

# **GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM**



**THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION POLICY IN PUBLIC  
INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA: THE CASE OF PUBLIC  
UTILITIES REGULATORY COMMISSION (PURC)**

**BY:**

**MOHAMMED ADAM SULAIMAN**

**OCTOBER, 2020.**

# **GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM**

**(SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH)**

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**MOHAMMED ADAM SULAIMAN**

**MADC18095**

**LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE  
STUDIES AND RESEARCH OF THE GHANA INSTITUTE OF  
JOURNALISM IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT  
FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT  
COMMUNICATION**

**OCTOBER, 2020.**

## DECLARATION

**STUDENT:**

I, Mohammed Adam Sulaiman, the undersigned Master of Arts Student in Development Communication of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Ghana Institute of Journalism do hereby declare that this long essay, with the exception of quotes and references is as a result of my own original research under the supervision of Dr. Modestus Fosu. That all used work have been duly acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted for any award in this institute or elsewhere.

I wish to state that I am responsible for all omissions and shortfalls.

.....

Date:.....

Mohammed Adam Sulaiman

(MADC18095)

**SUPERVISOR’S CERTIFICATION:**

I hereby certify that the preparation and submission of this long essay was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of long essay by the School of Graduate Studies and Research of the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

.....

Date:.....

Dr. Modestus Fosu

(Supervisor)

## **DEDICATION**

May the name of the Almighty Allah be praised for guiding me to seek further knowledge at the School of Graduate Studies and Research of the Ghana Institute of Journalism. To Him is the Glory and Honour.

This research work is dedicated to my dear mum (Hajia Azaratu Nayi Fuseini), dad (Alhaji Adam Nachimbilla), wife (Issahaku Munawara) and kids (Mohammed Eeman Wuntia, Mohammed Zaidan Nabbu and Mohammed Ihsan Dinviela) whose prayers, love and assistance has kept me going all these while.

May Allah increase you in faith and reward each and every one of you long life and good health.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First and foremost my gratitude goes to the Almighty Allah for everything that He has done and continue to do for me. Also, my deepest gratitude goes to my father and supervisor, Dr. Modestus Fosu for his time in guiding me through this work. I appreciate his time, patience and strict supervision that resulted in the production of this work. His personal interest in my work offered me expert opinion and useful information without which I wouldn't have been able to complete the work in such a solid form.

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Finally to all those who, in one way or the other have contributed to the success of this work, I say thank you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Communication is considered crucial and critical component in the lives of individuals, corporate institutions as well as nations. Whether internal or otherwise, it is the lifeblood of institutions. The world thrives on information and communication. Because of the vital role that communication play, there is the need for it to be organised, streamlined and guided at all times in order for its intended purpose to be achieved. Despite its importance, a substantial number of organizations do not have clear cut communication policy. And where there is one, it is either abandoned or are not fully implemented it its entirety. This phenomenon has adversely effected many organizations, especially their corporate image.

The study was conducted to assess the role of communication policy in public institutions viz aviz the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC). The study, which basically used the in-depth interview, aided the researcher to gain an insight into the communication process of the PURC thereby arriving at the conclusion.

The findings of the study revealed that the PURC has no known communication policy document that clearly spells out the dos and don'ts of the communication process of the Commission. Instead, communication is guided by rules and regulations enshrined in the Commission's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and this falls short of the requirements of a comprehensive communication policy document.

The paper shares suggestions that will facilitate the Commission to create a roadmap of how information about the Commission will be shared and communicated to its stakeholders.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Background to the study

In our world today, communication has become vital and the wheels on which everything revolves. Human beings everywhere in the world in one-way or the other have an innate need to communicate. According to Cüceloğlu (1998 cited in Boyaci et al, 2000), ‘everyone is in communication with others in the social context. Whatever the content is, notably, individuals need to exchange and share thoughts, news among others.’

Since this is an essential quality of people, especially in organisations where formal and informal communication exists, the need to share and exchange information still plays a vital role in structuring the organizational activities, objectives, company policies and strategies. It could proportionally be inferred that the success of any organization largely depends on the communication mechanisms deployed internally and externally.

