

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

**TOPIC: USING NEW MEDIA TO ENHANCE CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND
CORPORATE IMAGE: A STUDY OF ECG**

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**A DISSERTATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER
OF ARTS DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere, except the works of other authors, which have been properly acknowledged.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my entire family, especially my lovely wife and daughter, Mrs. Patience Halm and Benjamina Halm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my utmost appreciation to the Almighty God for making it possible for me to complete this work. I thank Him for His Grace. Special thanks goes to my supervisor, Dr. Esther Dodua Darku, who guided me through this work at a time the world was in the shackles of Covid-19 pandemic. I would also like to thank my wife and daughter, who endured my late night returns from the office to the house during the research, and my colleagues, friends and loved ones for making this work a success. I cannot forget my parent, siblings and pastors for their prayer and support.

ABSTRACT

The study aimed at examining the use of new media to enhance Corporate Communication and Corporate Image, using ECG as case. The main objectives were to ascertain the type(s) of new media tool(s) used by the ECG social media unit for internal communication, to assess the new media tool(s) used for external communication in ECG, and to examine the various challenges associated with using such new media tools to enhance corporate communication and corporate image. The Systems Theory of public relations was to measure the relationship building efforts using new media tools. The study employed the qualitative research design. Hence, an interview guide was used to collect data. The findings revealed that, ECG used Facebook; Intranet; Corporate emails; internally developed application, Powerhub; and Kaizela- a Microsoft application for internal communication. ECG also used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, WhatsApp and ECG website for external communication while ECG was challenged by the creation of parody accounts, bad comments by customers and the possibility of a staff sending a message that is contrary with the company position. Also, the use of new media has contributed improvement in the corporate communication and corporate image of the ECG.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1. PR — PUBLIC RELATIONS
2. MPR — MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS
3. ECG — ELECTRICITY COMPANY OF GHANA LIMITED
4. MD — MANAGING DIRECTOR
5. RQ — RESEARCH QUESTION
6. ACCA— AWARENESS, COMPREHENSION, CONVICTION AND ADOPTION
7. NCA— NATIONAL COMMUNICATION AUTHORITY
8. AIETA— AWARENESS, INTEREST, EVALUATION, TRIAL AND ADOPTION.

FIGURE

FIGURE 1.1 PUBLIC RELATIONS LOCATION IN ORGANISATIONS10

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Public relations is defined by Dodd (2016) as a strategic management function. He adds that public relations professionals use goal-directed communication to achieve desirable organizational outcomes in a competitive landscape. Just like other managers, public relations professionals seek to achieve competitive advantages for their organizations through communication.

Public Relations practitioners the world over have attempted to create good relationship between their organisations and their publics/stakeholders with the view to helping them to achieve their goals and visions.

A careful examination of the history of public relations reveals that PR practice has evolved from four modules, the press agency, where the role of the PR practitioner was seen as an agent of the press; one way information dissemination, where the PR practitioner disseminated one-way information through the media; the two-way asymmetric, where the PR practitioner did research to before communicating; and the two-way symmetric, where the PR practitioner does research and receives feedback from the audience after communication. (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Tench & Yeomans, 2009, Newson et al, 2013.)

The practice of Public Relations (PR) has seen some evolution. Early PR practice was recorded in the United States of America and United Kingdom. (Roberts-Bowman 2016). Various PR textbooks and articles review have revealed that the practice of PR started from a humble beginning and has gradually become a recognized profession/discipline for study. Although the practice of modern-day PR could be traced to the USA and UK, the practice has gradually spread into many countries, including Ghana, which is in West Africa.

Public Relations in Ghana has also grown from humble beginnings. The practitioner has functionally grown from being “a mere appendage of the corporate governance structure and has become, increasingly, the fulcrum around which organisational image building and public goodwill revolves”, Adjei, cited by Asante (2016). The early PR practitioner in Ghana was seen as the information disseminator hired for buying media spaces for organisations, writing articles for publication and brokering advertising space for their organisations. With time, PR practitioners have made inroads in attaining management status. Public Relations roles have moved from basic technician roles to the expert prescriber, where we have some agencies, giving counsel to some institutions.

The Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR-Ghana) has been at the forefront of promoting excellence in the practice over the years, with pioneers like the late J. E. Allotey-Pappoe, being champions of modern trends of PR in the country. With the invention of the internet and web 2.0, it is possible for people to share information and interact all over the world without limitation of space and time. The world now has online applications and platforms that make it possible for people to communicate in real time without consideration for distance. The new media has gradually become a means of complimenting the traditional media for various organisations to communicate.

This situation has forced some traditional media houses to seek online presence. It is not becoming the toast of newsmakers and news producers alike. (Friedman & Friedman, 2008). Public Relations practitioners in Ghana have been using the various traditional media i.e. newspapers, radio stations and television stations to carry out their managerial functions. It was until recently, when the new media was discovered that practitioners had to shift attention to the use of the social media, which provides a wider platform for PR practitioners to undertake their activities.

It started with using some bloggers to post stuff for companies and then moved into website designing and now social media. The social media is a platform that offers PR practitioners and the world to hold virtual discussions in real time. The email provides space for PR practitioners to interact with their audiences in real time without regard to distance. For example, at the press of a button, some millions of users can be reached on new media platforms and the spread of information has become very widespread (viral) in some cases, where both positive news and negative news was concerned.

Ghana has seen various companies, government agencies and organisations make attempts to establish new media units to enable them to have a “free-and-enhanced-way” of engaging their customers without hindrances, and in real time. The use of social media elsewhere has proved very successful, but not without initial challenges before they found ways to use it to enhance communication and corporate image of the various organisations. It has virtually become the toast of many companies’ communication departments, as it really has the potential to help them to communicate strategically to their target audiences/stakeholders in a virtual community.

It is in line with this development that this study therefore seeks to explore the challenges emanating from the use of new media in enhancing corporate communication and corporate image, using the ECG as a study.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The role of Public Relations in organisations include building a positive image. It has been argued that public relations could have a powerful impact on the conscience of the public, through mass media publicity, and interactive communication, a method that is cost effective

in gaining public attention, than through advertising, which is very expensive in doing same. This means, the effects of publicity are far more reaching than advertising. In addition, most people recognize advertising as a deliberate move to influence people to take certain actions. (Olariu, 2017).

Another role of Public relations is to form a tactical alliance with the media to influence people's opinions and change behaviours through their programmes. They do this by influencing journalists who work in the various media to spread the news about their organisations. However, the increase in the use of social media has expanded PR's attention to include bloggers and web content generators (Alhidad & Qaddami, 2016). This means PR has to utilize the new media, to reach its audience.

Some organisations have tried to establish new media units to educate their publics and tell their own stories. They have put up departments responsible for communicating with their various stakeholders through the digital space and daily devise tactics to achieve this arduous task, as the cyber space appears to be a very delicate place to operate. The slightest of agitation among customers results in headlines, which have far reaching effects on the image of organisations. In this direction, the creation of the new media departments hand the PR practitioners the arduous task of telling their story to the world in a volatile environment, while at the same time giving them the opportunity to tell their company's story "the way it is" or "want to be shared."

However, there are problems associated with using social media. Having a social media unit, does not simply mean that a company/organisation is successful. Public Relations had faced major challenges since the mid-2000s with the increasing use of more interactive social media platforms (Fitch, 2009). Not many organizations make efficient use of digital public relations in their entirety (Ezeah, 2005). Some companies have focused on some aspects of digital public

relations such as the use of social media for brand awareness creation, customer relationship management, and market research (Chikandiwa, Contogiannis & Jembere, 2013). In a study conducted by Martin (2009), it was identified that at least 67% of companies and government agencies use social media as part of their digital public relations engagements. Similarly, Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer (2012) conducted an online survey of three distinct industries – travel, telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals – exploring the comparative impact of brand communication on brand equity across social media, in comparison to traditional media. The study established that contact by social media by organizations significantly affected brand perceptions (ibid).

