporters and media outlets on a frequent (sometimes daily, sometimes weekly) basis. Government communications focusing on elaborating and relaying new information about how the government was handling the COVID-19 outbreak since the first case was commended by the Communications Expert 1 and 2.

According to them, in a proper and effective risk communication situation like Ghana's, the citizenry needed to depend on "...consistent media presence with information and guidance "(Abrams & Greenhawt, 2020; Park et al., 2020). According to Communications Expert 1,

"...the Ministers Briefing was also good because then it explains, it is like a second-tier communication where it explained the policies that the Government was putting in place, when they say there is a lockdown in Greater Accra or Greater Kumasi or there is no flight, closing of the borders and all that, it further explained the policies and it was very good because it moved down to the people and so the Presidential speeches were done in the evenings and then the Ministers Press Briefings were done in the morning so at least everybody will get to understand and then it broke down to the Ghanaian languages as well so if people didn't understand what the president said in English then the Ministers briefing was able to break it down to the people and that briefing had the Minister of Health and Information, Ghana Health Service to break down the communication and I think it was done very well."

The main objective of this engagement was to update the nation on measures taken so far and how Government intends to deploy the Covid 19 vaccine with an objective to carry the nation along on the vaccination program. The bi-weekly press briefings have been utilized to educate the citizens on some things including the dos and don'ts in the era of the pandemic. The press briefings have been used to explain to Ghanaians how they need to protect themselves. The topical issues that have arisen out of this strategy has been about the lack of a key spokesperson according to Communications Expert 2. In his attempt to evaluate and assess the pitfalls of this strategy, he highlighted that;

"It augmented the Presidential Address which was good but the Ministers Press Briefing was lacking a key spokesperson"

In defense on why a key spokesperson was required for the Ministers Press Briefing, Communications Expert 2 added that,

“...the health minister has goofed on several count so its beginning to loose credibility within the Ghanaian public so now people begin to doubt the authenticity of what he begins to say even in this case where he got sick and was taken to legon hospital, he said he was going for a bed rest, that was slow.”

The findings went on to highlight and analyze the media channels used to broadcast these briefings. Here again, Communications Experts 2 explains the need for employing diverse mediums to publicize briefings and not just sticking to social media. Media actors are currently bewildered. Converging technologies have changed the way journalists work. Communications Expert 2 reemphasized on the fact that the information dissemination was concentrated mainly in Accra.

“...however, what the Press Briefing failed to do was that they were relying solely on digital platform, most of the press briefings were carried on the facebook live. They could have leverage on the national broadcaster (GBC) and other local stations and then the information was just limited to Accra. The information was stucked in Accra. Ghana is beyond Accra.”

Overall, this approach aided the initial slogan of “spread calm instead of fear” as intended by the Government. The aim however was to render extended forms of information and explanations to matters arising or spoken about in the Presidential address. In the end, this aided to achieve such underlying objective while helping to kick out rumours, misinformation, fake news, mythical and superstitious notations and ideas existing amongst the citizenry. Media houses in turn also benefited as they received first-hand data and directives from the Ministries, aiding greatly in speeding up the publication of instantaneous news stories.

This as an extended perspective shaped the national discourse and reportage on the pandemic in a tone and manner set or initiated by the Ministers through the press briefings. This cycle largely enabled balanced reportage of figures and cases recorded, communicated restrictions and protocols, and eliciting unified nationalist responses.

4.4 Social Media and Dedicated Covid-19 website

Despite the potential for broad definitions of social media, in practice, most scholars and practitioners invoking social media are referring to a specific set of online offerings that have emerged over the past three decades – including blogs, social networking sites, and Micro-blogging. The emergence of these technologies and the associated specific applications is often characterized as establishing Web 2.0, which refers to the presence of a class of web-based applications that offered all users the opportunity to write and contribute through posting content and could be accessed through multiple devices (Beer and Burrows 2007).

