

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

"SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN GHANA: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GHANA WATER AND ELECTRICITY COMPANY OF
GHANA LIMITED"

BY

ERIC ASANTE
(MAPR 16081)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
RESEARCH, GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM, ACCRA, IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS
DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS.

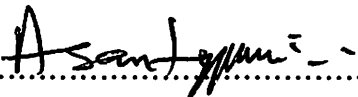
NOVEMBER, 2017

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the award of the Master of Arts Degree in Public Relations and that to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person, nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Name: Eric Asante

Index Number: MAPR 16081


Signature..... 

Date..... 29/11/17

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of the dissertation is line with the guidelines of supervision of dissertation laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

SUPERVISOR
Mr. Henry Kojo Bonsu-Owu
(Supervisor)

 29/11/17
.....
Signature Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the entire Management of the Accra West Branch of the Electricity Company of Ghana and the Head of the Public Relations Department, Mr. William Boateng for his immense support in carrying out this thesis.

God bless you all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to Almighty God through whose help I have been able to put this research work together. I want to thank, my Supervisor, Mr. Henry Kojo Bonsu-Owu for the patience, encouragement, advice, dedication and professionalism he exhibited throughout the research work.

I want to express my gratitude to the Project Manager in charge of Social Media Team of Electricity Company of Ghana for his immense research work. I am extremely grateful to the Management Information Officer, Accra West, Mr. Asiedu Mantey for the Statistical Data.

I am so thankful to Archibald Adams, for supporting in the entire research work. I offer special thanks to my wife, Angela Asante for helping me edit my work. Finally, to all my lecturers at the Ghana Institute of Journalism who imparted this extensive knowledge to enable me come out with this research work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Item	Page No
Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Abstract	ix
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 Research Objectives	5
1.4 Research Questions	5
1.5 Significance of the Study	6
1.6 Limitations and Scope of the Study	6
1.7 Organization of the Study	6
CHAPTER TWO	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2.1 Theoretical Framework	8
2.2.2 The Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Communication	8
2.2.3 Excellence Theory	11
2.2.4 Systems Models	16
2.2.5 Assumptions of Systems Models	18
2.2.6 Critique of Systems Models	18
2.2.7 Critique of Systems as the Dominant Public Relations Paradigm	19
2.3 Overview of Public Relations Practice	20
2.4 Concept of Social Media	22
2.5 Social Media in Ghana	23
2.6 Public Relations and Social Media	24
2.7 Impact of Social Media on the Public Relations Practice	26
2.8 Related Works	31
2.9.1 Organisational Profile of Ghana Water Company Limited	34
2.9.2 Organisational Profile of Electricity Company of Ghana	36
CHAPTER THREE	39
METHODOLOGY AND ORGANISATIONAL PROFILES	39
3.1 Introduction	39
3.2 Research Design	39
3.3 Research Population	40
3.4 Sample Size	40
3.5 Sampling Technique	40
3.6 Types and Sources of Data	40

3.7 Data Collection Tool	41
3.8 Data Collection Procedures	41
3.9 Treatment and Presentation and Analysis of Data	41
CHAPTER FOUR	43
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA	43
4.1 Introduction	43
4.2 Demographic Data	43
4.2.1 Category of Respondents	43
4.2.2 Characteristics of Respondents	43
4.3 Main Findings	43
4.4 Objective 1: Social media platforms that ECG and GWC are active on	47
4.4.1 Social Media Platforms for PR	47
4.4.2 Activeness on Social Media	48
4.4.3 Visit to Social Media Platforms	50
4.5 Objective 2: Social Media platforms that are used for PR functions	51
4.6 Objective 3: Benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice	52
4.7 Objective 4: Challenges associated with using social media for PR functions	53
CHAPTER FIVE	54
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS	54
5.1 Introduction	54
5.2 Summary of Findings	57
5.3 Conclusion	58
5.4 Recommendations	58
5.4.1 Develop a Social Media Policy	58
5.4.2 Institute a 6 hour Feedback Mechanism	58
5.4.3 Hire a Dedicated Staff/Team of Staff for Social Media	59
REFERENCES	60
APPENDIX (QUESTIONNAIRE)	64

LIST OF TABLES

Item	Page Number
Table 1: Social Media Platforms	45
Table 2: Presence of Organisations on Social Media	50
Table 3: Benefits and success stories of using Social Media for PR Practice	51

LIST OF FIGURES

Item	Page Number
Figure 1: Category of Respondents	43
Figure 2: Visit to Social Media Platforms	46
Figure 3: Kind of Information posted on Social Media Platforms	47
Figure 4: Sample ECG poster on social media platforms	48
Figure 5: Sample GWCL poster on social media platforms	49

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to assess social media and public relations practice in Ghana, a comparative study of Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG). The research design adopted for the study was the quantitative research design. Using the non-probability sampling technique, the purposive sampling method, a sample size of eighty (80) research participants took part in the research. The study established that, the social media platforms used for Public Relations (PR) activities are Facebook (47 respondents, representing 59%), Twitter (25 respondents, representing 31%) and LinkedIn (8 respondents, representing 10%). The study established that, the kind of Information posted on Social Media Platforms included public announcements, maintenance schedules, new service tariffs and energy safety tips. The study also established that, both ECG and GWCL use their social media platforms to receive complaints, provide feedback to customers, communicate issues to customers and send information to customers. However, it was clear that, the social media platforms of ECG had several evidences to show that, it was using its social media platforms to achieve these and many more. From the statistics, it can be seen that ECG has a stronger presence on Facebook and Twitter whilst GWCL had a strong presence on LinkedIn. The study further revealed that, ECG had a team of four staff who have been hired to handle the three main social media platforms of the company. However, GWCL had no dedicated staff for social media, even though the updating and posting of information on the social media platforms lies within the responsibilities of the Public Relations Unit. The study recommended that, both organisations should develop a Social Media Policy and institute a 6 hour Feedback Mechanism to respond to all questions, comments and enquiries on the social media platforms. For GWCL, the study recommended that, a staff or team of dedicated staff for social media should be hired to enable to coordinate the organisation's social media efforts.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Public Relations (PR) is seen by Lattimore et al (2004) as a leadership and management role that aids the realisation of organisational goals, definition of corporate philosophy as well as the facilitation of organisational change. In essence, PR ensure that the communication with both internal and external publics to ensure continuous harmony between organisational objectives and public expectation. PR practitioners formulate, implement and evaluate strategies that enhance positive relationships and favourable image with their key publics or stakeholders of the organization Cutlip et al (2006) see public relations as a systematic effort to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics .Over the years, PR has been playing very important communication roles in society (Culip et al, 2006). It seems businesses all over the world have been using such public relations tools as publicity, sponsorship, event management as well as image and identity buildings to promote their products and services (Harris, 1991).

In the 1980s, information channels could be split into two forms: mass communication and micro-communication. Mass communication included newspapers, magazines, television, radios and other information sources shared with large groups of people in an asymmetrical or unbalanced exchange. Micro-communication on the other hand tended to deal with exchanges between individual persons and thus, was more symmetrical in its exchange (Phillips & Young, 2009). In this current online space, public relations practice has become more transparent because communication is handled in the spotlight (that is, on the internet

where everyone has democratic access). This has been facilitated by the rise of social media (Breakenridge, 2012).

Social media is increasingly changing the way public relations practitioners communicate and do their jobs. Wigley & Zhang (2011) claimed that people have started exploring public relations practitioners' general social media usage. According to Argenti & Barnes (2009) new communication media has "changed the rules of the game in every part of strategic communication". They also claim that over the past decade these new communication vehicles have also dramatically changed the business of managing relationships. McCorkindale (2009) reported that more than two-thirds of the current Fortune 2000 companies are using social networking sites. According to Wright & Hinson (2010), among all the social media used for communication by practitioners, "the most widely used free - access social networking sites are Facebook which now has over 400 million users worldwide and MySpace which has about 200 million users".

Social media includes mobile and web-based technologies that construct highly engaging arenas by which individuals and communities share, create, dialogue, and adjust user-generated content (Kietzmann et al, 2011). Breakenridge (2012) notes that "when social media meets PR, communication unites with technology" (p. 1). Social media causes content to be democratized, and demands a change of attitude to unite communications with collaborative technology. Lovejoy et al (2012) assert that social media or social networking, such as Facebook, has afforded organisations the opportunity of engaging their stakeholders in real-time communication and information exchange.

The growing popularity of social media is becoming evident among users of the internet (Kim & Johnson, 2011). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) note that “according to a Forrester Research, 75% of internet surfers around the world used ‘Social Media’ in the second quarter of 2008 by joining social networks” (p. 59). This suggests that social media use has become a global phenomenon. Social media involves the use mobile and web-based technologies to design highly interactive platforms by which individuals and communities share, create, converse, and adjust user-generated content (Kietzmann et al, 2011). User-generated content is enabled by Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) – a second generation of internet-based applications that can directly engage consumers in the creative process by both creating and disseminating information through cooperative writing, content sharing and social networking (Thackeray et al, 2008). Currently, there is a rich and deeply varied ecology of social media websites, such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter which differ in terms of scope and functionality, with Facebook being a major player (Kietzmann et al, 2011)

The Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) is a limited liability Company wholly owned by the Government of Ghana. Currently ECG is responsible for distribution of electricity in six political/administrative regions in southern Ghana namely, Ashanti, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Volta and Western Region. ECG has a well set-up Public Relations Department and has Regional Public Relations Officers who attend to issues as their respective levels. The PR Department recently launched its digital media strategy to engage customers online with the aim of improving customer communication. Currently, ECG is on three social media platforms namely, Facebook (13,959 likes as at 6th November, 2016), Twitter (5,175 followers as at 6th November, 2016) and LinkedIn (575 likes as at 6th November, 2016).

The Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL), on the other hand, is a full owned utility company that is responsible for potable water supply to all urban communities in Ghana. GWCL has set up a Public Relations Department headed by a Manager who oversees the operations of the department. There are also Regional Public Relations Officers who respond to the needs of the internal and external publics of GWCL in their respective regions. GWCL's PR Department in August 2016, launched a new website and is also active on three social media platforms. These are Facebook (1,033 as at 6th November, 2016), Twitter (172 followers as at 6th November, 2016) and LinkedIn (712 likes as at 6th November, 2016).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Public relations practitioners play a vital role in carving and maintaining an image for an organization as well as maintain a two-way communication between an organization and its publics. Public relations practitioners are now using social media to reach out to their publics. According to Marchese (2007), the difference between traditional media like newspapers, magazines, radio and television and social media is not the media itself but the system of discovery, distribution, consumption and conversation surrounding the media. Even though both social and traditional media have the ability to reach small or large audiences, production costs for traditional media are usually high. But social media technologies give anyone with internet access on either a mobile phone or a computer the ability to reach a global audience at little or no cost (Wright & Hinson, 2007).