Other studies have also explored the use of other aspects of digital public relations (Alfonso and de Valbuena Miguel, 2006; Lindic, 2014; Eyrich, Padman, and Sweester, 2008). In a study of how the top 50 global Fortune 500 companies used Really Simple Syndication (RSS), podcasts, and blogs along with e-mail and websites, Lindic (2014) stated that majority (38) of the organizations used more than one internet tool. According to the analysis, most of the organizations continued to rely upon e-mail and websites for communication, but there was a considerable rise in the use of RSS, especially in media relations, whereas blogs and podcasts were still struggling (ibid). As a result, Lindic (2014) noted that the digital public relations in its wholeness and platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are yet to be fully exploited by public relations practitioners as channels of strategic communication.

This assertion from Lindic (2014) is in tandem with the research findings of Gladstone (2015) who discovered that out of the numerous social media platforms that exist, the Electricity Company of Ghana had only one active social media account to communicate with its publics. From the foregoing, this study sought to interrogate the prospects of using new media to enhance corporate communication and corporate image at the Electricity Company of Ghana.

1.3 AIM OF STUDY

To examine the use of new media to enhance Corporate Communication and Corporate Image at ECG.

1.4 OBJECTIVES

1. To ascertain the type(s) of new media tool(s) used by the ECG social media unit for internal communication
2. To assess the new media tool(s) used for external communication in ECG
3. To examine the various challenges associated with using such new media tools to enhance corporate communication and corporate image

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the new media tool(s) used by the social media unit of ECG for internal communication?
2. What are the new media tool(s) used by the social media unit of ECG for external communication?
3. What are the challenges associated with using such new media tools to enhance corporate communication and corporate image?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study will help add to the existing knowledge on the use of social media. It will help other government agencies to streamline their activities in terms of using new media for communicating with their publics.

1.7 SCOPE OF STUDY

Studies on new media and public relations efforts to enhance corporate communications and corporate image cover broad areas. For the purposes of this study, the scope will be limited to digital media channels used by the ECG.

1.8 ORGANISATION OF STUDY

Chapter one provides background of the study, provides the statement of problem, gives scope of study, delineate objectives and significance of study. Chapter two reviews literature on the study and provides a theoretical frame work for the study. In chapter three the research methodology is discussed. It also, explains the sample size, sampling methods and instrumentation used in the data collection. The fourth chapter analyses the data and presents findings while chapter five discusses the findings of the study and provides recommendations for future study.

1.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study seeks to recommend to other companies in Ghana that use social media, to tackle some of the teething problems associated with using social media to build relationships.

KEY WORDS

Public Relations, New Media, Social Media, Systems Theory, Relationship Building, Image Management.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework, the definition of public relations and some emerging trends in the profession, the role of PR in building images of organisations, changes occurring in the practice of public relations, the use of new media as PR tool, the impact of new media on communication, the benefits, challenges and effectiveness of new media.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ferguson (2018) promotes the theories of relationship management in PR and encouraged PR researchers to focus on relationship building rather than on organizations or on the publics, to help to better understand the importance of relationships, to the public and the organizations. She added that, “A model that focuses on either the organization or the public assumes that if and when changes occur, either the organization and/or the public must change. A relationship-centric model has the assumption that the relationship is the prime issue of concern, not the parties.”

The systems theory, will be the framework for this research and will be focused on building relationships. It describes organizations as a set of parts or subsystems that impact one another, and together interact with the organization’s environment. The systems theory of PR was adopted from the work of biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy who described organisms as an “open systems in which material continually enters from and leaves onto the outside environment”. (Hiscock, 2017). Hiscock traces the development and adoption of the systems theory in public relations from the 1970s to the year 2016, giving an overview of the various researches that have been conducted into the theory, which was earlier proposed by von

Bertalanffy, a natural scientist, who said “many ‘systems’ problems [were] asking for ‘theory’”. (ibid p.7)

Tench & Yeomans (2006; 2007; 2014; 2017) highlight the work of Grunig and Hunt (1984), who further developed the systems theory. They described organisations as having five major subsystems, namely, production subsystems; maintenance subsystems; disposal subsystems; adaptive subsystems; and management subsystems. Figure 1.1 shows how organisation subsystems interact as a unit, while they collectively interact with the environment within which they operate.

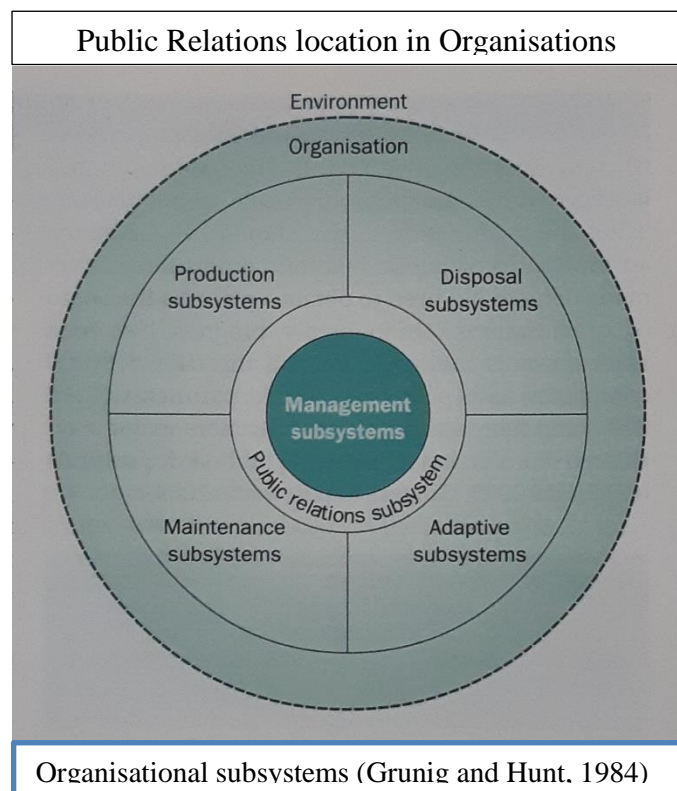


Figure 1.1

Source: Tench & Yeomans (2006)

According to the theory, the production subsystems produce the products or services, the maintenance subsystems encourage employees to work together, disposal subsystems market and distribute the products or services, adaptive subsystems helps the organisation to adjust to

its environmental changes, while management subsystems control and direct all the subsystems, managing conflicts and expectations of the subsystems. (Tench & Yeomans, 2006). They further asserted that the systems theory hands the PR practitioner the 'boundary spanning' role of mediating within an organisation and between an organisation and its publics. As depicted in the diagram, the PR subsystem, mediates through an organisation's management subsystem and other subsystems, and this role is also extended to the environment, which is made up of extended stakeholders. In effect this theory was developed to explain the relationship theory in which PR ensures that organisations have a good health in terms of communicating internally before moving out to its environment.

Tench & Yeomans (2017: p.151) cited Edwards as adding that, "this theory starts from the view of PR practitioners working for an organisation that has PR activities, which are meant to achieve/increase benefits for the organisation. They argued that the aim of the theory is to explain communication used to create relationships and that it encourages proactive public relations. The theory is supported by the fourth model of public relations, which encourages a two-way communication between an organisation and its publics/stakeholders.

Therefore, for any organisation to function well in communication, it has to plan, communicate, and get feedback from the audience. Looking at their explanations, the PR department of organisations, in their bid to maintain a two-way communication between an organisation and its stakeholders in modern times, would require the use of new media to promote corporate communication within an organisation (a system) and help enhance their corporate image (to the external environment).

The systems theory further connotes that the Management of the organizations' communication should create and maintain internal structures to communicate and extend their communication to the environment in which they operate. Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2000: p.229) further

describe a system as, “a set of interacting units that endures through time within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain goal states”. This definition helps to explain further the systems theory, as handing the PR practitioner the role of liaising between an organisation and its boundaries. For PR to maintain a balanced relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders, it has to maintain an equilibrium within that organisation and between the organisation and its environment.

The PR practitioner in this situation is a member of Management and plays the role of an ombudsman, who mediates between the internal stakeholders made up of management and staff, and external stakeholders, where the practitioners stands between management on one hand representing the organisation and the outside world.