Social media are nowadays recognized as a strong tool for advocacy, communication, and education in the health sector. They are also proven to be an important resource for public health preparedness and response to disease outbreaks, emergencies, and other disasters.

When used during an emergency, social media helps expand the reach of message due to social sharing and the vast number of citizens who actively utilize the platforms. It serves as an open communication channel for residents to respond back, ask questions, and provide updates.

The uses of social media for healthcare communication are various and include providing health information on a range of conditions; providing answers to medical questions; facilitating dialogue between patients and between patients and health professionals;

collecting data on patient experiences and opinions used for health intervention, health promotion, and health education; reducing stigma; and providing online consultations.

Internet-based tools like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were at the heart of Ghana's Government communication approaches. The Ghana Health Service (GHS) has been and continues to be at the forefront of the battle and influencing government in decision making as far as the COVID 19 pandemic is concerned. This service is responsible for implementation of health-related national policies under the control of the Ministry of Health and together with the Ghana Medical Association has been involved in public education on COVID 19 prevention, testing and treatment. To aid Government communication efforts, like many other countries around the world, the Ghana government created a dedicated website through the Ministry of Health as a way of updating the country on the case count. The dedicated website <https://www.ghanahealthservice.org/covid19/> has since March 2020 been used to provide all the updates associated with the pandemic. After the President's first address on March 11, 2020, Ghana recorded its first two cases. Ghanaians were informed immediately on the Covid-19 dedicated website.

The Ministry of Health stated on the dedicated website for Ghanaians to be aware the country has recorded cases in the country (Ministry of Health, 2020). All updates have since been uploaded on this website. The Ghana Health Service through the good life campaign designed to promote healthy lifestyle developed educational flyers against Covid-19. Below are some of the flyers.

Stay Healthy



Avoid close contact with people coughing and sneezing

Frequently clean hands with soap under running water or alcohol-based hand rub



Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth



Designed & Produced by the Health Promotion Division



However, even with this powerful tool at the disposal of Government, Communications Expert 1 highlights some cons associated with its usage by the government. In her evaluation on why social media use was a strategy she explained that natural crisis were difficult to simulate unlike some crisis at the workplace thus most countries were not prepared for the pandemic. She said it was very difficult for any country to put together a proper strategy for the first few months of the pandemic. She observed that Ghana tried to put together Information giving to educate Ghanaians about the virus. She said:

“so I think that they used that because they also didn’t know what to do. And so, the only thing they could do was to give the information that there is covid and these are the things you could do to protect yourself.”

In analyzing this quotation, it infers that Ghana was inadequately prepared to respond to the virus thus started to give out information on preventive measures before the actual plan.

Communications Expert 2 had a rather contrasting view. He explained that the strategy was timely. The Government of Ghana at the initial stages of the virus helped the masses gain knowledge and facts about the virus which promoted choice, rather than being dictatorial and over-authoritarian. He said:

“if these strategies were not put in place there would have been more chaotic or even more prevalent cases that we have had because if we didn't have these strategies in place, the situation would have been worst that it was at the time, so these strategies were timely and were appropriate at the time.

Kemp (2020) reports that there are about 14 million internet users in Ghana of which about 6 million are on social media. With this number, our findings tells us that the government's decision to make use of social media communication has been critical in the Covid-19 fight.

Adopting the use of social media as part of the government's strategies to update the people is to reach as many people especially the youth as possible and to disseminate information to the last person.

Pondering on one of Communications Expert 1's statements, she recounted that misinformation and fake news flooded the digital landscape. In her own words,

“...that was where my problem was, the misinformation, under information, over information, the numbers not adding up, the changing of the designs, all these are very distractive because then somebody will be thinking that why did u change the design of how the numbers look like so which one is which. When people started designing their own numbers then we didn't know which was which and even the flyers too to announce the presidential speech was changed at a point and was also very distractive at appoint because we didn't know what was what because in this age you don't know who is doing what

at what point. So, I think that it was good in the beginning, but they lost focus a little and lost in the whole, let it be nice kind of thing...”