Public relations practitioners are shifting to social media as the lines between online and offline promotion become blurry. Social media afford public relations practitioners the opportunity of reaching out to and engaging with their publics in conversation (Eyrich et al,

2008; Hanna et al, 2011). Social media can be deployed and applied in a variety of situations, particularly in the organisational setting. Indeed, organisations are embracing social media use for diverse activities including building brand awareness, promoting brand recognition, customer relationship management and market research (Chikandiwa et al, 2013). However, not all PR practitioners are taking advantage of social media. This study assessed social media and PR practice in Ghana, undertaking a comparative study of Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG).

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives for the study were:

1. To identify the social media platforms which the two organisations have signed unto and how active they are on these platforms
2. To understand how social media is being used by the two organisations in terms of their PR functions
3. To compare the benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice among the two organisations
4. To identify the challenges that comes with using social media for PR functions

1.4 Research Questions

The following were the questions for this research:

1. What are the social media platforms that the two organisations have signed unto and how active are they?
2. How is social media being used by the two organisations in terms of their PR functions?

3. What are the benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice among the two organisations?
4. What are the challenges that come with using social media for PR functions?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study was significant in the following ways. The study findings would provide an insight into how social media can be used in the PR practice. The findings would help organisations, both public and private to understand the benefits of social media in their PR practice and put in structures for its institutionalisation. The findings would also assist organisations to know which of the social media are relevant to their core business. Finally, the findings would serve as a reference material for related study and an addition to the body of knowledge.

1.6 Limitations and Scope of the Study

The study assessed social media and PR practice, undertaking a comparative study between GWCL and ECG. The study was limited to the sample size of eighty respondents. The study was also limited to Management members and PROs who work at the Headquarters of the two organisations as well as their Greater Accra regional offices. Other limitation encountered was the busy schedule of the management members which made it difficult for the researcher to meet them on even scheduled dates.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter one gave an overview of the background to the study, statement of the problem, research objectives and questions,

significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study and organization of the study. In chapter two, the researcher reviewed theories, concepts and previous research works related to the study topic. The third chapter three examined the research methodology of the study. This included the research design, research population, sample size and sampling techniques, types and sources of data, data collection instrument, data collection procedure, treatment and presentation and analysis of data. The chapter three ended with brief profile of Ghana Water Company Limited and Electricity Company of Ghana.

In Chapter four, the researcher presented the results of the data collected and discussed the findings. The discussion was done along-side the literature review and theories that were used by the researcher in chapter two. Lastly, chapter five presented a summary of the findings, drew a conclusion and provided recommendations from the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contained the review of related research, concepts and theories that were related to the research topic.

2.2.1 Theoretical Framework

The following theories were relevant to the study:

2.2.2 The Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Communication

This study was grounded in the two-way symmetrical model of public relations. The two-way symmetrical model of public relations as described in Grunig's Excellence Theory is focused primarily in making sure that decisions made by an organisation are mutually beneficial between itself and its audiences. The goal of Grunig's symmetrical communication model is one that embraces negotiation between organisations through their public relations practitioners, and their publics, and also fosters mutual understanding often times as a result of a successful formative or evaluative public relations research these organisations might have conducted.

During this aspect of Grunig's research, his idea for symmetrical communication —also was stimulated by Carter's (1965) and Chaffee and McLeod's (1968) conceptualisation of orientation. Grunig (2013) indicates that the roots for this model —represented a movement away from theories of attitudes held by one person and research on how to develop messages to change the orientations (attitudes) of a person. For him the model is drastically different in

comparison to the stereotypical view of the public relations practitioner as a manipulative figure who uses smoke and mirrors to control audiences. The symmetrical model —proposed that individuals, organisations, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behaviour to those of others rather than try to control how others think and behave.

Grunig (2013), states that, the symmetrical model of communication is a democratic framework for the public relations practitioner to follow. It is also one that can both be effective or detrimental, depending on the situation. The overall goal of creating mutual understanding between parties also is much more palatable for audiences, because in human nature, no one desires to be controlled. If a person is controlled or feels inferior to another person or organisation, they will not develop trust, and they are likely to withdraw completely from a relationship. The same goes for the organisational public relationship as well. If we create a sense of open communication and build trust through the two-way symmetrical model, we are more likely to be in a positive position when a time of crisis occurs because of strong relationships that have created a strong reputation.

The use of two-way symmetrical communication by a public relations practitioner who functions at the strategic management level, for instance, allows stakeholders to have a voice at the executive level. This model, therefore, creates a level playing field for negotiation and mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics. The two-way model provides an organisation with the necessary equipment and procedures needed to create a strong organisational reputation built on a solid and long-lasting relationship. This is because both the organisation and its publics are provided with one voice in processes and development of issues or problems. The two-way symmetrical model for communication maintains the organisation's best interests as well as the best interest of its audiences at the forefront in a

fair and balanced way. Through the use of this model, both the organisation and its audiences can collaborate to strengthen the overall ideals of the organisation, leading to greater successes and progress.

Two-way symmetrical communication and Social Media: The worldwide success of social media websites, blogs and interactive online technology has provided organisations with a direct link to stakeholders all the time. Its impact can be seen on a global scale, as activists utilised Facebook in organising the —Arab Spring protests and uprising in the Middle East. Today, websites are used by just about every generation. These various sites provide organisations with the ability to reach new publics and also engage with potential new stakeholders on a daily basis. When an organisation use Facebook on a daily basis, providing interesting content that engages users to take action like make a comment, share a photo, or even click —what happens is that stakeholders are helping the organisation to gain awareness across social media sites, while at the same time, feeling a one-on-one, interactive connection with the organisation in question. Facebook also provides the needed space for organisation’s publics to have a voice in a centralised online location. Currently, the two-way symmetrical model is a part of daily life for public relations practitioners who are managing social media websites.

Grunig (2013) has stated that now more than ever, symmetrical communication is a reality for public relations practitioners regardless of whether or not they are trying to implement it. This suggests that, digital communication can be used to make symmetrical communication fairly easy to practice and, in fact, might make it unavoidable, Grunig (2013) said. —With digital communication, publics have much more control over their sources of information; and organisations have little choice other than to communicate with them symmetrically. At

the same time, public relations practitioners must understand how these platforms work. Social media sites are not simply websites where information can be posted and left to stand on its own. It must be utilised for two-way conversations to take place. Grunig (2013) also cautioned professionals to use these symmetrical communication tools in the right way. He observed that —Too many practitioners still use digital media as a way of dumping information on publics, the symbolic-interpretive approach, and therefore think of social media sites only as a means of disseminating messages, and suggested that, —Instead, they should think of digital media as a way of identifying problems, publics, and issues that require the attention of strategic managers and as a way of engaging in dialogue with publics.

Most digital sites can be used in that way, but there is the fear that popular sites such as Facebook are used most to dump messages and not as interaction. Through the use of Twitter, on-going interactive conversations occur daily between organisations and their publics. In this medium, complaints can be handled and resolved in an immediate fashion, and users discussing the same topics related to a company can also connect with each other through the use of hash tags paired with key words. Twitter gives the public relations practitioner a chance to communicate daily with various stakeholders, while at the same time, provides an avenue for scanning the latest topics and trends, which connects to another facet of the Excellence Theory: environmental scanning.

2.2.3 Excellence Theory

The Excellence theory in Public Relations (Grunig, 1992; Dozier, 1992; Grunig, 2002) identified a set of characteristics of an excellent public relations function. Different researchers (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998; Grunig & Grunig, 1998; Rhee, 2002; Luo & Yi, 2005), out of their research of various organisations have provided consistent support for the

Excellence theory in public relations principles. A need exists for different context study to be conducted to test the excellence theory in public relations and extend its application. The Excellence in public relations theory explained the value of public relations to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics. For an organization to be effective, according to the theory, it must behave in ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of stakeholders as well as of management.

Grunig (1992) suggested that the most effective public relations practice requires excellence in practice. The author described it as Excellent Public Relations. According to him, there are four levels analysis of excellent public relations and they are: The theory states that at the programme level, public relations department should know why, when and how individual communication programmes are implemented. That is, there is a conscious effort to have in place, a public relations plan that is strategically geared towards the attainment of organizational goals. The theory again explains at the departmental level, how the public relations department operates and fits in with other departments and the organisation as a whole. At this level, there is a single or integrated public relations department separate from marketing. The department's head assumes a managerial role and reports directly to top management. The head and those who work under him have academic qualification in public relations or the field of communication are professionals. Two-way symmetric model of communication is also promoted (Grunig, 1992).

A two-way symmetric model of communication is one in which employees are provided mechanisms for dialogue with each other and with supervisors and top managers. Two-way symmetric communication as a result contributes to organizational effectiveness. This model

helps to improve morale of employees are more likely to enhance rather than to constrain the organisation. Two-way symmetric communication is necessary for the organisation to coordinate the behaviour of its relatively autonomous subsystems. Such coordination is necessary for the organisation to be effective. Two-way symmetric model of communication also helps to increase employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. The organizational level also talks about the understanding of and respect given to communication processes and audience feedback by the organisation and its staff. The public relations head has a strong voice within the organisation and attempts are made to promote participative rather than authoritative organizational culture. Effective internal communication is promoted Grunig (1992).

Weaknesses and Strengths of the Excellence Theory: Many scholars have questioned the possibility of the two-way symmetrical model in real-life context. Van der Meiden (1993) observed that the two-way symmetrical model is unrealistic since it suggests that organizations should value the interests of their publics more than those of the organization. Murphy (1991) proposed that the concept of symmetrical communication works along a continuum from pure conflict to pure cooperation, which is based on mixed motives. Leichty (1997) argued that completely collaborative public relations is not feasible in some situations, and pointed out that public relations practitioners' lack of power within an organization further increases the limitation of collaboration. Cameron and his colleagues developed the contingency theory of accommodation, which represent the stance movement of an organization toward a given public at a given time and in a given situation (Cameron et al (2007) and suggests that the true excellence in public relations may result from picking the appropriate point along the continuum that best fits the current need of the organization and its publics (Canel et al (1997).

