

**JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTION OF MEDIA RELATIONS: A CASE  
OF THE GHANA ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION**



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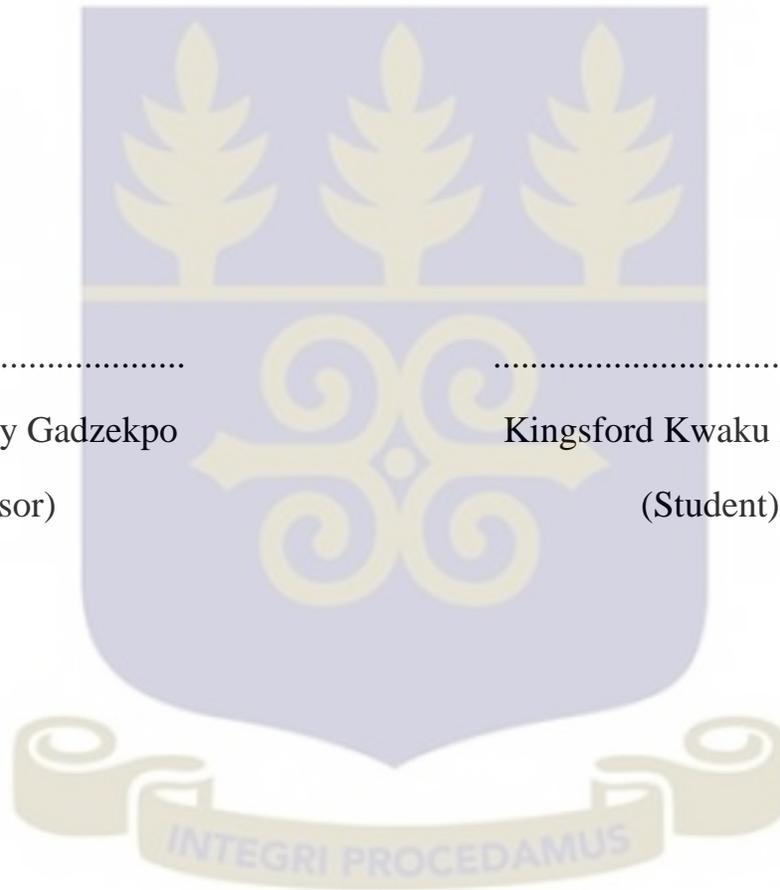
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## DECLARATION

I, Kingsford Kwaku Ahialey, do hereby declare that the work presented in this dissertation is my own work and findings, except where indicated. All sources used have been duly acknowledged. Professor Audrey Gadzekpo supervised this work.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to God, who has sustained me through difficult times and has also seen me through another milestone in my life. I will forever be grateful for his mercies.



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## ABSTRACT

GAEC's mandate to commercialise its research activities has become very crucial and this cannot be achieved without the media. There is, therefore, the need for thorough investigation into GAEC current media relation practice in order to understand journalists' perception and what could be done to improve the relations. In line with this, a research on Journalists' perception of GAEC's media relation was undertaken. This research was intended to answer questions on how much information journalists have about the core activities of GAEC; the extent to which GAEC's media relations enable journalists to report on its activities and the extent to which GAEC's media relations can be categorized as reactive, proactive or interactive. Qualitative research approach was used to explore current perception of journalists about Ghana Atomic Energy Commission's media relations. Purposive and convenient sampling methods were employed and semi-structured interview was used to elicit information from ten (10) journalists who have covered some activities of GAEC. After the recording had been transcribed, coding exercise was applied and the resultant five themes were discussed. The findings were also discussed in the context of the research objectives, as well as some of the tenets of the excellence theory. It was deduced from the responses that journalists have some minimum amount of information from GAEC but the information is not concrete enough. Although journalists agreed to have covered some programmes concerning GAEC and GAEC has found a way of communicating very technical information to the understanding of journalists, it is still clear that adequate capacity has not been built. GAEC's media relations cannot be described as proactive or interactive

enough because has failed to have the right publicity that could dispel negative perceptions.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Tench and Yeomans (2006) explain media relations as managing relationships with the media and all people who contribute to and control what appears in the print, broadcast and online media. Media relations is a core activity of public relations and an organisation's relation with the media is very important for a number of reasons.

The mass media serve important channels of communication and are considered as independent sources like of information. The media are, therefore, considered more credible than direct sources such as information from an organisation's public relations outfit. The benefits of media relations to the public relations practitioner and for that matter any organisation is in two-fold: firstly, the mass media offers a good platform for reaching large audience for the purposes of creating awareness, building positive reputation, disseminating point-of-view messages etc. Secondly, news media serve as credible third-party sources of information.