Valentini and Edwards (2019) discuss Public Relations (PR) theories in the wake of a technological world. Their use of the term, “current moment”, suggests that theories used in the past ought to be given a new dimension when research into practice of the PR profession is being undertaken. They explained that public relations has grown academically and professionally over the last four decades, and is now a specialised communication discipline, with the view that public relations is primarily becoming a strategic organizational function that nurtures positive relationships with publics and stakeholders for various private, public, non-profit, activist, and advocacy organisations.

They further discuss that during the first two decades, theories that focused on the organizational roles of public relations on internal or external functions have dominated research into public relations practice. Top of them is the Excellence theory and systems theory, all aimed at “relationship management, communitarian, rhetorical and dialogic approaches.”

From the various writings reviewed, it could be inferred that PR revolves around systems theories, with the support of other theories. This assertion could be interpreted to support the fundamental role of public relations, which is deliberately directed to nurture and manage relationships using various techniques in the age of communication technology. It could also mean that in order to better understand PR in the technological world, research efforts should be directed towards relationships building function of PR using the new media.

The significance of the systems theory is that, “In general, [it] encourages a more integrated approach to research and practice, and the prospect for developing more universally applicable theory accommodating all social, organizational and functional considerations.” (Hiscock, 2017: p.2).

Various PR theorists have postulated that the profession is supported by the systems theory when it comes to relationship management, and communication theories that ensure that public relations practice revolved around strategic communication within an organisation to promote an equilibrium between all categories of stakeholders/publics (systems). Therefore some organisations, depending on how they adopt the systems theory, could be described as having open or closed systems. (Newson et al, 2013; p.111). Those with open systems usually are transparent and use the two-way method of communicating while those with closed systems do not engage in two-way communication.

This research would be founded on the systems theory, using the theory of relationship building to explain how the various systems in an organisation interact and communicate to the various stakeholders in the environment. Relationship theory seeks to explain the core relationships that exist between organisations and their stakeholder (Ferguson, 2018).

It is significant to this research because it would help to examine challenges faced by corporate communication experts while using new media in communicating to the outside world. It

would also help to unearth some of the successes chalked in the area in terms of stakeholder/organisation relationship creation using the new media. This therefore makes the systems theory very important for this research, and could serve as the framework for the design and implementation of this research.

2.2 DEFINITION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Wilcox, Cameron and Reber (2015) assert that Public Relations (PR) has been defined in many ways. They noted that a Stanford Professor, Rex Harlow, in his attempt to compile a list of definitions, counted about 500. This indicates that PR has been defined in various forms. Various books and articles have sourced some popular definitions, which have guided the practice of PR from the 1970s. Judging from the fact that we have a plethora of PR books and articles, PR has been defined as, “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and their publics.

Theaker (2012) argued that the definition framed by the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in 1987 is still relevant which it come to the definition of Public Relations. The IPR defined, “Public Relations is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics.” According to her, words such as ‘planned’ and ‘sustained’ suggests that relationship building is not automatic or effortless. It therefore hands the PR practitioner the task to put in efforts to ‘establish’ and ‘maintain’ such relationships, with the aim of creating goodwill for their organisation.

Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2,000), cited by Butterick (2012), defined Public Relations as the “management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its publics on whom its success or failure depends.” This definition portrays PR as a management function, creating relationships with stakeholders

and maintaining such relations for the benefit of the organisation and publics (affected stakeholders) in any given situation.

2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF PR IN IMAGE BUILDING

The Image management role of Public Relations (PR) is very important. It can be argued that the basic motivation for which various PR departments are set up in the world, is to manage the image of such organisations. The various PR definitions have not come up without the image management function of PR being factored into account. Thus, the slogan of the Ghana Institute of Public Relations (IPR-Ghana), “Image is Everything”, sums it all. This emphasis on the fact that images of organisations epitomizes their appearance in the ‘eyes’ of their publics or stakeholders. Thus, a positive image means a positive outlook, and vice versa in the public view.

Image building starts with the creation and sustenance of attributes that resonates with the publics/stakeholders of an organisation through corporate communications. PR has the task of managing the image of companies, which in return, grows into the reputation of these organisations. It therefore takes deliberate efforts to present an organisation in a certain manner for a long time, to register an image of the organisation. For example, a company like the Ghana Oil Company (GOIL), has worked over the years in Ghana to be recognized as producing one of the best quality fuels. Although its prices are slightly above others on the market, that image of selling high quality fuel has made customers choose GOIL over others, which are far cheaper.

Image in general is intangible and not easy to produce. This also applies to “corporate image”. Corporate image is primarily created by Corporate Communication and marketing

communication, which suggest a mental picture (image) to stakeholders and the public. (Beger, 2018: p.507). He argues that PR departments cannot build an image alone and will need the support of all other departments of the organisation and media as well. In the end, the stakeholders of the organisation will decide where to position the organisation in terms of their image, which in effect leads to their reputation. In most cases, image building starts with creation of a unique identity, differentiate organisations from one another, projecting a certain appearance (image) in the eyes of the public, and this would build up into reputation.

Ledingham and Bruning, cited by Pang et al (2019), emphasises that relationship building is an important component in the practice of public relations in organisations. This claim was premised on finding from research on public relationships in organisations, which revealed that “organizations that engage stakeholders and communicate with them regularly build better relationships than those that do not.” In doing that they have to get a solid corporate communications unit to foster such relationships.

Roy (2018) says no business can exist without a strong internal and external communication tools in the present era. The emergence of new technology and the strong power of digital platform help the corporate bodies to realize and to keep their corporate communication intact to help maintain a positive perception among stakeholders and shareholders. According to him, for a company to have a successful corporate communications strategy, the communicator must possess some communication skills to enable them to maintain a balanced relationship within an organisation. This also creates a positive image on the minds of stakeholders.

Theaker (2012) stated that, “Corporate communication has been defined in a number of different ways – in relation to public relations perhaps the most significant is as the process of establishing trust, social capital and legitimacy.” This definition helps us to understand that

corporate communications is a process, and will require some tools and skill to help establish the social capital and legitimacy on the minds of stakeholders and shareholders.

Balmer and Illia (2012) take a cursory look at corporate communications as being a management function with focus on maintaining relationships within an organisation and its dependent groups, with the sole aim of securing favourable relations.

Another major role of PR is to take care of the reputation of organisations with the aim of gaining understanding and support, as well as influencing opinion and behaviour of their stakeholders. Stacks, cited by Sampson (2018).

“Reputation was, is, and always will be of immense importance to organisations, whether commercial, governmental or not-for-profit. To reach their goals, stay competitive and prosper, good reputation paves the organisational path to acceptance and approval by stakeholders. Even organisations operating in difficult ethical environments – perhaps self-created – need to sustain a positive reputation where possible.” Watson & Kitchen (2010: p. 378).

This statement from the two PR gurus underscore the importance reputation management for every organisation and calls for a need to maintain a positive reputation. It therefore behooves PR divisions to manage the image of their organisations, looking at the various definitions given on PR.

Bailey (2018) argues on the role of PR departments in managing the reputation of organisations. In his article, he admits that various scholars have tried to link reputation management to public relations in broader terms. However, there are two main challenges that confront the practitioner. The first challenge is that reputation is not under the control of the practitioner, just like beauty, which is in the eye of the beholder. In that direction, people outside the organisation decide on how they want to see your organisation in terms of reputation.

The second challenge with reputation management, is the question which could arise from how one can measure and value reputation. It cannot be seen and therefore not physically measured. He concludes his argument with the view that some auditors see reputation as goodwill, something that can be of value to a company.

His argument may seem right, looking at the scholars he cited in his article, who developed a six step approach to reputation measurement, Charles Fombrun (from the US) and Cees van Riel (from the Netherlands) as having “developed a model known as the Reputation Quotient, which measures six drivers contributing to corporate reputation (emotional appeal; products and services; vision and leadership; workplace environment; financial performance; and social responsibility).”