It is in line with this view that Wertheim (2008) observed that ‘people in organisations typically spend over 75% of their time in an interpersonal situation, thus it is no surprise to find that at the root of a large number of organisational problems is poor communications.’ Wertheim goes further to state that effective communication is an essential component of organisational success whether it is at the interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup, organisational, or external levels. According to Boyaci (1996, p.3-5 cited in Patrick, 2012), ‘communication is the exchange of information, thought and emotion between individuals or groups, communication still plays a fundamental role in balancing individual and organisational objectives.’

It is for its vital role of communication that Shonubi and Akintaro’s (2016) view communication as ‘crucial impacts among work groups. Organizational communication is a channel through which information, resources and even policies flow, hence communication

within institutions could broadly be referred to as the flow of information, ideas, policies, statement of positions and feedbacks, within an institution, and between an institution and the public, as well as between organisation and other organisations’.

‘Communication is the sharing of signification or meaning in formal and informal communication. It applies to almost all levels of communication, including the bottom up and top-down, horizontal and vertical, to name but a few. All persons in an organization are accountable for the effectiveness or otherwise of their way of disseminating information.’ Rodney (2015). In an organization as well as any other setting, everyone, irrespective of his/her credentials, has a role to play in the communication process. Top level management, middle level as well as low level management ought to have similar opportunities in making their concerns and thoughts known. Media, through which employees and employers pass their expressions must be equally available for all. According to Gilsdorf (1998), ‘communication in an organization caters for both internal which includes employees and external, that is, consumers, clients and audiences. In a situation where workers have a fair understanding of the expectations required of them, it contributes better to the vision of management of an organization.’ The attainment of effective organizations depends on the existence and availability of a ready and effective communication between senior management and junior management in an organization. ‘The presence of such organizational communications is expected to accelerate a variety of coordination and cooperation.’ Nawi (2015).

It is necessary and vital for all organizations and institutions, whether public or private to have policies, guidelines and a constitution that governs their day to day activities. It is more necessary for the policies of organizations to be implemented accordingly and applied equally devoid of discrimination. Without implementation, policies and guidelines are mere

documents which have no life or purpose to an organization. Also, policies of an organization should be at the disposal of its workers for them to know the what's, how's and when's not forgetting the why's of the organization. Policy documents must always be easily accessible to members of an organization as they will serve as a guide to them as they execute their duties and functions. Researchers, such as Daft & Weick (1984), postulate that organizations are complicated and dynamic systems that explain events for their staff and create meanings that guide actions and decisions.

There are many types and forms of policies depending on the focus and aim of an organization. An organization that is into the provision of insurance services for clients cannot exist without having an insurance policy; a transport company must have a transport policy; and a state must have a constitution (written or unwritten) or convention to live on. Although policies differ and vary, notably, some policies and the existence as well as survival of an organization are inextricably connected, that is, one may not be effective without the other and a good exemplar of such policy is a communication policy.

‘A communication policy outlines communication practices and procedures in an organization. It encompasses collective beliefs, expectations, and values regarding communication, and is generated in the exchange of information and ideas in an organization.’ M. S (1985).

‘Communication is an inherent component in any organization. Its essence is to update management on new decisions and policies, to prepare for crisis communication, to enhance standard compliance or to listen to the attitudes of employees. SHRM, (2018). According to Article 1 (2) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, ‘This Constitution shall be the supreme law of Ghana any other law found to be inconsistent with any provision of this constitution shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void.’ Basically, policies and guidelines of any

organization operating within the territory of Ghana must be in consonance with the provisions of the 1992 constitution. In a circumstance whereby a policy of an organization contravenes any provision(s) of the 1992 constitution, the said policy is null and void. Furthermore, Article 21 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states that ‘all persons shall have the right to (a) freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media’. This underscores the communication processes of organizations operating in Ghana as the right to communicate using any medium is enshrined in the constitution. According to Gadzekpo (n.d) ‘communication policies don’t just take place in a vacuum but can be determined by a variety of factors including politics, economics, culture and the society.’