“Fake news,” or fabricated information that is patently false, has become a major phenomenon in the context of Internet-based media. It has received serious attention in a variety of fields, with scholars investigating the antecedents, characteristics, and consequences of its creation and dissemination.

Adding to existing knowledge, Communications Expert 2 also voiced that he liked the idea of using website but as to verification of the data provided, he couldn’t vouch for. In his own words, he said;

“...I liked the website because of constant updates but as to whether the figures were correct or not, you and I were not there, but there was like a constant update on the figures and regional distribution. It was updated very regularly. But on the social media platforms they failed to constantly respond to some of the questions.”

Along with the use of the dedicated website, the Vice President of Ghana launched the Ghana COVID 19 Tracker App. He indicated that the app is essential in the current battle against the crisis as “It will help us easily track people with the virus, and those who have had contact with others. It is also useful in quarantine reliability in case certain individuals need self-quarantine”. These, along with many social media and other digital approaches contributed to Ghana’s third communication approach explored for the purposes of this study.

Social media have the potential to play an important role in public health and health promotion. However attention is needed in public health information and messages diffusion in order to ensure the respect of transparency and accuracy of information.

4.5 “#Spread Calm Not Fear” message

The communication strategy above was introduced among other things solely to inform citizens as much as possible on how to deal with the pandemic. The government indicated that the message is to sought to “Spread Calm, Not Fear”. With the heightened statistics being announced in other countries around the world, the fear in the country was rising as Ghana recorded its first Covid-19 cases. So, the first message the government through the Ministry of Information rolled-out was the need for Ghanaians not to panic but to be calm and adhere to all the protocols the Ministry of Health and the team of experts assigned to manage the pandemic proposed. As a way to make it an everyday phrase for the “fellow Ghanaian”, the #spreadcalmnotfear was not only common on all social media platforms of government spokespersons but became part of daily conversations amongst Ghanaians.

Though this helped in allaying fears of the populace, others criticized this option. They were of the view that instead of spreading calm, the government had to spread fear and let the people understand the severity of the virus and the degree of destruction it is causing to other nations.

According to Mr. Segbefia, Head of Policy Planning, Budgets, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, Ministry of Information, the sole “purpose of these communication strategies was to keep the Ghanaian populace informed, educate the public on the pandemic in order to stay safe as well as avoid misinformation and false news on COVID-19 related issues. The focus was mainly to; Create awareness of the pandemic, Educate the public on the need to stay at home to avoid the spread of the virus, Educate the public on the importance of wearing a mask and observing other COVID-19 protocols.”

4.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Ghana governments communication was based on a set of strategies to counter the corona pandemic which focused on the following directives and instruction: involving the

community in the efforts to contain the pandemic; raising awareness about the government efforts; supporting government preventive measures; enhancing social initiatives and responsibility; informing and guiding people about the economic, educational and social repercussions and solutions and their assurances that the government is assuming its responsibility of protecting everyone.

Topical of these strategies were the Press Briefings, Presidential address, Back To School Campaign, #SpreadCalmNotFear campaign and Social media and website updates.

According to Mr. Segbefia, "...stakeholder engagement was used for selected groups of people. They included traditional rulers, opinion leaders, political parties, and leaders of faith-based organizations. This promoted awareness creation on the pandemic in our communities effectively. Mass media campaigns targeted the general public using both traditional and new media. This was highly patronized by the youth especially with the use of social media."

According to my findings, the key communication approaches of the Ministry of Information was stakeholder engagement and mass media campaigns. An online survey conducted by Star Ghana Foundation clearly revealed that, the strategies choked over 80% their communication objectives.

"The ultimate outcome of the communication strategy was to effect behavioural change."

It is clear that citizenry gradually adjusted to the new norm albeit some compliance challenges. A major feedback to the Ministry was the fact that many Ghanaians were still not complying in full with restrictions and the safety protocols that were instituted despite the massive campaign activities.