Crenshaw (2017) notes that one basis of PR campaign is “reputation management.” She adds that in the case of brand or an individual reputation management, most good PR professionals focus attention on helping internal or external clients to create positive perception among key audiences. She also projects that the growth of social and digital media, has brought about some opportunities and challenges for reputation management. “Digital content like customer reviews, blog posts, or social updates can help tell a story about professional expertise or insights,” she added.

Crenshaw (2017) borrowed some steps public relations used in management of reputation and prescribed it for use onto the social media space in managing reputation of organisations. Her recommendations give credence to the important role PR plays in reputation management, even onto the new community, created in the world by the digital community.

In an effort to brand a company in the technological world, Safko (2012), offer some useful tools and tactics to succeed in using social media to promote your brand. In his book, he points

out that social media gives marketing and PR executives the opportunity to reach many people with the click of a button. Tools such as videos, microblogs, audios, photos, and livecasting (live coverage of issues) among others, have become available for the spreading of information through as well as ensuring that feedback is received on the various communication items. Comment sections on Facebook live stream for example, gives viewers opportunity to comment on the live feeds, thereby encouraging feedback from viewers.

From the foregoing discussions, it can be gainsaid that PR departments all over the world have a daunting task of building good images within and without organisations using positive and transparent relationships.

2.4 NEW TRENDS IN PR

Public Relations has evolved over the years. Bowman-Roberts, (2016). She argues that PR has a long history and has seen many phases before the advent. The development comes in academic and practical eras, she says, adding that most of the history of PR can be traced to the United Kingdom and the United States, where many of the early practitioners could be traced to. She postulates that PR has seen a development into specialist areas in the management of reputation and integrated communication. Some of the emerging trends include the use of brand communications, and use of digital media for digital communications.

In her arguments, the use of digital communication has an aim to reach a wide range of audiences. It however notes that the digital media, can be used at different levels. In the case of the use of social media, it involves the use of communications strategies to engage audiences in discussions through some additional digital channels. She reminds students and practitioners alike that the need for social media would depend on the ‘motive’ of an organisation and what they intend to achieve.

Butterick (2011) discusses issues ranging from the early development of PR, and delves into some new trends that are making that practice more challenging. The author introduces the idea of PR and marketing working hand in hand. She introduces the concept of marketing PR, where PR specifically supports the sales of company products and services. Kitchen, cited by Butterick (2011), states that, “The PR which specifically supports sales activity is marketing public relations (MPR).” Its aim is to create awareness and build sales through relationship management.

This is another trend in public relations, where supporting marketing activity is of the essence. Therefore, the role of MPR is to add value to advertising campaigns, by creating and maintaining relationships with clients to grow the sales drive. In that direction, the idea of integrated marketing communication is discussed where PR and Marketing losing their boundaries and eating into one another as separate disciplines. The new practice of PR, is different from the old PR that only looked at image management sought only social relationships with the publics. PR has now become part of management and its activities seek to create an affection for products to add to the bottom line of companies.

Wilcox et al (2015) state that given the increase in the world wide web and social media communications tools for use by PR practitioners, PR units now have a duty to do online research, to maintain an equilibrium in their organisations. This therefore hands the various departments with the task of conducting research online. This can be seen differently from the previous era, where PR practitioners had only the mass media for disseminating information.

Moss et al (2010) confirm that the world of public relations is changing at a fast pace although its fundamental aim has not changed that much. They review international public relations, and maintains that PR has grown in democracies, and use. However, they also bring to the attention of practitioners the new world of internet, which changes the dynamics of PR practice. It

identified the internet and social media as becoming power platforms for PR practitioners in mobilizing support for their organisation in image management activities. They asserted that PR has changed the relationship between the mass media and PR units owing to the fact that some PR units have in-house social media units. They also add that the changing trend is not particular to the western world, but the developing world.

Tench & Yeomans (2017) added that “Business, industry and government have embraced digital and social media.” They stated that a survey conducted in 2013 by McKinsey survey revealed that at least 83 percent of companies used one form of social media. Online video, social networks and online video conferencing were prominent among the type of social media companies were employing. They developed the theory of “content bypassing” where the gatekeeping role of the traditional media is eroded, giving anyone the opportunity to regulate what they send out to the public.

The authors revealed that PR practitioners have enthusiastically accepted the new form of social media, which I think has become a driving force to information dissemination in the current world of information boom. They cited Hazelton, who claimed that “public relations is ‘undergoing a revolution’ because of social media. They however noted that despite the opportunity this area offered to communications, there has not been drastic use of the new tools as some longitudinal studies have shown.

“Public relations was one of the first industries to recognize and harness the power of the Internet. The Web was a natural venue for corporate communications, establishing brands, spreading product information, and much more. PR professionals with vision and imagination jumped on board as soon as they recognized the unparalleled possibilities.” (Dilenschneider, 2010: p.1) The author hinged his arguments on the basic role of PR to communicate and get attention for a purpose, which is to make people act in a certain way. He then interjects that the

success of every PR practitioner hinges on their ability to communicate, and points to the opportunities the internet has offered to public relations practitioners to reach a wider audience. He also warns of the possible dangers associated with the internet, and makes crisis communication plans available for use by practitioners.

From the above discussions, it could be clear that PR practice has gone through various metamorphoses to survive in the modern world. It could also be said that the internet and for that matter the new media, has brought about a trend in public relations, where the practitioner had had the opportunity control what they sent out. The real time opportunity for feedback, has also facilitated the role of PR in communicating on a two-way basis.

2.5 DEFINING NEW MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Safko (2012) defines social media as the “media we use to be social”. He simplifies the definition of social media. He however stakes a claim that the main issues are found in the tactics of each of the hundreds of technologies and the tools that are available for users to connect with customers and prospects, and the strategies as well as tactics and tools needed for an effective online presence.

“Social media refer to websites and online tools that facilitate interactions between users by providing them with opportunities to share information, opinions, and interests. Social media consist of a “variety of tools and technologies that includes collaborative projects”. (Khan et al, 2014: p. 607).

Torning et al (2015) defined social media as, “fundamentally scalable communications technologies that turn Internet based communications into an interactive dialogue platform”, but when integrated in a business setting they become even more complex IT-artifacts. According to them, social business refers to the “utilization of online social channels to conduct

business.” Gomez et al (2015) said “social media are web-based media and mobile technologies for social interaction and communication, and it can include social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn), micro-blogs (Twitter, Tumblr), blogs, wikis, video sharing sites (YouTube), among others.”

Linus (2018) said social media is the new way through which people create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas among themselves in virtual communities and networks (social media overview, 2018). This is made possible through social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn; Micro Blogs like Twitter and Tumblr; Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snap Chat among others. Linus (2018) therefore asserts that the evolving nature of communication has compelled most companies to adopt social media as a way of communicating with both employees and consumers.

2.5.1 THE USE OF NEW MEDIA AS A PR TOOL

The use of new media has seen a rise on the globe. Roy (2018) argues that the use of the new media has made information readily available to stakeholders of companies and institutions across the globe. He stated that at the click of a computer mouse, stakeholders now have access to vital company information such as company profile, employee and financial strengths, among others, when uploaded onto the internet. It alerts companies and businesses to get ready for the new world of technology, which the researcher has observed is becoming the norm of the day. The use of the new media, which brought about the influx of social media, has made the world globalized into a virtual community. Therefore at the click of a mouse, one can access information from any part of the world. Therefore, the new media has been identified as a tool for enhancing corporate communication throughout the world.

Komodromos (2014) studied the use of social media as a PR tool and recognized that the use of social media has now become widespread among PR practitioners and this has

fundamentally changed how PR practitioners shared information and created relationships with their stakeholder. According to him, they are now able to build more new relationships and sustain them across a wide area as compared to the previous era without social media. It is a new tool for PR to aid PR in its bid to communicate to the outside world and seek feedback. Instant feedback from the social media moves PR as step further in achieving a two-way communication.