With the use of LinkedIn, organisations are provided with a more informal platform to reach out to current employees to update them about various news and events. LinkedIn also provides organisations with a way of attracting new employees through engagement and regular updates. Instagram allows the public relations practitioner to take full advantage of the power of symbols in the climate of new media. However, this also highlights Grunig's fear of public relations professionals using social media as a symbolic-interpretive tool rather than an interactive one.

Start-up websites like Concert-oh, a company based in Pittsburgh, allow organisations to host virtual town hall meetings via webcams in which two-way communication can take place in a convenient and open manner. Social media websites and modern technology, therefore, provides organisations with an array of platforms in which relationships can be strengthened and communication can take place anytime and anywhere. Access to an organisation's leaders is just a click away in today's social media-driven world.

Through the use of social media, every stakeholder an organisation works with via the two-way symmetrical model not only has a voice, but one that is very public in that everyone engaged on a social media site will have the ability to view an individual's comments, concerns or complaints. The above facts are, however, accompanied with some unique challenges that social media brings to the public relations practitioner in the midst of the very positive cultivation of two-way symmetrical communication.

One example is posed by the use of blogs. A blog is a medium that is largely dominated by reader comments, suggestions and insights. Blogs provide a way to connect with various audiences on a regular basis, but they also open up an organisation to regular scrutiny and

comments from a wide range of people who can enjoy the anonymity of the Internet. In today's world, majority of people have experienced or witnessed the presence of —trolls online – the anonymous commenters who want nothing more than to trash anything and everything they see online simply to aggravate others. This is why public relations practitioners today must have solid social media policies in place that create a healthy balance *of two-way communication that fosters mutual understanding, and also a policy that protects the organisation from shallow insults that have no merit.*

Grunig (2013) said that public relations practitioners must understand how to use each platform and also must understand that new media is a place for conversation. The world of social media opens the floodgates for two-way communication to take place, and it must be managed by public relations practitioners in a rational and professional manner to uphold the integrity and reputation of their organisations (Grunig, 2013). Grunig (2013) noted a specific successful example of the use of social media in negotiating with the public and engaging in two-way symmetrical communication, saying “I will cite a recent paper by Shannon Bowen that provides an example of how Starbucks has used digital media to engage its publics symmetrically.”

Grunig (2013) said. “Here is a direct quote from her paper with the citation following, “Starbucks provides a classic case in the development of social media and the active engagement of publics. Starbucks was among the first large organisations to take social media to an innovative level by using it to actively conduct research and generate public feedback. The idea page promotes engagement of the public with the organisation, and offers a space in which publics can share ideas as well as discuss topics with each other. The page invites participation with the opening: You know better than anyone else what you want from

Starbucks. So tell us. What's your Starbucks Idea? Revolutionary or simple—we want to hear it. Share your ideas, tell us what you think of other people's ideas and join the discussion. We're here, and we're ready to make ideas happen". By actively inviting participation, the organisation is not only promoting engaged relationships but is also able to use the site as a cost-effective source of research data. The site provides a valuable information, opinion, and attitudinal data freely offered by Starbucks customers. Numerous ideas that originated with Starbucks customers on the website have been launched, from recycled Starbucks cards to eco-friendly cup sleeves.

In addition to the cost savings, publics to engage with Starbucks on the website will, in most cases, have increased knowledge about Starbucks and relationship satisfaction with the organisation resulting in increased brand loyalty. In public relations terms, the —my Starbucks idea campaign creates a win-win scenario (Grunig, 2013).

2.2.4 Systems Models

Spicer (1997) asserts that open systems are controlled by the environment which make them sensitive to various transformations of which must either be accepted or otherwise. It is, however, important to note that a system affects and is also affected by the environment in which it operates, and also monitors their environment to predict any possible and expected changes in order to develop some means to be able to forestall any unforeseen external occurrences. Closed systems normally react to combat new reforms. According to Theaker (2001), the first distinction systems theorists make is that between closed and open systems though it is quite impossible for one to find one in any social systems. The application of systems theory to the study of organisations is credited with shifting the focus of organisational study from one that centres largely on the internal workings of the organisation

to one that should focus on the interdependence of an organisation and its environment, Spicer (1997).

On the other hand, Berger and Chaffe (1987) likened a system to a family where the members of the family are the objects of the system, their individual characteristics being the attributes, and their interactions, the relationships among the members. They also contend that since families exist in a social and cultural environment, there is likely to be mutual influence between the family and its environment and this absolutely indicates how Ghanaian organisations and their stakeholders are compared with family members who are not isolated but live in continuous support with each other.

This means that where there is cordial relationship between an organisation and its publics or stakeholders, the constant interaction that exists between the two makes it easier for issues of mutual interest to be discussed towards the mutual benefit of the two parties. Each party in this regard is free to raise issues that might not augur well for their relationship, the other party accepts in good faith, they develop a conducive platform for discussion, and amicable solutions are identified to solve the problems or challenges.

Gibson and Hodgetts (1986), also see the system perspective of communication theories as a paradigm that basically deals with the dynamics of communication between an organisation and its environment. Since research in public relations practice is very important, and since the systems theory is about communication between an organisation and its publics to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and its publics, this study sought to confirm or refute the perception with respect to whether indeed

the two-way symmetrical communication process exists in public relations departments in public organisations in Ghana.

2.2.5 Assumptions of Systems Models

Banathy (1973) has indicated that the fundamental assumptions of the systems theory are firmly rooted in the underlining philosophy such as what things are, and how things are or work. This implies that our beliefs about what the world is will determine greatly how we see it and act within it. In connection with this, the way we see things and act will determine our beliefs about its nature. In this regard, systems theorists believe that the world essentially consists of things and processes of which these things are only 'stills' out of the moving picture, and that the human mind is immanent and not transcendent.

Additionally, Banathy (1991) also believes that any emerging system that has the appropriate complexity of casual and energy relationship is capable of showing mutual characteristics, comparing and responding to differences, processing information, being self-corrective, as well as ensuring that no part of an internally interactive system can exercise unilateral control over other parts of the system.

2.2.6 Critique of Systems Models

Littlejohn (1996) has highlighted the argument made by critics that the system theory is more confusing than the assertion of integration proponents place on it. This criticism has the notion that if all circumstances are through one particular set of system principles, there would be no criteria to measure why one should be different from other things. Some critics also question as to whether all systems approach is a theory since they believe the theory has no explanatory power but only provides little basis for understanding why certain things

occur the way they do. Others such as Cutlip et al. (2000) are also unsure as to whether the theory has the ability to generate research or not since they are of the view that the theory has not produced sufficient empirical research. There is however, the view that new angles to the claim have been provided.

2.2.7 Critique of Systems as the Dominant Public Relations Paradigm

Critiques of the dominant paradigm according to Grunig (1992) signify the growing trend of public relations as a discipline. Botan (1993) and his colleagues have argued over and over again that the idealistic system-based, two-way symmetrical model of public relations does not consider issues of organisational power, and that the two-way symmetrical model still incorporates power disadvantages that are not overcome through dialogue and mutual exchange. This assertion maintains that the burden and control regarding whether a dialogue is developed or not depends on the organisation since the organisation can decide not to dialogue with stakeholder groups in any way. These controversies appeared to be quite ridiculous for reasons having to do with the fact that consensus building does not depend on unilateralism which assumes the approval of the parties involved.

It is important to note, however, that a party needs the services of the other and vice versa and so must not show any sign of superiority over the other since doing that brings about its own repercussions. Furthermore, if an organisation for instance, resolves not to be lucid, and exerts power in dealing with its publics, the relationship ceases to be a symmetric one, and not in consonance with systems thinking. Pearson (1990) has also indicated that the systems theory has an inherent managerial bias that inadvertently excludes both employees and stakeholders, while Murphy (1991) argues that because symmetry is implemented on behalf

of management and because it seeks to minimise differences in search of consensus, it tends to discourage innovation but encourages custom and tradition.

2.3 Overview of Public Relations Practice

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, in the United States alone, Public Relations is a multibillion-dollar business practiced by 158,000 professionals and the employment of public relations specialists is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2012 (Seitel, 2007) . Therefore, the need for effective public relations in an increasingly competitive business environment should spur demand for public relations specialists in organisations of all types and sizes.

Public relations practice as a field has grown immeasurably and today, it is clearly a grown industry (Seitel, 2007). Having seen how the practice of public relations look like currently, it is prudent to trace the profession down memory lane.

Public relations has been in existence for thousands of years. Public relations became a profession in 1903 as Ivy Lee, who is recognized as one of the founding fathers of modern public relations, defined public relations, saying “Public relations is the actual relationship of the company to the people and that relationship involves more than talk”.

The company must act by performing good deeds. Today, although a generally accepted definition of public relations still escapes practitioners, there is a clearer understanding of the field. According to Seitel (2007), one of the most ambitious searches for a universal definition was commissioned in 1975 by the Foundation of Public Relations Research and Education. Sixty-five public relations leaders’ participated in the study, which analyzed 472

different definitions and offered the following 88-word sentence: “Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools” (p. 4).

According to the Mexican Statement (1978) as stated in quote, “Public relation is defined as the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences; counselling the organization’s leaders; and implementing planned programmes of actions which serve both the organization’s and public’s interest”. In the definitions of public relations given above, it is seen that public relations assists an organisation and its publics to adapt to each other mutually. The key word used in both definitions is that public relations is a management function. Public relations must report to and be part of top management if it is to work to the benefit of an organization. Public relations must also serve as a sincere tool to management and its advices to management must be unfiltered. For public relations to function like what has been stated above, in most situations, is easier said than done because many public relations departments in several organizations are combined with either marketing, advertising or even legal departments.

According to Seitel (2007), the functions of public relations comprises writing, media relations, planning, counselling, researching, publicity, marketing communications, community relations, consumer relations, employee relations, government affairs, investor

relations, public affairs and issue management and website development. This is a list of what public relations practitioners do and also provide all-round general communication counsel to management and publics. Janice Sherline, a professor of public relations, gave a description of public relations as “the management of communications between an organisation and all entities that have a direct or indirect relationship with the organisation, i.e., its publics” (Seitel, 2007, p.6) Every organisation has its own publics it deals with and it is one important responsibility of the organisation to build good lasting relationships with its publics.