In response, the Ministry launched Below-the-line advertising campaigns to intensify awareness creation. Message types or types of information included were; statistics, detailed

instructions, steps and procedures, correcting false information, following-up the spread of the disease locally and international, COVID-19 protocols (hand washing/sanitizing, cleaning surfaces, avoiding crowds, social distancing), providing regular updates about government decisions and procedures, supporting the people working in the health sector naming them ‘the first line of defense’ and highlighting their efforts and Guiding people about how to face and manage pandemic issues.

Also, they posted COVID-19 updates, provided easily referenced Question & Answer (Q&A) and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), communicated about issues related to government-mandated quarantine, financial and market concerns, work-from-home policy, and business impacts.

Government communication concentrated on delivering information about how the government handles the COVID-19 outbreak since the spread of the novel as proper and effective risk communication depends on consistent media presence with information and guidance (Abrams & Greenhawt, 2020; Park et al., 2020). The Ghanaian government depended on accurate, confident, transparent, and trusted communication which are effective values during risks and emergencies. (Park & Lee, 2018).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Any communication in COVID-19 is crucial whether from government to people, from media to people, people to people, doctor to patient, within families and so on. Effective communication emphasizes the importance of content, accuracy, comprehensive signs, symbols, language, culture, and semiotic rules.

5.1 CONCLUSION

To conclude, Ghana developed very good risk communication strategies in health communication to manage the COVID-19 crisis. It followed the international standards and also considered its own political, economic, social, and cultural features. The Ghanaian government used press briefings, Presidential address, social media campaigns and many other strategies to inform and convince people including clarification of measures strategy, reassurance strategy, ambiguity reduction strategy, behaviour efficacy strategy and correcting misinformation and rumors. The major challenges and areas that need redress and preparations for in the case of future pandemics remains; Alleviating any room created for ambiguity and lack of clarity, regulate and control false news, and finding antidotes to business and economic impacts.

Pandemic demands strengthening the personal relevance of effective communications. It is mandatory to prepare for a dynamic risk event and uncertainty management during pandemic. To achieve this comprehensive framework for effective and integrated communications for COVID-19, technology plays a critical role at a national level. Success in containment of COVID-19 pandemic also mandates effective communication and interpersonal skills of a doctor and other health care workers that include the ability to collect information to facilitate accurate diagnosis, proper advice for isolation and quarantine, provide clinical advice and

develop relationships with patients. People should seek knowledge of COVID-19 from reliable sources only and, in particular, to take practical action as per government advice to make plans and protect vulnerable populations.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the government of Ghana has implemented a range of public health and socioeconomic measures, such as using drones to deliver samples for testing, supporting front-line health workers, and providing economic relief to citizens and enterprises.

However, after easing lockdown on May 31, and reopening schools on June 15, there is a risk of further viral transmission. The government needs to strengthen real-time surveillance and monitoring and greatly expand testing and vaccination capacity. Support should be provided to the most vulnerable populations to better control the spread of coronavirus. The government should also focus on health system strengthening and build its capacity for dealing with multiple crises and outbreaks to better respond to public health emergencies.

Additionally, government should also desist from politicizing every plan they implement. It breaches trust and distracts attention from problem solving. In the quest to tackle future situations better, findings from the study also suggests that adhering to scheduled time-lines and designating a figurative spokesperson decreases the probability of message rejection.

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APPENDIX:

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

PREAMBLE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am an M.A in Public Relations student of the Ghana Institute of Journalism and I am conducting a research on the topic “***COVID-19 & CRISIS COMMUNICATION; ANALYSING KEY GOVERNMENT OF GHANA COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AS DEPLOYED BY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION***”. I will be very grateful if you spare me a moment of your time to complete the following questions. If it is okay with you, I will be tape recording our conversation. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. This interview is purposely designed to collect data on the said topic. Information provided is purely for academic purposes only and all information provided will be treated confidentially. I will be compiling an analysis report which will contain all comments with reference to individuals in the final report.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewee's information