Kent & Taylor (2014) concluded that social media presents great opportunities for organizations to communicate with their publics. They explain that social media have become a tool to help build relationships among publics, therefore helping to foster social change in relationships, communities and societies. They however noted some negative aspects to social media in public relations, which was the fact that it can extend and narrow relationships. Wang (2015) conducts investigations into what has been researched and reveals that social media has become a tool for engaging the technologically savvy publics of organisations. He uses the dialogical theory to support his study, indicating that PR has to engage in dialogue with their various stakeholders. In the line of this duty, social media has proven to be an effective tool. Therefore, it has become a tool PR can do without.

Damásio et al (2012) identifies social media as a tool for PR in the daily operational activity. The areas that they critically need social media as a PR tool is organisations' stakeholder management, where PR manages and the opportunity it gives to institutions to reach a wider audience. It also delved into the use of social media for communication and issues management, citing TAP Air Portugal. This assertion affirms the notion that social media has become a tool for PR.

Looking at the various discussions above, it can be concluded that social media has become a useful tool for the practice of public relations. It helps practitioners to engage their stakeholders

and foster a good relationship. However, it has the tendency to put an organisation in a bad light in terms of negative publicity. A case of Emirates airlines, where a passenger was forced out of a fully booked flight that went viral is a good example of the negative impact of social media.

2.6 THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA ON COMMUNICATION

The use of new media for communication has increased since the development of the internet. The result is increased access to information by a wider community, with speed and immediacy being the order of the day. Gone were the days where media publications were controlled by the print and electronic operators, thereby, restricting access to news in a way. One had to own a television set, a radio set or buy a newspaper, before getting access to information. However, the coming into being of the new media, has made it possible for millions of people to get instant access to information at the highest convenience. The use of social media, as part of the new media, has taken communication to a different level all together. The digital world has made it possible for people to interact in a virtual community. The evolution has reached real time communications, where people interact through videos and audios, instantly.

Social media has gradually emerged as an interactive way to communicating in modern times. As Mishra (2017) recounts, “Social media has become a phenomenon with the advent of technology and rapid rise in the reach across the world. It has made inroads in almost every sphere of business, communication and marketing.” Its importance in communication in the era of technology and globalization can never be underestimated. The impact have both positive and negative consequences on communication. On the positive aspect, it helped organisations to help a wider group of people with the use of technology. The modus operandi of PR institutions and organisation has changed with the invention of the web 2.0, which made it possible for the sharing of videos and pictures.

2. 7 SOME BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are becoming critical for interactions between governments (countries), governments and citizens (within countries), and government agencies and businesses. Moreover, using social media presents some benefits and challenges. (Khan et al, 2014). The benefits include increased participation through openness, participation and sharing of information. They discovered that social media is a game changer in government communication in states that engage citizens in conversation through the social media. This means that communication departments have the opportunity to engage their stakeholders through conversations.

Drahošová, M. and Balcob, P. (2017) reported that social media have assumed great popularity among users in the European Union and decided to study their advantages and disadvantage. They discovered that using social media promotes information sharing and communication, flexible working terms where people can work from their homes, and getting services and education online.

Gomz et al (2015) asserted that social media has a powerful advantage in letting users contribute and share information and ideas, in different ways that were never achieved before with traditional media. This meant it gives a wide range of new sources of online information platforms for interaction with consumers to facilitate the selling of products, services, issues, and brands (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004).

2.8 SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Social media has become useful to the various sectors of the world and provides speed for dissemination of information. Observing the trends in the world, now with the click of a button on one's mobile phone, information becomes readily available, all thanks to Social media. In modern day lifestyles, social media marketing and mobile marketing have become the order of the day. This provides an effective way to reach out to customers. The provision of marketing information on the internet allows shoppers and marketers to showcase items to people at the comfort of their homes and this helps them to make purchase decisions at a very fast pace.

2.9 SOME CHALLENGES POSED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media usage comes with some great challenges. In fact, some people have become used to social media to the extent that all their livelihoods depend on this new era of information through technology. Although people have been using the internet to connect with others since the early 1980s, it is only in the last decade that social networking services have proliferated and their use has become a widespread practice – particularly amongst young people (Horizon, cited by Collin et al, 2011:p.8). The challenges these social media poses to users include cyber bullying, information management and breach of privacy and predation, among young users of the internet.

Torning et al (2015) conclude that social media is a field that requires extensive capital to maintain while control of communication was difficult and management of dialogue too posed a great risk to any activity online. Lee (2014) argues that social media has changed the landscape within which public advertising departments operate. It has caused the restructuring of various departments, thereby calling for the employment of new staff, etc. In this direction, it could be inferred that the advent of social media has also had its telling effect on PR practice. PR departments now have to employ new workers to deal with the public directly.

2.10 RELATED LITERATURE

Lipińska (2018) studied the use of social media in the corporate communication processes, between a company and the internal and external environment, and the role the social network, LinkedIn plays in organisation communication. She concluded that social media played a significant role in corporate communication and that LinkedIn fulfills a critical role in the communication process of engaging stakeholders. The study also revealed that in view of the growth of communication needs, organisations are constantly looking for new, integrated channels of communication with stakeholders, and recently their activities have moved to social media, where Facebook is the leader.

Gomez et al (2015) explored the “Usage and Importance of Social Media for Corporate Communications and Stakeholder Dialogue”, and found that with the popularization of social media, companies have had to change their communication strategies and approach to attract customers. They conclude that social media has become an excellent tool for companies to generate stakeholder dialogue and engagement gain competitive advantage with inexpensive collaboration, real-time communication, and online archiving.

Belasen & Belasen (2019) examined the value of strategic corporate and functions, social media and stakeholders. They noted that integrated corporate communication has become very relevant in strategic management processes of drafting messages to strategic stakeholders, sustaining corporate communication narratives on social media sites, and aligning communication strategies with organizational goals.

Linós (2018) used his study into the future of corporate communication to conclude that social media has become the future of corporate communications and suggested that previously corporate organisations had built their communication drives on traditional forms of “Corporate/Company Communication.” “There however has been a new dawn in

communication that to some extent in many developing countries still considered casual means of communication. The acquisition of social media has opened several opportunities that when fully explored contribute to even more effective communication in the corporate world.” (ibid)

Maria Vernuccio (2014) explored using social media to communicate organisation brands and found out that although there were encouraging signs that social media was effective in brands communications, they were done in an atmosphere with caution. She however urges corporate brand drivers to adopt a more expansive approach in using social media to help cover more stakeholders in their efforts at brokering dialogue between their organisations and its stakeholders.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Given (2008), cited by McManus et al (2017) research methodology consists of the assumptions, postulations, rules, and methods—the blueprint or roadmap—that researchers employ to render their work open to analysis, critique, replication, repetition, and/or adaptation and to choose research methods. This chapter discusses the methodology, which includes the research approach, the research design, the research population, the sampling technique and size, data collection instruments and ethical issues.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research employed a qualitative approach in collecting and processing data. Qualitative research is a type of research approach that helps in developing explanations of social phenomena (Hancock, 2002). That is to say, it aims to help us to understand the world in which we live and why things are the way they are. By this approach, an understanding of the social media phenomenon and its operations to build corporate image was generated. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009).

Yin (2003) advances that qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers study social and cultural phenomena. This study can be termed qualitative as regards how the interviews were descriptively interpreted and analyzed bringing out the most recurring categories and themes in the texts. Qualitative research involves collecting and/or working with text, images, or sounds (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

3.2 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Bhattacharjee (2012) says a Research Design can be considered as the structure of a research, being the blue-print or plan of the proposed research work. This plan must cover “data collection process, instrument deployment process, and the sampling process”.

Sileyew (2019) explains that research design is an arrangement of conditions for collecting and analyzing relevant data and will determine how relevant information for the study will be obtained. It should determine the samples size, sampling techniques, the type of data and how to collect it as well as the method of data analysis.

This study will adopt a case study design, which is a form of qualitative research, widely used by researchers in social sciences. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) provide a definition based on its characteristics. To them, a case study is (a) the in-depth study of (b) one or more instances of a phenomenon (c) in its real-life context that (d) reflects the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon (p.447). Since the research approach chosen for this study is the qualitative and the focus lies in providing a better understanding of the challenges PR practitioners are facing using new media tools in their practice, the researcher deemed it fit to adopt the case study strategy as the design for this study.