This essay seeks to argue that the effectiveness and success of any organization largely depends on its communication policy (internal and external relations). Conversely, the failure of any organization may also be attributable to the lack or ineffectiveness of its communication policy. An organization can be effective when it has fully implemented its communication policy. Aside implementation, what constitutes a comprehensive communication policy is key and this essay intends to explore the communication policy of the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC). The existence and availability of the policy, its content, implementation, reliability among others will be constructively perused by the writer. Also, the essay will draw a link between the communication policy (document or convention) of PURC and the laws of Ghana to determine the level of compliance of PURC.

## **1.2 Justification for the study**

Undoubtedly, the PURC has its recognized way of practicing organizational communication which has yielded significant gains for the organization since its establishment in 1997. However, it is noteworthy to conduct an external and independent evaluation of the

communication processes of the commission by using communication policy as a standard tool for realizing the role of communication in the Commission. Arguably, the writer observed that a substantial number of organizations and institutions do not fully implement the entirety of a communication policy. Having closely worked in the Commission, the researcher can assert that, the role of communication policy is mostly limited to media engagements, that is the occasional release of press statements and organizing press briefings. Other components of a communication policy which receive little or no attention include media training and monitoring, customer care, crisis communication, just to name a few. Communication can either exist as a written document or convention. From the researchers observation, it can be argue that, many organizations engage in the communication process without having a laid down communication policy. This study will again determine the role of communication policy in two categories, namely communication policy as a written document and communication policy as a convention.

### **1.3 Research Hypothesis**

Undoubtedly, the PURC has a communication department which acts as the official mouthpiece of the commission. The Commission again has a mandate to act on behalf of the interest of the Ghanaian populace in arriving at affordable and appropriate charge regimes for public utilities specifically, electricity, water and gas transmission. Despite its communication department that serves as the intermediary between the Commission and the public, there is little or no information about PURC to a large number of Ghanaians. Many people misconstrue the mandate of the Commission for that of the Electricity and Water service providers namely, Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL), Volta River Authority (VRA), Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) and the Northern Electricity Distribution Company (NEDCO). In a situation in which the mandate of PURC is appropriated to them by the public, then that public forms only the elite few.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

In order to get the intended information to make an argument for this research, the researcher is guided by the following general and specific research questions.

### **General Research Question**

1. What is the role of communication policy in the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC)?

### **Specific Research Questions**

1. Does the PURC have a known (documented) communication policy?
2. In what ways does the PURC engage in internal communication as well as external communication?

## **1.5 Significance of the study**

This essay provides compelling qualitative evidence to the importance of communication policy in an organization as it focus on information from the communication units of the PURC. A functional communication department chiefly helps in managing the expectations of both the internal and external publics. Efforts to harness these benefits is better presented and appreciated in a communication policy that designates responsibilities of how communication is received, stored, and managed. Conversely a functional consumer, client and customer reception will shape the quality of services of the PURC.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

To understand the importance of communication policy in any given organization, it is imperative to analyse the management, structure and operations of the organization. One can only successfully examine how communication results in the success and efficiency of an organization by exploring how employees exchange official information within an organization. The way employees engage with one another can also determine the efficiency and success of an organization. The researcher confidently relied on Ahmed (2019) to assess the communication practices of PURC. According to Ahmed, for an organization to be successful, its communication process must include the following; formal and informal communication, directional communication, internal and external communication, oral and written literature. The formal relates to how an organization takes advantage of the channels available using well-structured units within their organizational structure whereas informal refers to friendly engagements between members of an organization.

Directional communication either involves downward up or top down flow of information. Basically, this involves the interaction between top level management and members of an organization. It addresses the relationship of power that exists in an organization. Internal and external communication basically examine how in-house members interact and how the organization engages the public. The issue of the release of press statements and organization of press engagements, briefings respectively fall within the written and oral communication. According to Mohammed (2019), 'Ghana is a multicultural society with diverse religious and ethnic orientation, so it is imperative for Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to be a part of the communication policy of an organization as it respects dignity and encourages inclusion.'

To understand the organizational communication of PURC, the researcher relied on the works of Herbet A. Simon especially in his 'organization communication systems'.

According to Simon, H. (1997), 'the importance of communication is unquestionable in organizations.' In the next chapter, all arguments will be aimed at positioning communication as an intrinsic component in an organizational setting like the PURC.