2.4 Concept of Social Media

Social media is really a set of technology platforms that have ‘branded’ and ‘re-engineered’ what the Internet could always do, which is allow people to share opinion. Social relevance determines the online reputation of an individual or organisation. Open access, means carte blanche communication on products, brands and services, which can of course be good or awful. Social media encompasses the ability for people to communicate more easily, sharing ideas, videos and other materials which might be from elsewhere or their own user-generated content. Social networking connects people via interests, likes, common factors and opinions to form like-minded communities.

Social media are “forms of electronic communication (as web sites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos) (Cortesi, 2013). A closely related phrase is social network site (SNS), which is defined as “a networked communication platform in which participants (1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that can consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; (2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (3) can consume,

produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (Gwenn & Clarke-Perarson, 2011).

In this research the terms “social media” and “social network sites” are used interchangeably. Some of the most popular SNS include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google+, Tumblr, Instagram, Flickr, Vine, Meetup, Ask.fm, meet me, Snapchat, vk.com, Tagged, Classmates, MySpace, YouTube, Picasa, the Student Room, the Math Forum, CyWorld, LunarStorm, WhatsApp, Skype, Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, and so on (Lenhart et al, 2010).

2.5 Social Media in Ghana

Just about five years ago, Busy Internet, West Africa’s largest Internet safe, located in Accra, had a hub with 100 computers and Ghanaians from all walks of life would pay for access over their speedy connection. However the growth of broadband and mobile internet has brought the internet closer to many, and fewer people need now go to any café to surf the net (BiztechAfrica.com). According to the Measuring the Information Society 2012 report, between 2010 and 2012, Internet usage moved up from 10 to 12 %. Mobile broadband penetration surged from seven per cent in 2010 to 23 percent in 2011. Ghana ranked 117th out of a 155 countries, an improvement by 4 places from 2010. No other African country recorded such an improvement for Internet access as well as usage. Today, Ghana has over 3.5 million Internet users, representing 14.1 % of the population (Internetworldstats.com).

Mobile technology is allowing access to the web than ever before. It is empowering more and more people by reaching areas that were previously disconnected. Mobile technology is not only expanding access, it is also pushing the frontiers of what is traditionally considered a

computer. In Ghana 60 percent of the population own mobile handsets, while 29 percent own handsets with Internet connectivity Calandro & Wang (2013). Today, mobile handsets come equipped with fast 3G internet, video and audio recorders and offer loads of software that allow editing and publishing of digital material. Mobile Networks in Ghana like MTN currently offer services that allow text messages to be transformed into Facebook posts. At present (2015) Ghana has over 1,630,420 users active on Facebook making it the most visited website in Ghana with Twitter at 15th on the list but ranks as the third most visited social media site after Facebook and YouTube (www.internetworldstats.com).

2.6 Public Relations and Social Media

Previously in the 1980s, information channels could be split into two forms: mass communication and micro communication. Mass communication included newspapers, magazines, television, radios and other information sources shared with large groups of people in an asymmetrical or unbalanced exchange. Micro-communication on the other hand tended to deal with exchanges between individual persons and thus, was more symmetrical in its exchange (Phillips & Young, 2009).

In this current online space, public relations practice has become more transparent because communication is handled in the spotlight (that is, on the internet where everyone has democratic access). This has been facilitated by the rise of social media (Breakenridge, 2012). Social media includes mobile and web-based technologies that construct highly engaging arenas by which individuals and communities share, create, dialogue, and adjust user-generated content (Kietzmann et al, 2011). Breakenridge (2012) notes that “when social media meets PR, communication unites with technology” (p. 1). Social media causes content to be democratized, and demands a change of attitude to unite communications with

collaborative technology. Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) assert that social media or social networking, such as Facebook, has afforded organisations the opportunity of engaging their stakeholders in real-time communication and information exchange.

Despite the surge in popularity of social media, studies that explore the usage of social media for public relations remain few (Briones et al, 2011). Public relations, defined by Grunig and Hunt (as cited in Kamerer & Morris, 2011), is an organisation's attempt to manage the communication between itself and its publics. Communication by a single person or organisation to thousands of other individuals has been heightened by the advent of internet-based social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009) undertook a content analysis of 275 non-profit organisation profiles on Facebook to assess how they used social networking sites to promote their organisational mission and programmes.

Among others, they sought to answer the question of how non-profit organisations incorporate relationship development strategies into their Facebook profiles. They found that the non-profits had not integrated most of the numerous interactive Facebook applications on their profile. They failed to capitalise on the interactivity of social networking, and consequently Facebook. They also rarely distributed organisational news.

McCorkindale (2010) also conducted a quantitative content analysis of 2008 Fortune 500 companies Facebook pages to assess how they used Facebook. The study analysed 55 Facebook pages to determine what was posted or published about the company. Among other results, the findings from the study indicated that few companies were using Facebook as a channel for disseminating information. Moreover, the communication on the Facebook page

was generally one-sided, resembled a monologue and thus, neglected the two-way, relationship building potential of Facebook. McCorkindale (2010) concluded that companies in the Fortune 50 were not taking full advantage of Facebook and needed to incorporate relationship building strategies on their social networking sites.

Furthermore, Briones et al (2011) conducted a study by interviewing forty individuals from the American Red Cross to explore how social media is used in communication with key publics. The study sought to investigate how two-way dialogue had been accomplished primarily through Facebook and Twitter. The research showed evidence that the study's participants were aware of the importance of social media, and how it could be used to build stronger relationships with publics such as volunteers and the community. It seems that most studies recognise the relationship-building capacity of social media. This can also be applied to the four companies of this study, as they also communicate or dialogue with various key publics, using Facebook. In effect, dialogue is seemingly necessary in an organisation-public relation.

2.7 Impact of Social Media on the Public Relations Practice

Galloway (2005) puts forward that conventional techniques of public relations are being undermined by the mobile nature of new media and that this requires public relations practitioners to rethink how they relate to publics. Internet news services are not just relying on the news wire services but turning increasingly to other places for raw materials. Public relations practitioners would be aware that 'transcripts, reports and budgets are regularly being placed on the Web, either by organizations themselves or by citizens trying to hold those organizations to account' (Stephens 2007, p. 35).

Consumers expect instant updates in their inboxes when something happens. Public relations practitioners may be under more pressure to produce this instant content. The implications for public relations practitioners of needing to prepare material faster than ever before include being able to produce what is required almost instantaneously and with the required level of accuracy; having processes in place that can get required priority clearances for materials to be released; and, having the technology at hand to directly distribute or upload what is being disseminated. These factors may put pressure on the public relations practitioner and the team with which they work but may also pressure the relationships they have with colleagues or more senior staff, in particular the CEO, and his or her minders.

It can also add pressure to the relationship with the Information Technology (IT) team if direct upload to the corporate website is not available to the public relations practitioners. In-house public relations practitioners may need to form stronger alliances with IT departments and may have to engage with the organisation's legal advisers in order to refine content clearance procedures when content is demanded instantaneously.

Another area of practice that new media has changed in the past decade is that of events. People attending events are being exposed to more and more 'bells and whistles' as new media technology gives the wherewithal to create spectacle to an ever increasing number of people. The ubiquitous digital projector and PowerPoint presentation have become baseline requirements for the most basic events, and access to the Internet to enable presenters to integrate online elements is now almost essential. Practitioners working on events may need to manage expectations from their employing organisations, their consumers and stakeholders, including sponsors, that the level of spectacle and gadgetry provided at one event will be replicated or augmented.

If new media are to be embraced, public relations practitioners will need more technical skills in areas such as web publishing, new software operation, online security, search engine optimisation, web analytics and web trend analysis software operation. They will need enhanced online information architecture skills and skills related to managing an increasing amount of complex information digitally. Writing for cross-media delivery will continue as a major component of practice but the demands for multimedia elements will bring even more challenges in this area. Since late 2006 there have been several trade press articles on how the media release is beginning to evolve to include multimedia elements. The past several years has seen an increased use of multimedia and interactive content in news releases and leading newswire services are fully equipped to distribute such material (Nowland, 2006).

With the trend towards multimedia news releases, the demands to have multimedia elements available for inclusion in such releases will grow. Public relations practitioners will be responsible for either coordinating production, or actually producing this material, and the budgets and skills bases of public relations units may need to be reviewed to accommodate these new demands. This trend may be setting up new expectations for content provision that smaller or non-profit organisations may not be able to easily meet and this has the potential to diminish the share of voice that less well-funded organisations receive. There is also the need to consider whether target publics have access to new media technologies such as the Internet which becomes an issue when communication strategies target publics without such access due to geographic or socio-economic factors (Badaracco, 2007).

All public relations practitioners will need to keep abreast of emerging media and many may already be undertaking public relations planning, implementation and evaluation in unfamiliar media areas. PR News Online started their PR Digital Report earlier this year and

is now regularly covering stories on issues such as blogging, online communities and podcasting. Only a few years back it would have seemed unlikely to many practitioners to have to plan campaign components to embrace website possibilities such as YouTube and My Space but it is evident that many organisations and now, even election campaigns, are doing just that. In 2003, Galushkin suggested that SMS text messaging should be considered by organisations as a means to enhance internal communications given that spatial and temporal constraints had been weakened or removed, and new communication structures and forms had developed. Less than three years later, during the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing, SMS was used extensively by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for communicating with tens of thousands of census employees. (C. Verey, Media and Public Affairs Unit, Australian Bureau of Statistics, personal communication, 26 April 2007).

The academic literature indicates a range of challenges ahead for public relations practitioners. They may need to design virtual experiences that stimulate feelings as connectedness, involvement, appreciation and meaningfulness (Galloway 2005). Serious consideration must be given to whether blogs are part of campaigns as there are indications that they could be effective at establishing and maintaining organisation-public relationships (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007).

Already the cautionary tales related to blogging are evident in the trade literature. A public relations firm was discovered to be ghost-writing a blog on behalf of Walmart customers in the USA causing embarrassment to the company (Holmes, 2006). Sony was also caught out by faking a blog which was supposed to have been written by a boy wanting a Playstation 2 for Christmas; this is known as ‘flogging’—a term coined in the information technology media for fake blogging (Laycock, 2006).