Descombe (2003) has stated that the case study is the best way to penetrate and investigate a single or few complex situations. Yin (2003) also added that a research that focuses on more than one instance is referred to as a multiple case study, while a single case study looks at an aspect of a phenomenon. Although case studies are not limited to qualitative research, they tend to be used often and take a small sample of research subjects as a source of in-depth qualitative information.

Notwithstanding the strengths of a case study approach, it has been criticised for lacking the grounds for generalisation (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2004). Yin, (2004) argued that case studies are only “generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (p.10). Yin (2004) further explains that the purpose of case studies is a generalisation to expand theory and not in statistical generalisation. In conformity with Yin (2004), Stake (2000) contends that with case studies, researchers make naturalistic generalisation which are different from deductive generalisations based on statistical analysis. In this research an attempt has not been made to make any statistical generalisation to a larger population. Rather, as Yin (2004) explained, the study seeks to make analytical generalisation to expand theory.

The study adopted the case study methodology to assess using new media to enhance corporate communication and corporate image and related the challenges PR practitioners in ECG. The case study research method focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings (Eisenhardt, 1989 cited in Yin, 2009). The use of the case study method allowed the researcher to explore the study of the challenges PR practitioners in ECG face in using new media to enhance corporate communication and corporate image “within its real-life context”, which is particularly important in the service industry because of the interactions between agents.

This study adopted a single case study design at the expense of a multiple design (where multiple design means using two or more companies), because using “a multiple-case study can require extensive resources and time beyond the means of a single student or independent research investigator” (Yin, 2009: 45). Focusing on a single case design, ECG was chosen for this study.

3.3 POPULATION

In this study, all staff of the Public Relations Division, including, the social media unit of ECG formed the population. However, the General Manager of PR, his two deputies and the head of social media became the target population.

3.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002), sampling technique guides researchers in their choices of whom to observe or whom to interview. The sampling technique of a study as advanced by Given (2008), is dependent on the objectives of the study. In accordance with the objectives of the study, the purposive sampling technique was used.

Purposive sampling may be defined as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, texts, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

A purposive sampling method was used to select the General Manager of PR, his two deputies and the head of social media because as individuals they can provide important information as agreed by Maxwell (1996) who defined purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which, particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices. Furthermore, these key individuals were chosen by the researcher because they fall within the group that had first-hand knowledge of ECG's social media strategy and operations and will therefore be in a position to give information needed for the research.

3.5 SAMPLE SIZE

3.5.1 Interviews

A sample size of six (6) PR Practitioners: General Manager of PR, his two deputies and the head of social media was selected, and two (2) six Regional Public Relations Officers (PROs) selected.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

The researcher employed interviews as an instrument for data collection. Interviews are helpful in qualitative research because they help the researcher to understand people's perspectives and experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) in order to obtain information to answer a particular research question. Also they reduce the degree of subjectivity on the part of the researcher which is prominent on sole reliance on inductive and interpretive analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Bertrand & Hughes, 2005). The General Manager of PR, his two deputies, two regional PROs and the head of social media were interviewed. The approach to the interviews was semi-structured; in the semi structured interview the interviewer had a set of broad questions to ask and also had some prompts to help the interviewee but the interviewer had the time and space to ask follow-up questions.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

3.7.1 Interviews

The interview sessions were carried out with the help of an interview guide which was semi-structured. The 14-item interview guide was designed to be very concise in order for them not to generate disinterest among respondents. The interview guide was meant for the General Manager of PR, his two deputies, the two regional PROs and the head of social media to assess the challenges ECG faced in the use of new media (social media) to enhance corporate

communication and corporate image. The interview guide was not applied bureaucratically which could have restricted the benefits of openness and contextual information. There was the need to mediate between the interview guide and the course of the interview because the respondents had their individual ways of talking about the topics and other topics relevant for them. The researcher however, brought them back on track in the cases of digression. The interview for the General Manager lasted approximately 22minutes and 33 seconds; that of the two deputies lasted approximately 25 minutes each and for the head of social media, it lasted approximately 17 minutes. That of the regional PROs lasted approximately 15 minutes each.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

3.8.1 Interview Analysis

This was done by recording the interviews with a laptop after seeking consent from interviewees. The interviews were analysed by playing back the recordings over and over again and then transcribing the text, word for word into textual materials (transcripts). Several copies of the transcript were printed to prevent loss of data. With facts broken down into manageable pieces of printed matter, the researcher did multiple readings of the transcripts; searching for types, classes, sequences, themes or patterns that were related to social media and public relations. The aim of this process was to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion. After this, the recurrent patterns were put into themes and analysed.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

The researcher guarded against the fabrication or falsifying of data and therefore sought to promote the pursuit of knowledge and truth, which was the primary goal of this research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data obtained from the interviews in relation to the research questions. The main aim of this study was to examine the use of new media to enhance Corporate Communication and Corporate Image at ECG. By this, the study sought to assess the various new media tools used for communicating internally and externally by PR practitioners at ECG as well as some of the challenges faced in using such tools. This chapter has two main parts. The first part describes the main findings while the second part looks at the analysis and discussions based on the literature review, theories discussed and some key themes identified during the interviews. The research questions for the discussions are as follows:

R.Q.1: What are the new media tool(s) used by the social media unit of ECG for internal communication?

R.Q.2: What are the new media tool(s) used by the social media unit of ECG for external communication?

R.Q.3: What are the challenges associated with using such new media tools to enhance corporate communication and corporate image?

4.1 Background of Respondents (Interviewees)

Respondents of the study were public relations practitioners employed by the Electricity Company of Ghana. They have for at least five years for the company. All of them were members of Institute of Public Relations with three (3) being accredited members. The accredited members could add the initials, APR to their names, making them certified PR practitioners in the country. This was revealed before the main interviews were conducted with the respondents. The respondents include Senior Managers and Senior Public Relations

practitioners, and therefore, they are familiar with the practice of the profession in their company and beyond their territories. All the six interviews were conducted in English language and at the offices of the interviewees.

4.2 Findings

R.Q.1: What are the new media tool(s) used by the social media unit of ECG for internal communication?

This question sought to discover the types of new media tools used by the ECG PR professionals to enhance internal communications. This question also sought to unearth how new media tools have been used by ECG PR practitioners to change the way they communicate with their internal publics. All the six (6) respondents said the ECG uses new media tools for internal communication. They used WhatsApp; Facebook; Intranet; Corporate emails; internally developed app: Powerhub; and Kaizela-a Microsoft application, for the exchange of information internally. Young & Hinesly (2014) said organizations are gradually using social media to advance their internal communication. They said, upon successful implementation, communication could have a significant impact on “internal efficiency, team collaboration, innovation, organizational alignment, and cultural transformation.” Therefore, ECG uses new media tools such as WhatsApp for internal communication and has had a significant impact on the internal communication process, which promotes instant feedback. Ewen, Men & O’neil (2019) also state that the promotion of social media in organisations was helping to reshape communication strategy internally.

In using social media for internal communication, ECG Management broadcasts messages to groups and this has helped to ensure quick and instant dissemination of information meant for internal publics of the company.

One respondent said:

Previously it was newspaper, and radio and television and now people are much more closer to their phones and accessing social media everyday, so by occupying that space we've been able to reach out with more communication, to our customers and within the organisation. With the introduction of WhatsApp groups, there have been more groups created, the MD has over 100 groups that he is part of, of different, different, sections. That we also use frequently (Respondent 4, September 2020).

RQ2: What are the new media tool(s) used by the social media unit of ECG for external communication?

Another focus of this research was to find out the new media tools used by the social media unit of ECG to communicate with its external publics. It again sought to unearth how new media tool(s) were used for engaging the external publics of the ECG. It was also to investigate how effective the use of social media has been for the company.

Respondents said the company uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, WhatsApp and ECG website to engage external publics and stakeholders. They said that the company has established an in-house Social Media Unit that is responsible for communicating with its stakeholders/publics/customers. The communication model is two-way, therefore they communicate to them and receive feedback.