### **Literature Review**

Appreciable literature exists on communication policy relative to government and the state but limited literature exists on the role of communication in state owned regulatory bodies like the Public Utilities and Regulatory Commission. Admittedly, this debatable lack or inadequate literature on communication policy in organizations is evident in Ghana. A thorough search for scholarly work on communication policies led the researcher to first world countries. The existing literature for instance, Gaddzekpo (n.d) is limited to communication process of the government of Ghana. According to Gadzekpo (n.d) 'there is no clear policy document regarding communication. The government simply make pronouncements and declarations through newspapers and television during the era of military rule in Ghana.' The absence of a clear policy document does not downplay the essence of communication policy but having a policy document will help guide the effective communication process. This chapter seeks to critique existing literature on internal and external communication.

### **Communication at the workplace: internal communication**

'Healthy communication refers to the extent at which all employees are equally motivated to meet organizational goals by having knowledge of the mission and objectives of the organization.' Down (cited in Gonzales 2014). This makes employees conscious of the missions, visions and objectives of any given organization or institution. According to Tamuz (2001), 'when employees are treated unequally, this leads to the silence and inactivity on the part of victimised workers.' The silence and withdrawal of victimized employees of an

organization is clearly a symptom of a deprived organizational communication climate which has adverse effects especially on the organization's corporate image.

Open and equal communication emboldens expression of concerns especially from employees to management. The channel of information available from say, a Chief Executive Officer to a Human Resource Manager must be in a way available to the Security officer to the Human Resource Manager. During meetings, all employees present should have a fair chance to express their concerns and grievances. The Society for Human Resource Management (2004) considers communication among the 'Critical 4 Cs' criteria for a successful and positive productive workforce: "Commitment, Culture, Communication and Compensation' (retrieved from iabc.com).

'Effective employee communication is composed of the right information delivered in a clear manner; it is two-way and essential to the success of an organization.' Smith et al. (2004 cited in Human Element Chapter 3). It is the process of exchanging information and creating understanding and behaviors within an organization that reinforce the organization's vision, values and culture among employees, who can then communicate the company's message to external audiences. (retrieved from iabc.com) This essay seeks to find and examine the credibility and competence of the source of information or command issued to employees and the way in which such information is processed.

Gillis (2004) opined that 'employees are the front line and lifeblood of an organization hence their satisfaction is key in the communication chain. When employees leave the office at the end of the day, they act as their corporations' and organizations' ambassadors in the community'. In any communication policy, employee communication should be managed well so as to help preserve the corporate image on the organization.

According to Gray and Robertson (2005), 'employees want to hear from their CEO or executive management about the following "big picture" topics:

- The future of the organization.
- Overall corporate strategy.
- Top-line financial results.
- Major changes.
- Feedback from the board of directors (or, in the public sector, government).
- Major stakeholder issues.
- Responses to media attention. (p. 27)'

The above literature may not be applied to organizations like the PURC since the PURC is a state-owned regulatory institution. In state institutions, there are lots of bureaucracies that slow the smooth implementation of policies. Also, the PURC is a decentralized body with branches across the country hence they rely on orders from their Head office. Granted it is applied to the PURC, its effectiveness would be less as compared to a private owned institution.

### **External communication**

According to Dugan (2019), 'unlike internal communication, external communication is directed at customers and clients as well as other stakeholders and typically aims at promoting sales, publicity, generate sponsorship, announce events via emails, newsletters among others.' This again may not be relevant to the PURC as it does not engage in marketing. It is a regulatory body which is mandated by law to regulate and supervise two main utility service providers in Ghana. The Commission does not aim at promoting sales and generating sponsorship hence issues of marketing communications is not evident in their external communication process. Stakeholders of the PURC include the Volta River Authority, Northern Electricity Distribution Company. Ghana Water Company, Electricity Company of Ghana, organized, identifiable groups as well as members of the general public.

New media increase the volume, speed and every-way flow of communication, connecting people, giving them a voice and stimulating discussions about topical issues that are of common interest (Smith 2006). The use of social media such as emails, Facebook, twitter and LinkedIn may only be used in reaching out to those with access to social media leaving out those with little or no knowledge regarding digital technology. The mandate of PURC is beyond satisfying a few elites, thus they may not be exercising their mandate thoroughly and effectively by limiting their external relations to social media.