Practitioners will need to be able to analyse how new technologies can aide or hinder traditional public relations roles like public information dissemination, media relations, reputation management, stakeholder relations, marketing communications, investor relations, and issues and crisis management. Practitioners can draw on research to inform their practice. An excellent example of this is Taylor & Kent's (2007) work in articulating six best practices of mediated crisis communications. Taylor & Kent (2007) states that the use of the internet in crisis communications is a logical one in that websites are one controlled channel through which organisations can communicate directly with the media and the public. Through the website an organisation can tell its "side of the story, reduce the uncertainty of consumers, address multiple stakeholder needs, and work with government agencies that specialise in public safety" (Taylor & Kent 2007, p. 146).

Public relations practitioners, as the in-house experts on communication, are likely to be advising senior management on these issues and, in some cases, actively engaging in implementing new media initiatives. The practitioner will need to manage the organisation's expectation that all traditional media will be fully serviced, as has been the case in the past, as well as integrating many aspects of new media.

Additional work generated by these expectations may need to be undertaken without additional personnel or budget allocations. Finding time, funds and support for upgrading skills and engaging in professional development experiences may continue to be challenging. Turf wars may develop with other work areas in the organisation such as IT, marketing and sales, customer relations, call centres and others. This is due to these areas seeing a range of advantages, including the advancement of careers and the control of information and technology, in managing communication activities in a new media age. Turf wars can also

arise from public relations asserting management responsibility for areas of practice that traditionally may have resided within other areas such as IT. These internal relationships need to be carefully managed as encroachment from management information systems departments can lead public relations practitioners having a lack of control in managing Web sites (Pavlik & Dozier, cited in Porter & Sallott, 2003).

Research has shown that public relations practitioners who embrace new technologies such as blogging are perceived within organisations as having more power, in that they are willing to be leaders in the industry and use new tools to better reach target publics (Porter et al, 2007). Some practitioners may find themselves working with key organisational decision-makers who are not abreast of emerging media or, at the other end of the continuum, are working with decision-makers who are very aware of the new media developments and want to embrace every new one without considering the full implications of doing so (Porter et al, - 2007).

2.8 Related Works

A number of research studies have been conducted to examine the transition of public relations from traditional practices to contemporary ones in the social media age. The majority of these studies aimed to answer a common set of questions regarding the use of social media for corporate communications (Matthews, 2010).

Even though public relations practitioners believed in the use of new media in promoting an organization's image, they had attached little or no importance to the potential ability of websites to be used as tools for enhancing two- way communication with their publics (Seo et al, 2009). Similarly, Avery (et al 2010) also claimed that public relations practitioners did not

recognize social media as the most important source of information for their publics in either crisis or routine situations. Contrary to Avery et al, 2010's assertion, Wingley & Zhang (2011) found that nearly half of the respondents in his study said they have incorporated social media such as Twitter and Facebook into their crisis plans. The assertions of Wingley & Zhang (2011) indicates that the public relations practitioners studied came to the understanding that social media has become an important factor in how crises were reported on by the media.

The growing popularity of social media is becoming evident among users of the internet (Kim & Johnson, 2011). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) note that "according to a Forrester Research, 75% of internet surfers around the world used 'Social Media' in the second quarter of 2008 by joining social networks" (p. 59). This suggests that social media use has become a global phenomenon. Social media involves the use mobile and web-based technologies to design highly interactive platforms by which individuals and communities share, create, converse, and adjust user-generated content (Kietzmann et al, 2011).

User-generated content (UGC) is enabled by Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) – a second generation of internet-based applications that can directly engage consumers in the creative process by both creating and disseminating information through cooperative writing, content sharing and social networking (Thackeray et al, 2008). Currently, there is a rich and deeply varied ecology of social media websites, such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter which differ in terms of scope and functionality, with Facebook being a major player (Kietzmann et al, 2011).

Facebook is a social networking site, which was founded in 2004 and is primarily owned by Mark Zuckerberg (Griffith & Liyanage, 2008). It was designed to make the world a more accessible and connected place. People use Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family, to explore what is going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them. In its statistics, Facebook (2013) claimed that 655million internet surfers actively used Facebook on a daily average as of March 2013. In addition, 751 million also actively used Facebook mobile products on a monthly basis as of March 31, 2013.

Overall, Facebook claimed 1.11 billion monthly active users as of March 2013. It appears that Facebook is experiencing exponential growth within the social media arena. Public relations on the other hand is seen by Lattimore et al (2004) as a leadership and management role that aids the realisation of organisational goals, definition of corporate philosophy as well as the facilitation of organisational change. In essence, Public Relations ensure that the communication with both internal and external publics to ensure continuous harmony between organisational objectives and public expectation.

Public relations practitioners formulate, implement and evaluate strategies that enhance positive relationships and favourable image with their key publics or stakeholders of the organization. The relationship that exists between an organisation and its public is called organisation-public relationship (OPR) in this study. Public relations practitioners are shifting to social media as the lines between online and offline promotion becomes blurry. Social media afford public relations practitioners the opportunity of reaching out to and engaging with their publics in conversation (Eyrich et al, 2008; Hanna et al, 2011).

2.9.1 Organisational Profile of Ghana Water Company Limited

Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) is a utility company, fully owned by the state. The company is responsible for potable water supply to all urban communities in Ghana. GWCL currently operates eighty-eight (88) urban water supply systems throughout the country. Average production is about eight hundred and seventy-one thousand, four hundred and ninety-six cubic meters (871,496m³) per day (192 million gallons per day).

Present potable water demand is estimated at one million, one hundred and thirty-one thousand, eight hundred and eighteen point eighteen cubic meters (1,131,818m³) per day (249 million per day). Urban water supply coverage is therefore about seventy-seven percent (77%). With a staff strength of three thousand, four hundred and seventy-six (3,476), GWCL serves five hundred and fifty thousand, six hundred and fifty-four (550,654) customers, seventy-four percent (74%) of which are metered and twenty-six percent (26%) unmetered.

Governance Structure: The Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing is responsible for formulating water supply policy, overseeing operations of GWCL, sourcing for funding from external support agencies and coordinating sector investment plans. Under the general direction of the Ministry, GWCL is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors which has overall responsibility for the setting of sector policies and control of corporate programmes. The day-to-day affairs of the Company are managed by a Managing Director and two Deputy Managing Directors, one in charge of Operations and the other in charge of Finance and Administration. The three leaders are assisted by Chief Managers, 14 at the Head Office and 15 at the regional level. The 15 Regional Chief Managers are in turn assisted by District Managers who supervise and control the 75 districts of GWCL throughout the country.

Chief Managers at the Head Office are individually responsible for the various departments they lead. These departments are as follows: Project Planning and Development, Human Resources and Administrative Services, Legal Services, Corporate Planning, Geographical Information System, Finance, Materials, Audit, Business Development, Water Resources, Water Quality Assurance, Land and Assets, Commercial and Public Relations.

VISION: To be a world class utility company.

MISSION: We are committed to meeting the increasing demand for better service delivery through efficient management of our core business of production and distribution of potable water and customer management in urban areas of Ghana.

CORE VALUES

- Quality and excellent customer service
- Urgency in service delivery
- Continuous improvement and innovation.
- Health care and safety of stakeholders
- High ethical and professional standards

CORE BUSINESS

- Abstraction, treatment and supply of water to urban communities in Ghana
- Urban water sector planning and development
- Investment planning
- Sector financial management

- Contracting out the design, construction, rehabilitation and expansion of existing as well as new water supply infrastructure;
- Assets Management

3.9.2 Organisational Profile of Electricity Company of Ghana

The Electricity Company of Ghana is a limited liability Company wholly owned by the Government of Ghana. The Electricity Company of Ghana Limited (ECG) was incorporated under the Companies Code, 1963 (Act 179) in February 1997. It began as the Electricity Department on 1st April 1947 responsible for distribution power in the entire country and later became the Electricity Division in 1962. It was subsequently converted into the Electricity Corporation of Ghana by (NLCD 125) in 1967. In 1987, the Northern Electricity Department (NED) was established under the Volta River Authority (VRA), to take over from ECG, the responsibility of electric power distribution in Northern part of Ghana. Since then ECG has been responsible for distribution of electricity in six political/ administrative regions in southern Ghana namely, Ashanti, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Volta and Western Region.

The first government-sponsored public electricity supply in the country commenced in the year 1914 at Sekondi. It was operated by the Railway Administration which extended supply to Takoradi in 1928. Meanwhile, the Public Works Department had commenced a limited Direct Current (DC) supply in Accra during the year 1922, this was immediately followed by a large Alternating Current (AC) project which commenced on 1st November, 1924. A small plant consisting of three horizontal single cylinder oil-powered engines was installed in Koforidua in 1925 and opened by the Honorable William Omsby-Gore on 1st April 1926. Also in 1926, work commenced on the task of providing electric lighting and power to

Kumasi. A restricted evening supply commenced in May 1927, and a power station was brought into full operation on 1st October 1927. In the same year DC supply was installed at Winneba but this was subsequently changed to AC by extending an existing supply from Swedru. During the period 1929-30, a limited electricity supply was extended to Tamale until a new AC plant was installed in 1938. The next power station to be established was Cape Coast which came into being in 1932. Subsequent to its takeover by the Electricity Department from the Public Works and Railways on 1st April, 1947. A power station at Swedru was commissioned in 1948. This was followed by the installation of generating plants at Oda, Dunkwa and Bolgatanga in 1948. On 27th May, 1949, an electricity supply was made available at Nsawam through the building of an 11000 volt overhead transmission line from Accra. The Keta supply which was included in the programme was delayed by staff difficulties and was not commissioned until 1955.

The Tema power station was commissioned in 1956 with a 3x650 kW generating set. The Ho power station followed in 1957. From 1961-64, the Tema Station was extended to a maximum capacity of 35,298 kW, thus, making it probably the biggest single diesel-powered generating station in Africa. It is also on record that in 1963 the Electricity Division brought into operation the first 161,000 volts transmission system in Ghana, which was used to carry power from the Tema Power Station. At its peak in 1965, about 75 percent of the power was used in Accra.

Functions

1. To transmit, supply and distribute electricity.
2. To purchase electrical energy in bulk (from VRA) or any other supplier for distribution.

3. To construct, reconstruct, install, assemble, repair, maintain, operate or remove sub-transmission stations, electrical appliances, fittings and installations.
4. To execute and supervise national electrification programmes on behalf of Government.
5. To carry out any other activity incidental or conducive to the attainment of the objectives above.