Majority of respondents said they used new media to send information to their publics. Announcements on power outages, planned maintenance, and tariff adjustments are published on their social media handles and website, as public information. The ECG runs PR campaigns on all their social media handles and their website. They use images and catchy creatives to attract people's attention in the social media space. Twitter and Facebook has helped the company to send information quicker to their customers.

Respondents indicated that using the social media has facilitated two-way symmetric communication, which is conforming the last communication model, discussed in the

background to the study, Newson et al (2013). The Company has given a platform for customers or stakeholders to provide feedback on Facebook, Twitter and the official website, “www.ecggh.com”. There are some officers on standby who respond to customer complaints on hourly and daily basis. The ECG social media handles are: ECGghOfficial on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

One respondent said:

we have officers on our social media handles 24/7 [24 hours] who respond to the concerns of customers and so for that reason, anytime a customer presents a consent on any of our handles, immediately there is somebody there to respond and it has made it so effective for the company to use. When you look at the number of customers who go onto our website or interact with us on our social media platforms, you would really appreciate the fact that using social media to communicate has been very effective for the company (Respondent 1, September 2020)

It has also become the new way of engaging customers and helped to promote convenience for customers in the era of Covid-19. Some customers now can sit in their homes and make complaints through their mobile devices and have their complaints resolved. It has also reduced the risk for customers to travel to the offices of ECG to make official complaints.

Another respondent said:

It is marvelous. Previously, it is just impossible to do that. Today they can at the comfort of where they are outside Africa, still pay online any amount of money they are to pay for our quotation and would get their service connected, I mean the national grid connected to their premises without they stepping to our offices, is marvelous. Is just marvelous(Respondent 2, September 2020).

Using the new media (social media) influenced the branding process in ECG. ECG has visibility in the social media landscape. It has blue as its colour for communicating with its publics on the social media. It has shaped the posture of the company when it comes to communicating with the publics. There has been improvement in the visibility of company and this has brought on some likes on Facebook, and positive comments on some occasions.

RQ3: What are the challenges associated with using such new media tools to enhance corporate communication and corporate image?

One of the major objectives of this study was to find out the challenges confronting PR practitioners in using the new media tools for engaging their publics. Therefore, this question sought to explore some of the challenges associated with the use of new media tools and how using social media has enhanced the corporate image of ECG. It was also to assess whether it was worth using social media for engaging customers.

Respondents in gave three main challenges. These are parody accounts, bad comments by customers and the possibility of a staff sending a message, which is not in synchrony with the company position.

A respondent said:

Challenges such as parody, where we have people copying whatever you are doing and trying to use your organisation's image to identify or undertake criminal activities to damage the reputation of your organisation (Respondent 2, September 2020).

Some people mimic ECG on social media and spread falsehoods, therefore, the PR team has to be alert 24 hours to correct any erroneous impressions created by such people. This is consistent with the definition of fake news by Pulido et al (2020) who noted that "fake news has been defined as fabricated information that imitates news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent, which overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation—false or misleading information—and disinformation, which is false information that is deliberately disseminated to deceive people". Therefore, parody accounts have an aim to misinform the key publics with fake information and there are times some individuals have used information published by ECG and manipulated the information to deceive the general public.

Another respondent:

Challenge of even staff sending messages to customers contrary to corporate position and then creating identity crisis for the company. For example, immediately you send a message, it goes worldwide".

This was also identified as a major challenge to the company.

The respondents also said using social media also encouraged some customers to give bad comments and negative feedback.

One Respondent said:

Sometimes there are customers who take advantage of the fact that they are not seeing who they are talking to or who they are interacting with and say all sort of negative things (Respondent 3, September 2020).

Another respondent said:

Sometimes things can go wrong because what people say everybody sees so sometimes one bad experience and someone posts it there, and then people who had similar experiences come to flood the place with their comments. When people post negative comments, it encourages other people to post similar comments or bad experiences until someone posts a positive and then we have to highlight the positive. So it's easy to tarnish the brand's image on social media because people could rather run with negatives and it also exposes your company to small problems (Respondent 4, September 2020).

Respondents indicated that social media has been a blessing to ECG.

One respondent said:

It has actually lifted the company among its peers or the group such as Ghana Water, Volta River Authority (VRA) and all these other power utility companies. ECG stands tall because of social media (Respondent 4, September 2020).

A respondent said:

Currently, I would say the image of ECG has improved a lot in the eyes of the public and it is all because of the communication channels or tools we are using now. (Respondent 3, September 2020)

Another respondent said:

Well I think we've come a long way. I can say with confidence that it is better than the era of Dumsor, so I will personally say we are up there. We are not excellent yet but it is very positive. Gradually, customers have come to appreciate our role in the value chain matrix and so, majority have confidence in us. There is the game changer, the use of social media to engage customers promptly, has also added to improving our image (Respondent 2, September 2020).

Respondents noted that the benefit of social media far outweighed the disadvantages.

4.2.1 Using New Media enhances corporate communication

Findings from the study suggested that using new media has enhanced corporate communication both internally and externally, a core aspect of the systems theory, which proposes that PR should serve as the boundary between an organisation and its publics. With the use of social media new tools such WhatsApp, Intranet, email, website, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram, the ECG PR is able to communicate to both its internal publics and external publics. This is in agreement with the study by Tench & Yeomans (2017), emphasizing the role of PR in organisations. The ECG PR therefore serves as bridge between the ECG staff internally through social media and the Publics, using the social media. They share information internally and externally, all aimed at enhancing corporate communication.

Lipińska (2018), who studied the use of social media in the corporate communication processes, between a company and the internal and external environment, and the role of social network, concluded that social media played a significant role in corporate communication and that LinkedIn fulfills a critical role in the communication process of engaging stakeholders. The study also revealed that in view of the growth of communication needs, organisations are constantly looking for new, integrated channels of communication with stakeholders, and recently their activities have moved to social media, where Facebook is the leader. Therefore, the use of social media, especially Facebook by ECG has enhanced the process of corporate communication.

Manavik et al (2015) stated that corporate communication professionals build and maintain relationships with all publics. They posited that companies' reputation largely was facilitated by their image on social media. Therefore, a positive image on social media could add to the

enhancement of the corporate image of the Company. ECG has been on social media for the past four years and has since that time made a conscious effort to maintain a good corporate image.

4.2.2 New Media promote corporate branding

Responses indicates that new media usage in ECG was influencing the branding process positively. For public relations to contribute effectively to the branding process, they have the opportunity to ensure their company is visible in the social media space and tell their own story. This has ensured a consistent appearance in the public domain.

One respondent said:

Yes, previously or some time ago, ECG used yellow as its colour and then what we've done with social media is we kept pushing the blue in people's faces that now when you see an advert on social media that has a lot of blue, it is most likely related to ECG. So it's a place where you can run a brand. Each year, we can choose a different colour and run with it so people will come to accept it that that is the brand colour. The branding process also includes the way people talk, the way people react to the image of the company (Respondent 4, September 2020).

This means ECG has used the social media space to brand themselves, as Safko (2012), writes about everything social media, using videos, images and words to communicate on social media. Because ECG is seen as doing well, it has received some positive mentions on the social media.

In addition, the brand ECG is now seen as better than before, as most of the respondents said it has improved drastically over the past four years. In the past, some officers felt shy to mention that they worked for ECG, but with the inclusion of social media in their customer engagement, in addition to introduction of some new technologies in the service delivery, they are now proud to state they work for ECG.

4.2.3 Using social media to improve service delivery

Findings further suggest that the use of social media has enhanced the general service delivery of the ECG. The company has a customer population of over three (3) million across their operational areas and uses Facebook, Twitter, and its website to engage many of them. Customers have the opportunity to voice out their complaints, and they get instant feedback and results. It has encouraged most of the customers to report faults to the company through Facebook, emails, and through the ECG Power mobile application.

Information sharing has therefore been two-way affair. The company is able to send information to customers, and is able to receive feedback from them.