‘The power of radio to reach out to a wider audience lies not only in its vast geographical coverage but also in programming that addresses the linguistic needs of the communities it serves’ Mohammed (2019). According to Ansah (2008), ‘beyond audience reach, access to information in indigenous languages fuels the growth of democracy because a largely under-served audience group is afforded the chance to engage with the public sphere.’ This implies, a broadcast by PURC in indigenous languages such as Twi, Dagbanli and Ewe will be the most appropriate method of media inclusion.

This essay has the tendency of motivating more scholarly work on communication policies of state-owned institutions specifically regulatory bodies. The above mentioned literature on internal and external communication are going to be relied upon by the researcher as it serves as the foundation for this study. In the next chapter, the researcher will describe the processes used in gathering data for the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.1 Methodological Framework

Research methodology involves specified procedures, techniques, ideas and thought process followed in getting things done, and, or achieving particular ends or objectives. To this end, the researcher relied on qualitative research methodologies to answer the research questions outlined for the study. Qualitative research methodology is used because the writer admits that to get satisfactory answers to the questions raised, attention must be paid to narration and perceptions and not statistics.

To get a comprehensive appreciation of communication policy in PURC, two in-depth interviews was conducted. The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission PURC, with its head office in Accra is fairly represented in all nine (9) out of the sixteen (16) regional capitals. The Commission's Public Relations and External Affairs directorate is headed by a manager and assisted by three (3) officers who are assigned different roles such as protocol, media relations and public education. Furthermore, the researcher decided to use in depth interviews because he is of considered opinion that during interviews, the respondent is not limited so he / she is given unlimited time to provide information that might not have been posed by the interviewer and can have a meaningful impact to the data collection process. The focus here is to collect data from the Head of communication and Human resource person of the PURC as it will be of fundamental benefit to the objectives of the research. The first respondent is the Director of Operations of PURC. He is a top-level staff and best fits the description of a human resource person. The second is a Head of Communication at the commission. In compliance with the restrictions and safety protocols as a result of the deadly Coronavirus, the researcher took advantage of mediated communication. Mediated communication refers to communication carried out by the use of Information Communication and Technology and can be contrasted to face to face communication. (Crowley, David and Mitchell 1994). This

means that the usual face to face communication was forgone for the use of information communication technology. Interview guides was sent to the respondents via their respective email addresses. Each interview guide had its own set of content since different information was to be sought for by the researcher. The two respondents for the research decided not to share their names and identity to the interviewer for reason unknown to the researcher. This request was respected as the writer will make no mention of the names of the respondents. The interview guide contained six (6) and ten (10) questions for the respondents on Human Resource and Public Relations and External Affairs respectively. Find below, interview guide for the respondents:

**Interview guide for respondent on Human Resource.**

1. What is PURC and what does it do?
2. What is the importance and significance of the PURC?
3. How does the PURC carry out its functions?
4. What rules and regulations guide you in the exercise of your duties?
5. What are some challenges associated with your role?
6. Explain how internal communication in the Commission is conducted.

**Interview guide for respondent on Public Relations and External Affairs.**

1. What is PURC and what does it do?
2. What is the importance and significance of the PURC?
3. How does the PURC carry out its functions?
4. Does the PURC have a communication policy document?
5. What is the role of the Public Relations & External Affairs Officers of the Commission?
6. What rules and regulations guide PR officers in the discharge of their duties?

7. What is the most common medium used by your outfit in communicating with your publics and why is that your preferred choice of medium?
8. Explain how internal communication in the Commission is conducted.
9. What are some challenges associated with your role?
10. What can be done to improve the corporate image of the Commission?

The data was examined and analysed using the researcher's current knowledge of communication models and theories, especially Laswell's model of communication, 1948. According to Lasswell, H. (1948) 'the "who" referred to "control analysis", the "what" referred to the "message", the "which medium" referred to "media analyses", the "to whom" referred to "audience analysis" and the "with what effect" referred to "effect analysis". With the help of the aforementioned model of communication, the researcher was able to confidently digest the data gathered from the study by examining the internal and external ways in which the PURC disseminates information among its employees and the general public.