Vision: To be among the leading Electricity distribution companies in Africa by 2020

Mission: To provide quality, reliable and safe electricity services to support the economic growth and development of Ghana

Core Values

P-Professionalism

O-Openness

W-Wellbeing

E-Excellence

R-Reliability

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND ORGANISATIONAL PROFILES

3.1 Introduction

The methodology concerned itself with the methods and tools of data collection for this study. It will also outlined the types and sources of data that were collected.

3.2 Research Design

According to Aaker, Kumar & Day (2001), a research design acts as a blueprint that directs the researcher on what methodology to employ in order to achieve the objectives of the research study. This study adopted the case study research approach. Yin (2009) defines the case study research approach as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

According to Yin (2009) case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasis detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Researchers have used the case study research approach for many years across a variety of disciplines. Social scientists, in particular, have made wide use of this research approach to examine contemporary real life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extensions of methods (Yin, 2009). The study used the case study to conduct a comparative study of social media and public relations practice in Ghana using the Ghana Water Company and the Electricity Company of Ghana Limited.

3.3 Research Population

The population for this study was made up of all Public Relations Officers of the two organisations at the Headquarters and the Greater Accra Regional offices. It also included top management of these organisations. These groups were selected because they have the characteristics and knowledge that the researcher needed in answering the research questions.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample size for this study was eighty (80) and was made up of the following:

- i. 10 Management members of GWCL
- ii. 10 Management members of ECG
- iii. 30 PROs of GWCL
- iv. 30PROs of ECG

3.5 Sampling Technique

In order to select the above sample size, the researcher used both the purposive and convenience sampling methods. Using the purposive sampling, the researcher selected management members and PROs GWCL and ECG.

3.6 Types and Sources of Data

The study made use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data used was gathered from responses from the respondents whilst the secondary data was sourced from previous research work, annual reports of GWCL and ECG, websites among others. All materials used have been well referenced. The data collected was analyzed and presented with the help of graphs, tables etc.

3.7 Data Collection Tool

The researcher used a questionnaire as the data collection tool for this study. A questionnaire is a set of systematically structured questions used by a researcher to get needed information from respondents. Questionnaires have been termed differently, including surveys, schedules, indexes/indicators, profiles, studies, batteries, tests, checklists, scales, inventories, forms, inter alia. They are... “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (Brown 2001). A questionnaire may be self-administered, posted or presented in an interview format. A questionnaire may include check lists, attitude scales, projective techniques, rating scales and a variety of other research methods. As an important research instrument and a tool for data collection, a questionnaire has its main function as measurement (Oppenheim, 1992).

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The following were the data collection procedures:

- **Stage One:** A draft questionnaire was developed bearing in mind the research objectives and the research questions.
- **Stage Two:** The second stage was the pre-testing of the draft questionnaire for the study. After the pre-testing, the researcher realised that, the questionnaire was good to collect the needed responses/data from the sample size.
- **Stage Three:** The third stage saw to the distribution of the questionnaires to the sample size. The retrieval of the filled questionnaires from the sample size took place here. The filled questionnaire were grouped and coded.

- **Stage Four:** At this stage, the responses from the questionnaire were analyzed and with the help of statistical tools such as charts, tables among others, the data gathered were presented with an in-depth analysis.

3.9 Treatment and Presentation and Analysis of Data

All filled questionnaires from the field were collected, grouped and coded. The responses were analysed using the Microsoft excel software vis-à-vis the research objectives. The analysed data was presented with the help of graphs, tables etc. Using the descriptive analysis, the data was analysed providing in-depth analysis and comparing the analysis with the literature reviewed in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This study was conducted to understand social media and public relations practice in Ghana, a comparative study of Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG). Data obtained have been presented and analysed below.

4.2 Demographic Data

4.2.1 Category of Respondents

The sample size of eighty (80) representing 100% of respondents who took part in the study was made up of ten (10) management members of Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and thirty (30) Public Relations Officers of GWCL Headquarters. The sample size also had ten (10) management members of the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) and thirty (30) Public Relations Officers of ECG Headquarters. Figure 1 below illustrates the category of the respondents who took part in the study.

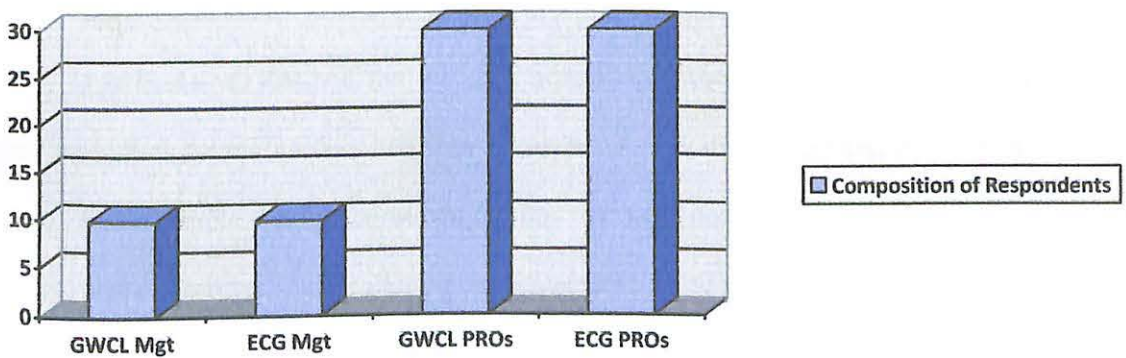


Figure 1: Category of Respondents

Source: Field Data, 2017

4.2.2 Characteristics of Respondents

The following were the characteristics of the 80 respondents who took part in the study:

Gender of Respondents: Out of the 80 respondents, 34 research respondents representing 43% were females with the remaining 46 being males. They represented 57% of the research population.

Age Range: Twenty nine respondents were aged between 35-39 years and they presented 36% of the research population. A set of 18 respondents, representing 22% of the research population were aged 40-44years. Fifteen respondents were aged 45 to 49 years and they represented 19% of the research population. Ten respondents, representing 13% were aged between 30-34 years with the remaining 8 respondents being aged 50 years and above. They represented 10% of the research population.

Marital Status: Forty seven (47) respondents out of the entire research population of 80, were married and they represented 59%. Twenty five (25) were single, representing 31% of the research population. The remaining 8 respondents were divorced and they represented 10% of the research population.

Educational Qualification: Out of the 80 respondents who took part in the study, 43 respondents were first degree holders and they represented 54% of the research population. Twenty one (21) respondents (representing 26% of the research population) were MBA/Masters' degree holders. The remaining 16 respondents were Diploma holders and they were made up of 20% of the research population.

4.3 Main Findings

The findings of this research were broadly based on four key research objectives. The first objective was to identify the social media platforms which the two organisations have signed

unto and how active they are on these platforms. The study's second objective was to understand how social media is being used by the two organisations in terms of their PR functions. The third objective of the study was to compare the benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice among the two organisations. Lastly, the finally research objective was to identify the challenges that comes with using social media for PR functions.

4.3.1 Objective 1: Social media platforms that ECG and GWC are active on

4.3.2 Social Media Platforms for PR

The respondents were asked to list three social media platforms that can be used for Public Relations (PR) activities. The responses from the respondents have been presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Social Media Platforms for PR

Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	47	59
Twitter	25	31
Linkedin	8	10
Total	80	100

Source: Field Data, 2017

Responses from Table 1 indicate that, the three main social media platforms used are Facebook (47 respondents, representing 59%), Twitter (25 respondents, representing 31%) and Linkedin (8 respondents, representing 10%).

This finding is corroborated by a study conducted by Kietzmann et al (2011). They noted that, currently, there is a rich and deeply varied ecology of social media websites, such as

LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter which differ in terms of scope and functionality, with Facebook being a major player (Kietzmann et al, 2011).

4.3.3 Activeness on Social Media

The respondents were asked to indicate how active their organisation is on Facebook and Twitter. The 40 respondents from ECG were very emphatic that their organisation was active on Facebook and Twitter and they indicated very active. They represented 50% of the research population. The other 40 respondents from GWCL were divided between inactive and active. Twenty Three (23) respondents from GWCL stated that, their Facebook and Twitter platforms were active with the remaining seventeen (17) noted that, the Facebook and Twitter platforms are not active.

4.3.4 Visit to Social Media Platforms

The researcher wanted to know how often the respondents visit these social media platforms of their organisations. A majority of 48 respondents, representing 60% noted that, they visit the social media platforms weekly. A set of 28 respondents stated that, they visit the social media platforms daily and they represented 35%. The remaining 4 respondents stated that, they visit the social media platforms, monthly. They represented 5% of the research population. Figure 2 captures the data.

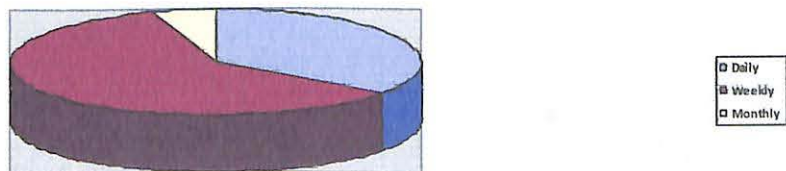


Figure 2: Visit to Social Media Platforms

Source: Field Data, 2017

4.4 Objective 2: Social Media platforms that are used for PR functions

4.4.1 Kind of Information posted on Social Media Platforms

The researcher asked the respondents to indicate that kind of information that are posted on these social media platforms. A large majority of 57 respondents noted that, Public Announcement is the main information that are posted on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. They represented 71% of the research population. A set of 14 respondents stated that, the kind of information posted on the social media platforms are Maintenance Schedules and they represented 18% of the research population. Five respondents (representing 6%) said the information posted on the social media platform is about New Service Tariffs and the remaining 4 respondents (representing 5%) settle on Energy Safety Tips. This has been captured in Figure 3.