Participant # _____ Date of the interview: _____

Time starts: _____ Time end: _____

Designation: _____

DIRECTORS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

a. Crisis communication strategies employed by government

1. What was the existing public health crisis communication framework of government before COVID-19 struck?
2. How did the Government define the COVID-19 crisis from the communication perspective?
3. What are the specific strategies and channels used in teaching the citizens on COVID-19 communication?

b. Why these strategies were used

4. How did you settle on these strategies?
5. We all saw and still can see some of the communication mechanisms government deployed but what were the strategies behind these tactics?
6. What objectives did you set as the benchmarks for achieving the full realization of these strategies?

c. Assessment of communication mechanisms in line with the strategies

7. For what scenarios and for what audiences were you using which strategy? Was there a strategic use of say one communication tactic for particular circumstances over the other?

d. Effectiveness of these strategies in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic

8. How effective were these strategies?

e. Challenges of these crisis communications strategies and recommendations for the future

9. What were or some of the pushbacks (challenges) in the implementation of these communication initiatives?

10. How did you overcome these challenges?

11. Was there ever a need for getting back to the drawing board to revise these strategies and tactics? Why and what was the outcome?

12. What are some of the gaps you see in the general government COVID-19 crisis approach that you think could have been done better?

13. What useful lessons have been learnt with managing this COVID-19 crisis that will be useful for the management of similar future crisis?

STAFF OF GOVERNMENT COVID-19 COMMUNICATION AGENCIES (GHS, MoI, PRESIDENCY etc)

a. Crisis communication strategies employed by government

1. As a member of the communications team of this agency managing the crisis what is your specific role? What do you do or have you been doing on a daily basis in terms of the COVID-19 crisis management?

2. What were the strategies that informed your role in the COVID-19 crisis communication?

b. Why these strategies were used

3. Had you been working on crisis management before COVID-19? If yes exactly what did you or were you doing in those crisis moments?

4. How different is this crisis management from the previous ones? (In terms of urgency, channels, messaging etc.)

c. Assessment of communication mechanisms in line with the strategies

5. How do you see your role supporting the effective management of the crisis?
6. Do you see your role supporting any strategic approach to the management of the crisis?

d. Effectiveness of these strategies in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic

7. How effective did you find your daily efforts for the management of the crisis? In other words evaluate the effectiveness of what you were doing to the communication management of the crisis (the videos, social media management, copy writing, press releases etc, how was it helping solve the crisis)

e. Challenges of these crisis communications strategies and recommendations for the future

- f. As a member of the communications team what were the daily challenges you experienced in your line of work with this crisis management?
- g. How did you solve those challenges?
- h. What do you think can be done differently to improve the handling of the crisis?
- i. From your experience what steps, initiatives etc. would you recommend for the better management of similar public health crisis?

COMMUNICATION EXPERTS

a. Crisis communication strategies employed by government

1. What did you see as the crisis communication strategies the Ghana government was deploying in the management of the COVID-19 crisis?

b. Why these strategies were used

2. What in your estimation prompted the use of these strategies?
3. How did these strategies fit into or derogate from general crisis handling approach in public health crisis management? (globally and from your experience)

c. and d. Assessment of communication mechanisms in line with the strategies

4. Kindly evaluate these communication tactics from government. What purpose did they serve in your estimation? How effective were they? What were their pitfalls in their deployment?
 - a. Presidential addresses
 - b. Minister's Press Briefings
 - c. Website and social media updates
 - d. Outdoor media (billboards, posters etc).
 - e. Information Services Department
 - f. Use of community and religious stakeholders for two-step communication and compliance.
- e. Challenges of these crisis communications strategies and recommendations for the future***
- f. What are the gaps you identified in both the conceptualization of these strategies and their implementation?
 - g. What are some of the strategies that you think the government could have used?
 - h. (Based on challenges of the crisis communications approach identified from the interviews with government officials, communication experts will be asked to suggest how these challenges can be solved)
- f. What are your recommendations for pandemic communications in the future.