This research had its own limitations and constrains which were mainly as a result of insufficient time and funds associated with the researcher, as well as unforeseen circumstances such as the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, its social distancing protocols among others. The researcher intended to conduct in-depth interviews with a total number of nine (9) Public Relations Officers of the PURC, with each interviewee representing their various regional offices. The writer settled on nine PROs mainly because he wanted his study to be comprehensive by being all inclusive of all regional operations of the PURC. The in-depth interview with the PROs at the nine regional levels was to gather information concerning organizational communication, especially the processes of internal and external communications with a focus on internal relations of the Commission. Also, two focus group discussions were to be conducted using random customers and clients of the various utility

service providers namely; Ghana Water Company, Electricity Company of Ghana, Volta River Authority and Northern Electricity Distribution Company. Each focus group discussion was to constitute five (5) participants with at least two participants being females so as to enhance gender inclusion. These focus group discussions were to be conducted in the Northern region and Volta region of Ghana to get insight on external relations, especially the public perception of the Commission. Topics for the focus group discussion would have included, Knowledge of the PURC, choice of news media (television, radio, online) and customer reception.

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher exhibited maximum professionalism by showing restraint by recording the exact responses from the respondents devoid of interference. This was very vital to the study since the researcher is an employee of the Commission. The researcher made absolutely no input into the data collected and also conducted the study devoid of personal relations with the respondents. In the next chapter, the researcher present findings of the study, discussions and analyses, recommendations and the conclusion to the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1 Findings of the study

In this chapter, the researcher makes known the results of the research questions derived from the respondents. The findings are categorized into three sectors namely; communication policy and guidelines, channel of communication / role of communication and communication related problems of the PURC.

#### **Communication policy and guidelines.**

The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) has no known communication policy document that clearly spells out the dos and don'ts of the communication process of the Commission. However, there exists rules and guidelines which guide the communication process of the PURC. According to a respondent who is Head of Public Relations and External Affairs:

**“There is no communication policy document for the Commission. However, communication is guided by rules and regulations enshrined in the Commission’s Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for all staff”.**

Furthermore, the activities of the PURC are again premised on a set of rules and regulations which is adhered to by the Commission. According to the Director of Regional Operations of the Commission:

**“The Commission uses various rules and regulations to undertake its duties. These Include:**

- 1. Consumer Service Regulation 2020**
- 2. Electricity Supply and Distribution (Technical and Operational) Rules, 2005, (LI1816).**
- 3. Electricity Supply and Distribution (Standard and Performance) Rules, 2005, (LI1935)”**

### **Channel of communication / role of communication.**

The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission has various ways of disseminating information and ideas. Internal communication which refers to how employees of the Commission share information and ideas to one another is usually through the circulation of memos, phone calls, WhatsApp messages and face to face communication. This is what the respondents provided as their means of communicating internally:

**“Internal communication is conducted through memoranda, letters, meetings, etc.”-**  
Director, Regional Operations.

**“Internal communication in the Commission is often conducted through memos, WhatsApp messages, phone calls and direct face to talks, especially among employees within the same office space”.**- Head of Public Relations and External Affairs.

Conversely, the exchange and sharing of information to stakeholders, especially utility service providers like the Volta River Authority, Electricity Company of Ghana and related institutions and agencies constitute the external communication process of the PURC. The most common channel used in the external communication process include radio and posters. Below is a response from a respondent when asked on the most common media used in disseminating information especially to the public.

**“The Public Relations and External outfit uses several mediums to communicate to its public. However, radio, posters and letters/memos are the most preferred and widely used mediums. This is because of the accessible nature of radio to members of the general public. The posters also serve as lasting reference point for people who may wish to lodge a complaint with the Commission. Letters and memos are mostly used in official communication with utility service providers”.**

The role of communication in the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission was also realized during the study. Communication related activities falls within the purview of the Office of Public Relations and External Affairs.

**“Public Relations and External Affairs Officers of PURC are tasked, among other things, the responsibility of projecting the Commission to the public by organising and participating in Public Education Programmes”.**- Head of Public Relations and External Affairs.