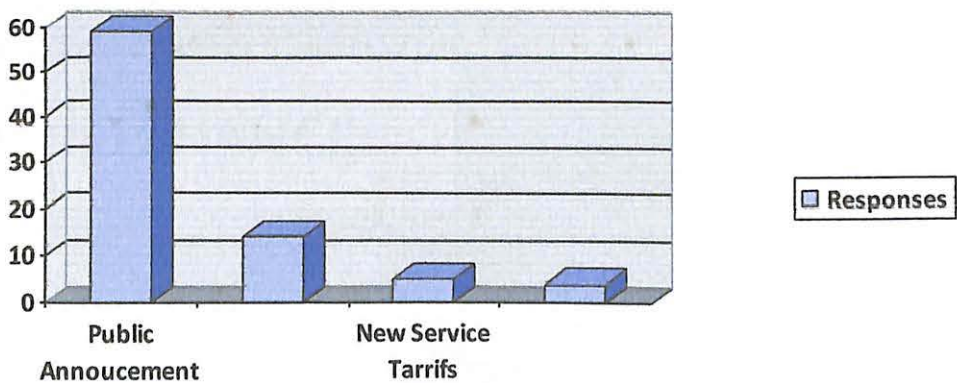


Figure 3: Kind of Information posted on Social Media Platforms

Source: Field Data, 2017

This finding is supported by a study by Breakenridge (2012), who noted that, in this current online space, public relations practice has become more transparent because communication

is handled in the spotlight (that is, on the internet where everyone has democratic access). This has been facilitated by the rise of social media.

4.4.2 Social Media and PR Functions

The researcher wanted to know if any of the two organisations used the social media platforms to receive complaints, provide feedback to customers, communicate issues to customers and send information to customers. Respondents from both organisations indicated that, they actually undertake these PR functions using their social media platforms. However, it was clear that, the social media platforms of ECG had several evidences to show on its social media platforms as against GWCL. Below are samples/evidence of these PR activities on both ECG and GWCL’s social media platforms



Figure 4: Sample ECG poster on social media platforms

GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED

ADVERTISER'S ANNOUNCEMENT
GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED BEGINS ELECTRONIC BILLING OF CUSTOMERS

In our bid to serve the public better, the Management of the Ghana Water Company limited, wishes to inform our cherished customers that, it is making a transition from Paper Bill delivery to electronic-billing (e-bills) through SMS and or Emails. As a result, SMS were sent to Customers in the following regions to validate their records;

- Greater Accra
- Central
- Ashanti
- Western

If you are a customer in the above listed regions and have still not received any SMS from GWCL, kindly report to the nearest GWCL district office and update or issue your customer details or call the call centre. (Numbers provided below)

These Include;

- > Customer Name
- > Customer Accounts Number
- > Customer Phone number and or email address
- > Other relevant information

Management wishes to inform our cherished Customers that, the GWCL will begin sending e-bills concurrently with Paper bills from March 2017 and gradually cease delivering that of the paper bills. Customers are as a matter of urgency, expected to cooperate to ensure a smooth transition.

Management of GWCL wishes to inform customers that, data collection is still on-going and wish to request of customers to be supportive by providing the above stated details when the GWCL conspicuously identified Meter Readers visit their premises.

For enquiries or complaints, please contact GWCL's Call Centre on the following phone numbers:

1700: (SMS only)

☎ 055 5123393 or 055 5155524 whatsapp only

☎ 0800 40000 Toll-free line
(Vodafone mobile and land lines only)

☎ **030 221 8240** **020 738 5089**
☎ **020 738 5087** **020 738 5090**
☎ **020 738 5088** **030 393 5419**

Ghana Water ... at your service

Figure 5: Sample ECG poster on social media platforms

Supporting this finding is a study conducted by Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) who asserted that, that social media, such as Facebook, has afforded organisations the opportunity of engaging their stakeholders in real-time communication and information exchange.

Further supporting this finding is a study by Briones et al (2011) conducted a study by interviewing forty individuals from the American Red Cross to explore how social media is used in communication with key publics. The study sought to investigate how two-way dialogue had been accomplished primarily through Facebook and Twitter. The research showed evidence that the study's participants were aware of the importance of social media, and how it could be used to build stronger relationships with publics such as volunteers and the community. It seems that most studies recognise the relationship-building capacity of social media. This can also be applied to the two companies of this study, as they also

communicate or dialogue with various key publics, using Facebook. In effect, dialogue is seemingly necessary in an organisation-public relation.

4.4.3 Presence of Organisations on Social Media

The respondents were asked to provide the number of likes that the organisation has on Facebook as well as the followers on Twitter as at the end of November 2016 and October 2017. The statistics have been captured in Table 2:

Table 2: Presence of Organisations on Social Media

Organisation	Social Media	November, 2016	October, 2017	Percentage Increase
ECG	Facebook	13,959	101, 625	628%
	Twitter	5,175	6,253	21%
	Linkedin	575	832	44%
GWCL	Facebook	1,033	1,865	45%
	Twitter	172	221	22%
	Linkedin	712	979	27%

Source: Field Data, 2017

From Table 2, it can be seen that ECG has a strong presence on Facebook with 101, 625 likes and Twitter with 6,253 follows. GWCL has a strong presence with Linkedin with 979 likes.

4.4.4 Dedicated Staff for Social Media

The researcher asked the respondents to indicate if they have a dedicated staff for social media. Respondents from ECG stated that, they have a team of four staff who have been hired to handle the three main social media platforms of the Electricity Company of Ghana. The respondents from GWCL, on the other hand, noted that, there is no dedicated staff for social media, even though the updating and posting of information on the social media platforms lies within the responsibilities of the Public Relations Unit.

4.5 Objective 3: Benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice

The respondents were asked to share benefits of using social media for PR practice. They provided the following responses which have been captured in the Table 3:

Table 3: Benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
It promotes interactiveness between organisation and its online followers	30	37
Feedback is immediate	19	24
Issues that are not raised through the traditional means(letter writing, filing complaints etc) are raised on social media platforms	10	12
Social media allows messages to be sent out in different formats such as images, info-graphics, video, audio, animation among others	14	17
It is less expensive as compared to adverts on the traditional media	7	9
Total	80	100

Source: Field Data, 2017

This finding is supported by a study conducted by Eyich et al (2008) and Hanna et al, (2011). They noted that, Public relations practitioners are shifting to social media as the lines between online and offline promotion becomes blurry. Therefore, social media affords public relations practitioners the opportunity of reaching out to and engaging with their publics in conversation (Eyrich et al, 2008; Hanna et al, 2011).

Further supporting this finding is a study by McCorkindale (2010). He conducted a quantitative content analysis of 2008 Fortune 50 companies Facebook pages to assess how they used Facebook. The study analysed 55 Facebook pages to determine what was posted or published about the company. Among other results, the findings from the study indicated that few companies were using Facebook as a channel for disseminating information. Moreover, the communication on the Facebook page was generally one-sided, resembled a monologue and thus, neglected the two-way, relationship building potential of Facebook. McCorkindale (2010) concluded that companies in the Fortune 50 were not taking full advantage of Facebook and needed to incorporate relationship building strategies on their social networking sites.

4.6 Objective 4: Challenges associated with using social media for PR functions

The respondents were asked to list some challenges that, ECG and GWCL may face in using social media for PR functions. The following were the three key challenges:

- a) Lack of a social media policy to coordinate the social media unit/online unit
- b) General poor internet services
- c) Lack of budget to support the operations of the Social Media Unit
- d) Lack of a dedicated staff or team of staff for social media (GWCL)

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the data collected from the field. It also contained the analysis of the data vis-à-vis the analysis from the literature that was reviewed in chapter two. The fifth and final chapter contained a summary of the findings, a conclusion and some recommendations from the researcher based on the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study was conducted to understand social media and public relations practice in Ghana, a comparative study of Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG). The research design adopted for the study was the quantitative research design. Non-probability sampling technique, namely the purposive sampling method was used to select the sample size of eighty (80) research participants. The sample size was made up of Management and PROs from GWCL and ECG. With the help of a questionnaire and an interview guide, data collected from the field were edited, coded and analyzed. The Excel Microsoft Software was used to determine the frequencies and percentage of responses from the primary data collected from the field. These responses have been presented using tables, pie charts and graphs.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The findings of this research were broadly based on four key research objectives. The first objective was to identify the social media platforms which the two organisations have signed unto and how active they are on these platforms. The study's second objective was to understand how social media is being used by the two organisations in terms of their PR functions. The third objective of the study was to compare the benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice among the two organisations. Lastly, research objective was to identify the challenges that come with using social media for PR functions.

The first objective was to identify social media platforms that ECG and GWC are active on. On Social Media Platforms for PR, the respondents were asked to list three social media platforms that can be used for Public Relations (PR) activities. The respondents identified Facebook (47 respondents, representing 59%), Twitter (25 respondents, representing 31%) and LinkedIn (8 respondents, representing 10%). On the activeness of the two organisations on Social Media, the 40 respondents from ECG were very emphatic that their organisation was active on Facebook and Twitter and they indicated very active. They represented 50% of the research population. The other 40 respondents from GWCL were divided between inactive and active. Twenty Three (23) respondents from GWCL stated that, their Facebook and Twitter platforms were active with the remaining seventeen (17) noted that, the Facebook and Twitter platforms are not active.

The researcher sought to know how often the respondents visit these social media platforms of their organisations. A majority of 48 respondents, representing 60% noted that, they visit the social media platforms weekly. A set of 28 respondents stated that, they visit the social media platforms daily and they represented 35%. The remaining 4 respondents stated that, they visit the social media platforms, monthly. They represented 5% of the research population.

The second objective was assessing the social Media platforms that are used for PR functions. On the kind of Information posted on Social Media Platforms, a large majority of 57 respondents noted that, Public Announcement is the main information that are posted on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. They represented 71% of the research population. A set of 14 respondents stated that, the kind of information posted on the social media platforms are Maintenance Schedules and they represented 18% of the research population. Five

respondents (representing 6%) said the information posted on the social media platform is about New Service Tariffs and the remaining 4 respondents (representing 5%) settle on Energy Safety Tips.

Moving on to Social Media and PR Functions, the researcher wanted to know if any of the two organisations used the social media platforms to receive complaints, provide feedback to customers, communicate issues to customers and send information to customers. Respondents from both organisations indicated that, they actually undertake these PR functions using their social media platforms. However, it was clear that, the social media platforms of ECG had several evidences to show that, it was using its social media platforms to achieve these and many more.

On the organisation's presence on Social Media, the study revealed that, as at the end of November, 2016, ECG had 13, 959 likes on Facebook, 5,175 followers on Twitter and 575 likes on LinkedIn. Comparing to statistics as at the end of October, 2017, ECG had 101,625 likes on Facebook, 6,253 followers on Twitter and 1,865 likes on LinkedIn. Moving unto GWCL, as at the end of November 2016, GWCL had 1,033 likes on Facebook, 172 followers on Twitter and 712 likes on LinkedIn. Comparing to statistics as at the end of October 2017, GWCL had 1,865 likes on Facebook, 221 followers on Twitter and 979 likes on LinkedIn. From the statistics, it can be seen that ECG has a stronger presence on Facebook and Twitter whilst GWCL had a strong presence on LinkedIn.