A respondent said:

With Facebook and Twitter, we have a lot of customers who are on our Facebook and Twitter accounts and frequently we educate them through these means on the dos and don'ts, how to acquire our services. Things they need to know to enhance service delivery and also to ensure that the customers are satisfied (Respondent 3, September 2020).

They give feedback and when the feedback is negative they quickly work to correct the negative feedback and do what is right to satisfy their customers, and if positive, they try to improve on it.

4.2.4 ECG uses Social Media and Traditional Media blend for corporate communication

Respondents also indicated in their responses that the ECG used a blend of social media and traditional media to enhance corporate communication. Memos, notice boards, physical meetings, durbars, WhatsApp, Intranet, website, zoom and Microsoft apps have been used to promote corporate communication. In addition, for external communication, the traditional

media such as television, radio and newspapers are used in addition to new media to communicate to their publics. This means that the traditional media offers them the one-way asymmetric communication, where feedback is not immediate or non-existent. However, the use of new media helps ECG to engage in two-way interactive communication with their publics.

4.4.5 Using new media to enhance corporate image

Findings suggested that the use of new media has enhanced the corporate image of the ECG.

One respondent said:

Today I must say that the public sees ECG in a good light. We may have one or two customers who have their issues with us but generally, the majority of customers see ECG in better light than before because now ECG is going into technology, in fact has gone into technology. We have our power Application (ECG Power) where you use the internet or your phone to purchase power, ok, you can use your phone to pay your bills, you can use your phone to assess how much credit you have, we will send you information on your phone as to how much power you have left on your meter.
(Respondent 1, September 2020)

A respondent said:

Some of our meters are smart. How much you are owing, how much you have paid, and all that. And so this has cut down on the number of visit that customers make to our offices and it is being appreciated a lot. Especially with this ECG power that we launched somewhere this year, customers are using it extensively and they really appreciate it. So looking at where we are coming from, and where we have reached, I can say that ECG is in a good light when it comes to how the public sees us today
(Respondent 1, September 2020).

Another respondent said:

Gradually customers have come to appreciate our role in the value chain matrix and so majority have confidence in us. The game changer include the use of the social media to engage customers promptly. It has also added to improving our image. We also can talk of our app, ECG Power Application that has brought some flexibility and convenience to staff and customers and many others that we are introducing into the system. It means that gradually we are coming closer to what is being done outside or what has been the norm among developed world. I see our image going up by the day especially now that we have sufficient generation (Respondent 2, September 2020).

4.2.6 Challenges with Using Social Media

The main challenge that was identified by all respondents was parody. This is where the use of social media in the communication field has seen a rise in a new phenomenon. (Wan et al, 2015).

This is where a fake social media account is created in the name of a company in an attempt to create crises on social media for organisations that have a presence on social media or with no appearance on social media at all.

A respondent said:

Challenges ,such as parody, where we have people copying whatever you are doing and trying to use your organisation image to identify or undertake criminal activities in all to damage the reputation of your organisation (Respondent 2, September 2020).

People mimic ECG on social media and spread falsehoods, therefore, the PR team has to be alert 24 hours to correct any erroneous impressions created by such people.” The company has had its share of such experiences.

One respondent said:

Challenges of even staff sending messages to customers contrary to corporate position and then creating identity crisis for the company. For example, immediately you send a message, it goes worldwide (Respondent 2, September 2020).

This means that using social media can expose a company to the dangers of being trolled on social media because of a social media gaffe, where one response to a customer query goes bad.

The respondents also said using social media encouraged some customers to give bad comments.

One respondent said:

Sometimes there are customers who take advantage of the fact that they are not seeing who they are talking to or who they are interacting with and they say all sort of negative things (Respondent 3, September 2020).

Another respondent said:

Sometimes things can go wrong because what people say everybody sees so sometime one bad experience and someone posts it there, and then people who had similar experiences come to flood the place with their comments. When people post negative comments, it encourages other people to post similar comments or bad experiences until someone posts a positive and then we have to highlight the positive. So it's easy to tarnish the brand's image on social media because people could rather ran with negatives and it also exposes your company to small problems (Respondent 4, September 2020).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The following key findings were made from the study:

The study revealed that the ECG uses Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, corporate e-mails, Intranet, Kaizela and Powerhub for internal communication. They use such applications to disseminate information among the working groups. The MD is on 100 WhatsApp groups.

The study found that ECG uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, WhatsApp and ECG website to communicate with its external publics and stakeholders. Respondents said that the company has a social media unit that is responsible for communicating to the outside world. The communication is two-way therefore they receive feedback from customers and this has facilitated customer service.

The study further found that using the new media tools for internal and external communication has promoted instant feedback from such communications. It has also reduced the cost of communicating with both internal and external customers. Feedback is also immediate, as the mediums used encourages instant feedback.

Findings suggested that the use of new media as enhanced the corporate image of the ECG.

All the respondents said the image of the company has improved significantly with the use of social media to communicate. The public, they said, sees ECG in a good light now than before. The majority of customers see ECG in a better light than before because of the use of technology.

The study further found that some three major challenges associated with the use of social media is parody, bad comments and the dangers of staff sending information that is not in consonance with company position.

Finally, the study found that new media has enhanced two-way communication between the company and its internal and external publics, thereby enhancing the public image of the ECG. It was revealed that the benefits of using social media was more than the challenges.

5.2 Conclusion

In all, it can be gainsaid that the use of social media for public relations practice has not changed the landscape of practice completely. It has rather come to compliment the practice of the profession in the country. It has come to support the systems theory of Public Relations, which connotes that PR practitioners must span between an organisation and its publics to achieve a good corporate image. Responses indicate that ECG has used social media to facilitate internal and external communication, thereby creating a good relationship with both internal and external publics.

The findings suggest that PR practitioners are using new media to enhance two-way communication between management and internal stakeholders and both external stakeholders.

The use of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, corporate e-mails, Intranet, Kaizela and Powerhub, Youtube, Instagram among others has helped the company to go closer to its publics.

Findings also reveal that the ECG has received positive and negative feedback from customers. This has helped the company to address such problems and improved on its services.

Findings again suggest that the use of new media has enhanced the corporate image of the ECG. All the respondents said the image of the company has improved significantly with the use of social media to communicate.

Finally the study revealed that the benefits of using social media was more than the challenges because ECG's image has transformed within the past four year, winning four awards, and being mentioned at some international conferences.

5.3 Recommendation

It was discovered in the study that ECG's image has improved with the use of social media, having established its in-house social media unit. This researcher therefore recommends that other quasi-government institutions and state subvented organisations establish in-house social media units to promote their corporate communication efforts.

5.4 Limitations

Owing to the exigencies of the Covid-19 pandemic and the short period within which to complete the study, it was carried out in Accra and for the same reasons the sampled population was purposively selected and limited to the PR practitioners employed by the ECG. Although these practitioners have the basic qualities of PR practitioners, it must however be acknowledged that because they were purposively selected, results of data collected may not reflect the true situations in other categories industries in the country. The results cannot be generalized. The findings of this study represent the experiences of six (6) Public Relations practitioners of ECG. It is the view of this researcher that these findings be replicated to confirm their validity.

5.5 Future Study

Further studies on using new media to enhance corporate communication and corporate image using quantitative approach could be explored. Further research is also recommended on how public relations practitioners are actually integrating new media and traditional media to interact with their publics. The impact of new media on public relations could also in particular, be an area of more critical research.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How long have you been working with ECG?
2. What communication tools were used in the past for internal communications and how were they used?
3. What communication tools are used now for internal communication and how are they used?
4. Would you say communication has evolved in your organisation, and how?
5. What new media tools are used for internal communications?
6. What communication tools are used for external communications and how are they used?
7. How do you use the new media in your external communication?
8. How do you use social media in your service delivery, looking at your Facebook and Twitter accounts?
9. How effective has the use of social media been and why?
10. What are some of the benefits of using social media in communicating with both internal and external publics?
11. How has the use of social media influenced the branding process?
12. What are some of the issues/challenges you faced with the use of social media in your organisation?
13. What do you think is the current image of ECG in the eyes of the publics and why?
14. Would you say social media has been a blessing or otherwise to your company and why?