#### **Communication related problems of the PURC.**

Both the Public Relations and External Affairs Unit and the Human Resource Unit made clear the constrains they are faced with in performing their duties. According to the respondent for Public relations and External Affairs:

**“The major challenges associated with my role as Head of PR are many. They include:**

- 1. Lack of communication policy document.**
- 2. Technical nature of utility related issue.**
- 3. Language barrier.’’**

#### **4.2 Discussions and recommendations**

This aspect seeks to analyze and give recommendations to the findings already mentioned in the previous chapter. Once again, the researcher categorized the discussions into three sectors namely: communication policy and guidelines, channel of communication / role of communication and communication related problems of the PURC.

##### **Communication policy and guidelines.**

Although there is no known communication policy document for the Commission, the Commission’s communication processes are backed by rules and regulations ‘enshrined in the Commission’s Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for all staff’.

Effective communication process is best served when the roles of communication are performed by the Public Relations personnel since he/ she has the professional capacity to better articulate information and manage the media. In the PURC, the said Standard Operating Procedures exists for ‘all staff’ and not necessarily the Public Relations and External Affairs and cannot be the best legal document to hold people responsible for communication accountable since it does not specifically outline the directives for communication activities of the Commission. It can best be described as a document that checks professionalism of all employees but not a policy that contains written rules and guidelines for the Public Relations and External Affairs officers of the Commission. The use of the Commission’s Standard Operating Procedures as a substitute of a communication policy is clearly substandard and somewhat inappropriate. According to Course Hero (n.d), ‘the purpose of communication policies and protocols is to set a minimum standard for appropriate communication between staff members and between clients and staff members’

For any organization to attain a good corporate image, its communication must be effective and sustainable. This can best be attained when there is a known and clear cut communication policy as it is a standardized component of a communication outfit. The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission should adopt a communication policy as their current use of Standard Operating Procedure in place of a communication policy is substandard and unsustainable.

### **Channel of communication / role of communication**

From the findings above, it can be observed that the role of communication is solely that of the Office of Public Relations and External Affairs. Their responsibility is to ‘project the Commission to the general public by organizing public education programmes’. There are nine regional offices of the PURC, thus there are nine regional communication officers who project the image of the Commission to the various publics in their respective regions of

operation. They do this by organizing public education programs to sensitize the public on matters concerning utility services particularly, utility tariffs.

The way in which information is shared within the staff of the Commission as well as outside the Commission takes a multimedia approach. “Multimedia communication deals with the transfer, the protocols, services and mechanisms of discrete media data such as text, audio, visual, audio-visual over digital network” Wolf, Griwodz and Steinmetz (1993).

In simple language, the transmission of content/ information in more than one form of media is referred to as multimedia communication. The PURC uses both legacy and new media in the sharing of information. They make use of radio, television, newspapers and posters (legacy media) as well as electronic mails, social media (new media). They explore the various types of media available to them in a given situation but the radio is the most preferred media used by the Commission when sharing information to the public. When dealing with stakeholders and utility related agencies, the exchange of letters and emails are the best options available to them. This blend of legacy and new media leaves no audience behind in terms of information access. Also, it helps reduce the existing inequalities, especially the information gap that exists between the digital literates and digital illiterates. A person might not be able to access information about PURC on their website and social media pages as a result of his/ her economic inability to acquire a digital device such as smartphone or laptop. This person would be lagging behind in terms of information but due to this blend of new media and legacy media by the PURC, the person would have the access to the needed information by either listening to the radio which is widely used in Ghana or watching the television. Ithiel de Sola Pool (1973) predicted that developments in new and advanced media (internet) and technology challenge existing industry and legacy and traditional media now obsolete and ineffective. As a result of this, most communication

policies mainly focus on using new media such as internet and social media partially or fully neglecting legacy media such as radio and print.

### **Communication related problems of the PURC.**

The Public Relations and External Affairs unit of the Commission operate amidst some worrying challenges. Notably, the Commission acknowledges the need and essence of a communication policy document. This clearly shows that the Commission currently lacks the professional standards when it comes to the communication processes / role of communication. The absence of a communication policy hugely affects the role of communication in PURC as there are no known directions and guidelines for the dissemination of information.