The researcher wanted to know if the two organisations had a dedicated Staff for Social Media. The study revealed that, ECG had a team of four staff who have been hired to handle the three main social media platforms of the company. However, GWCL had no dedicated

staff for social media, even though the updating and posting of information on the social media platforms lies within the responsibilities of the Public Relations Unit.

The study's third objective was aimed at identifying the benefits and success stories of using social media for PR practice. The respondents noted that, social media promotes interactiveness the organisation and its online followers and feedback is immediate. They also added that Issues that are not raised through the traditional means (letter writing, filing complaints etc.) are raised on social media platforms and adverts on social media are less expensive as compared to adverts on the traditional media. They noted that, social media allows messages to be sent out in different formats such as images, info-graphics, video, audio, animation among others.

The forth objective was identifying the challenges associated with using social media for PR functions. The respondents identified the challenges as including the lack of a social media policy to coordinate the social media unit/online unit and general poor internet services which affects the work of staff dedicated to social media. They also noted that, there is no budget to support the operations of the Social Media Unit and specifically to GWCL, there is no dedicated staff or team of staff for social media (GWCL).

5.3 Conclusion

The study established that, the two organisations' main social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Between the two organisations, ECG had a greater presence on social media as against GWCL and that explains why ECG was more active on the social media

platforms. The two organisations used their social media platforms to provide public announcement, announce maintenance schedules, new service tariffs among others.

The two organisations also used their social media platforms to receive complaints, provide feedback to customers, communicate issues to customers and send information to customers.

Unlike GWCL, which had no dedicated staff for social media, ECG had a team of four staff who have been hired to handle the three main social media platforms of the company. The study established that, there are benefits of using social media for PR and there are challenges as well.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations have been made:

5.4.1 Develop a Social Media Policy

The two organisations would be encouraged to develop a Social Media Policy to coordinate the operations of their various social media platforms. In the policy, it would detail out the kind of human resource, logistics etc. that will be needed at the Social Media Unit. The policy would detail out the purpose for which the various social media platforms have been used and the fact that, management must give it the necessary backing and support to enable it achieve its purpose.

5.4.2 Institute a 6 hour Feedback Mechanism

The Social Media Unit would be encouraged to institute a 6 hour response/feedback mechanism on the various social media platforms especially Facebook. This is to ensure that, customers can always expect that, their issues and complaints will be responded to. Efforts

should be made at responding immediately to these issues but in very hard to handle issues, the Unit should ensure that, there is feedback at least within 6 hours of the complaints on social media.

5.4.3 Hire a Dedicated Staff/Team of Staff for Social Media

Management of GWCL would be encouraged to hire a dedicated or team of dedicated staff for social media, to enable the organisation enjoy the benefits of social media.

REFERENCES

Avery, E., Lariscy, R., Amador E., Ickowitz, T., Primm, C., & Taylor, A., 2010, Diffusion of Social Media among Public Relations Practitioners in Health Departments across Various Community Population Sizes. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22, 3, 336- 358.

Banathy, B. H., 1973, *Developing a systems view of education: The systems-model approach*. New York: Siegler/Fearon Publishers.

Boakye, F., Nsor, C., & Tabi, A. S., 2012, *An Assessment of the Contribution of Public Relations in Achieving Organizational Goals: A Case of Selected Private Tertiary Institutions in the Ashanti Region*. Unpublished Project Work Submitted to the Christian Service University.

Botan, C. 1993, Introduction to the paradigm struggle. *Public Relations Review*, 19, 107-110.

Breakenridge, D., 2012, *Social media and public relations: eight new practices for the PR Professional*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc. Available on www.communications/research/02MatthewsEJSpring10.pdf

Chikandiwa, S. T., Contogiannis, E., & Jembere, E., 2013, The adoption of social media marketing in South African banks. *European Business Review*, 25(4).

Cortesi S., 2013, "Youth Online: Diversifying Social Media Platforms and Practices," *H2O*, http://h2o.law.harvard.edu/text_blocks/2113.

Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M., 2006, *Effective Public Relations (9th Ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Cutlip, S. M., Center, A.H. & Broom, G. M., 2000, *Effective public relations (8th ed.)*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Eyrich, N., Padman, M. L., & Sweetser, K. D., 2008, PR practitioners' use of social media tools and communication technology. *Public Relations Review*, 34, 412-414.

Gibson, J. W. & Hodgetts, R. M., 1986, *Organizational communication: A managerial perspective*. Orlando, Florida: Academic Press Incorporated.

Grunig, J. E. (Ed.), 1992, *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grunig, J. E. (Ed.), 2013, *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. New York: Routledge.

Grunig, L. A., Grunig, J. E., & Dozier, D. M., 2002, *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations*. Mahwah, NJ:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gwenn S O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011), “The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents and Families,” *Pediatrics* 127, 4, 800–804,

Hanna, R., Rohm, A., & Crittenden, V. L., 2011, We’re all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem. *Business Horizons*, 265-273

Harris, T., 1991, *The Marketeers Guide to Public Relations: How Today's Companies are Using the New PR to Gain a Competitive Edge*, New York, John Wiley & Sons

Holmes, A., 2006, *The Wal-Mart Blog Fiasco*. Holmes Report Blog. Accessed 12 December, 2016 http://holmesreport.blogspot.com/2006/10/wal-mart-blog-fiasco-blogsphere-has_20.html.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M., 2010, Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 59-68.

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B.S., 2011, Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, pp. 241-251.

Kim, E., & Johnson, T. L., 2011, *Social Media in Public Relations: Tweeting, Facebooking & Blogging, Oh, My!*. Public Relations Society of America- Educators Academy, 76- 86, Orlando, Fl: Public Relations Society of America

Lattimore, D., Baskin, O., Heiman, S. T., & Toth, E. L., 2004, *Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Laycock, J., 2006, Zipatoni and Sony Slammed for ‘Flogging’. Retrieved 17 December, 2016, from <http://www.searchengineguide.com/laycock/009005.html>.

Lenhart A, Purcell K, Smith A & Zickuhr K., 2010, “Social Media and Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults,” Pew Research Center, Retrieved on 16th December, 2016 from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Report/2012/Social-Media-and-Young-Adults.aspx>.

Lovejoy, K., Waters, R., & Saxton, G. D., 2012, Engaging Stakeholders through Twitter: How Nonprofit Organizations are Getting More Out of 140 Characters or Less. *Public Relations Review*, 313-318.

Marchese, J., 2007, *The Thinking Person's Guide to Media*, Chapter Two : Advertising Philosophy. Retrieved on 05 December, 2016 from <http://www.mediapost.com/publications/author/1632/joemarchese/2007/05/#axzz2NKv6hx>

Matthews, L., 2010, *Social Media and the Evolution of Corporate Communications* Retrieved 12th December, 2016 from <http://www.elon.edu/docs/eweb/academics/>

Pearson, R., 1990, Ethical values or strategic values? The two faces of systems theory of public relations. In L. A. Grunig and J. E. Grunig (eds.), *Public Relations Research Annuals* (2, 219-234). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Phillips, D., & Young, P., 2009, *Online public relations: a practical guide to developing an online strategy in the world of social media*. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Porter, L. & Sallot, L., 2003, The Internet and public relations: Investigating practitioners' roles and World Wide Web use. *Journalism and Mass Communications Quarterly*. [Electronic version]. 80, 603–622

Porter, L., Sweetser Trammell, K., Chung, D., & Kim, E., 2007, Blog power: Examining the effects of practitioner blog use on power in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 92–95.

Seitel, F. P., 2007, *The practice of public relations* (10th ed). New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.

Seo, H., Kim, Y.J., & Yang, S., 2009, Global Activism And New Media. A Study Of Transnational Ngos' Online Public Relations. *Public Relations Review*, 35, 123-126

Spicer, C., 1997, *Organizational public relations*. New Jersey: LEA Publishers.

Taylor, M., & Kent, M., 2007, Taxonomy of mediated crisis responses. *Public Relations Review*. 33, 140–146

Thackeray, R., Neiger, B. L., Hanson, C. L., & McKenzie, J. F., 2008, Enhancing Promotional Strategies Within Social Marketing Programs: Use of Web 2.0 Social Media. *Health Promotion Practice*, 338.

Theaker, A., 2001, *The Public Relations Handbook*. London: Routledge.

Wigley S & Zhang W., 2011, A Study of PR Practitioners' Use of Social Media in Crisis Planning, *Public Relations Journal*, 5 (3)

APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

This is a student of the Ghana Institute of Journalism and currently conducting a research on “Social Media and Public Relations Practice in Ghana: a comparative study of Ghana Water and Electricity Company of Ghana Limited”. Any information you provide will solely be used for academic purpose, and confidentiality is assured. Please provide the appropriate information by ticking the appropriate box or writing your response by each question in the space provided.

Part 1: Personal Details

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age 25-20 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50 and above
3. Status Single Married Divorced Separated
4. Educational qualification Diploma First Degree MBA/Masters
5. Category of Respondent Management members of GWCL Management members of ECG PROs of GWCL PROs of ECG

Part II: Main Questions

6. List any three (3) social media platforms that can be used for Public Relations activities

- a)
- b)
- c)

7. How active are your organisations on the two main social media platforms Inactive
 Active Very Active

8. How often do you visit these social media platforms? Daily Weekly Monthly

9. How often are these social media platforms updated? Once in a week Once a day
 Never More than twice in a day

10. How many likes or followers does the organisation have on Facebook and Twitter as at the end of November, 2016 and October 2017?

Facebook.....

Twitter.....

11. What kind of information are posted on these social media platforms?

Public Announcements Energy safety tips Maintenance schedules New services tariffs others (please specify).....

12. Does GWCL/ECG has a dedicated staff for the management of Social Media?

Yes No

13. Do you use social to receive complaints? Yes No

14. Do any of the organisations use social media for any of these PR functions

Settle complaints Receive feedback Communicate issue to customers
 Send customer information

15. Based on feedback what are the possible success stories ?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

16. What are the challenges that come with using social media for PR functions?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

17. What are the benefits of social media to the customer?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

THANK YOU