Moreover, ‘technical nature of utility related issue’ was raised as a worrying phenomenon to the role of communication in the PURC. This challenge the commission is currently facing can best be resolved by incorporating the tenets of technical communication, precisely utility and energy communication since the Commission deals with utility service providers and consumers. ‘Technical Communication is a means to convey scientific, engineering, or other technical information’ Sheedan and Richard (2005). They generate and share information on a specific subject matter, say energy in the context of the PURC. The Public Relations Officers of the Commission need more than their communication skills to perfectly communicate on energy and utility related issues hence the need for them to be trained on the technicalities of energy and utility. This will help them in comfortably communicating to its publics and stakeholders who might be well versed in energy and utility. The Public Relations Officers must know the basic terms in utility and energy so as to create a relationship of trust and confidence between them and their publics.

Ultimately, the issue of language barrier in communication retards the intent of communication as there will be little or no understanding thereby informing unintended feedback. 'The difficulties in communication experienced by people or groups originally speaking different languages' Oxford English Dictionary (2005). This is prevalent especially in the educational programmes organized by the commission in the nine regions of operations in Ghana. 'Ghana has more than seventy ethnic groups. Major ethnic groups include the Akan, Mole-Dagbon, Ewe, Ga-Dangme and Guang' Ibrahim and Chernoff (1979). From personal observation, most of the staff of the Public Relations and External Affairs are not fluent in the language of the ethnic groups in which they find themselves in thus they do not attain the intended success in their public education systems. According to Mohammed (2019), 'Ghana is a multicultural society with diverse religious and ethnic orientation so it is imperative for Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to be a part of the communication policy of an organization as it respects dignity and encourages inclusion.'

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

This study shows that the success, trustworthiness, credibility and reliability of the PURC largely depends on its corporate image, that is, how it is perceived by its publics as well as the entire Ghanaian populace. When the publics and the entire society thinks good about the operations of PURC, it implies the Commission has a successful corporate image and for the PURC to have a successful brand, it means communication is actually playing its role and that is the mandate of the Public Relations and External Affairs, to project the image of the Commission to the public.

Contrariwise, when the publics are ill-informed about the operations of the Commission, it means the PURC has an unfavourable corporate image which can be attributed to a failed or failing role of communication. The success of communication in PURC is basically about

maintaining a good corporate image since they work on behalf of the interests of the Ghanaian citizenry especially on a very sensitive aspect such as electricity and water. Utility services play an essential role in our lives, especially our economic livelihood and survival hence communicating on utility should be very effective so as not to lose trust in the face of your publics.

This research has the tendency to contribute to existing knowledge on the roles of communication in regulatory institutions as it substantially provides narrative evidence to how communication can be effective in institutions. The study mainly limits the problems of organizational communication to the absence of a communication policy and also explores the benefits of a communication policy to the success of communication in an institution. This research can be a gateway for other researchers to examine the communication units of various institutions in Ghana with a focus on how communication guidelines and regulations are either clearly spelt out in a document or a convention. This research again paves way for researchers to examine technical communication in institutions such as health, nutrition, law, engineering, sports among others.

The study is of immense benefit to the researcher as it has equipped the writer with new knowledge and experience, especially in data collection and analysing communication related findings. The researcher has gained insight on the roles of communication officers, the problems associated with the communication offices as well as the legal ramifications involved in the communication process. Moreover, the findings from this study has presented new research objectives and questions to the researcher and other readers. These new objectives, when explored, will contribute to existing literature and knowledge of communication and media studies and decrease the dearth of literature in organizational communication. Arguably, this research is quite innovative as it examines the role of

communication in the PURC using communication policy among others as a standard for effective communication process.

In conclusion, the Commission must see the Public Relations and External Affairs unit as the livewire of the Commission and must, in all times, channel the needed resources in order to help them fully meet their quarterly and yearly targets of projecting the Commission to the public. Investing in communications should be seen as a lifelong investment and not just an investment for immediate gains. The process of public relations is a process of building and maintaining relationships between clients and publics.

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