Any organisation that wants to develop its image and improve long-term relationship with key publics must consider media relations as an important means to that end. Thus, a well-established media relation offers organisations and businesses a higher exposure to their publics.

The approach to media relations can be proactive, reactive, or interactive. Reactive media relations respond to media inquiries. Proactive media relations promote and publicise the organisation. Interactive media relations take a step even further to develop relations with the media practitioners.

## **1.2 Statement of problem**

A well-established media relations strategy is important for generating publicity and public interest in organisations. Media relations also brings about “third party endorsement effect” where the story is considered credible and unbiased because it is coming from third party (the journalist).

In accordance with this, Guth & Marsh (2007) posited that information conveyed through the media filter is thought to be perceived by consumers as more fact-based, credible and less-biased than information provided in a paid advertisement or other information that is prepared, funded and distributed by a self-interested party.

Competition has led to a shift from media relations as a ‘defensive’ service where organisations react to media enquiries. Corporate organisations are now adopting a more proactive and interactive media relations. They, therefore, set the discussion agenda for media organisations. These corporate organisations may locate media relations in corporate communications function, marketing or industrial relations function.

Public Scientific Research Organisations have failed to take advantage of the mass media to disseminate research findings. Carrada, G. (2006) posits that apart from spreading

knowledge, telling the science story helps convey scientific way of thinking and rational attitude to solving problems.

The dissemination of scientific research findings through the mass media is even more important in third-world countries where there still exist superstitions about a lot of basic natural phenomena. The Ghana Atomic Energy Commission (GAEC) has a PR unit which is supposed to lead in its media public relations effort in general and media relations in particular. However, most scientists and scientific research organisations have been famous for having little media engagement. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it will not be a wise decision to ignore the power of the media and for that matter the importance of media relations in making an organisation more relevant. Furthermore, the government of Ghana has started a policy that demands that some state institutions become self-financing and GAEC is one of those institutions. GAEC's mandate to commercialise its research activities has become very crucial and this cannot be achieved without the media. This calls for a thorough investigation into GAEC current media relation practice so that where there are lapses, immediate steps can be taken to remedy the situation. This research is, therefore, aimed at establishing the current media relations practice of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission and if there are any lapses, recommended ways to address them.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The overall objective of this research is to understand the nature of GAEC'S media relations. The specific objectives of the study are:

- to find out how much information journalists get from GAEC and how often they get the information;

- to find out the context/circumstances under which journalists meet GAEC;
- to find out whether the existing relations between the media and GAEC builds the media's capacity and understanding of GAEC's activities;
- to find out if the media relations was only used to generate publicity or if it also played a strategic role in relationship building.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

Based on the research topic and objectives, the following research questions were answered:

- i. What is Journalists' knowledge level about the core activities of GAEC?
- ii. To what extent does GAEC's media relations enable journalists to report on its activities?
- iii. To what extent can GAEC's media relations be categorised as reactive, proactive or interactive?

#### **1.5 Significance of Study**

In the search for literature, it was realised that little scholarly work has been done on media relations of public research organisations in Ghana. This research will, therefore, serve a pioneering role and open a new line of research. It will also add to the general existing knowledge on media relations and provide literature for further studies. It is envisaged that results will call attention to this area of study and reveal grey areas for further research and expansion of scope.

## **1.6 Limitations of the Research**

Since this is a case study and small number of journalists was interviewed, the results present a generalisability limitation. However, this study is very important to GAEC in particular and similar organisations in general because some of the situations may be similar to what pertain in other organisations.

## **1.7 Profile of GAEC**

The Ghana Atomic Energy Commission (GAEC) was established by act 204 of 1963, as the sole agency in Ghana responsible for all matters relating to peaceful uses of atomic energy. This Act was amended in 1993 by PNDC Law 308 and in the year 2000, Act 588. Act 588 makes provision for GAEC to, among others, undertake the following functions:

- To advise the Government on issues relating to nuclear energy, science and technology.
- To engage in research and development activities, as well as in the publication and dissemination of research findings and other useful technical information.
- To oversee and facilitate the development of human resources in the fields of nuclear science and technology, and to promote the training of scientific, technical and non-scientific personnel of the Commission.
- To encourage and promote the commercialisation of research results through its Institutes.

These functions are to be undertaken by four institutes: the National Nuclear Research Institute (NNRI), Radiation Protection Institute (RPI), Radiological and Medical Sciences

Research Institute (RAMSRI), and the Biotechnology and Nuclear Agriculture Research Institute (BNARI).



## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter first covers the theoretical framework that guides the study. The study was undergirded by the excellence theory. The historical background of the theory, the tenets, and some critiques of the theory were looked at. The second major part of this chapter provides a review of some related and available studies.

#### 2.2 Excellence Theory

The research would be underpinned by the excellence theory of public relations. The theory examines public relations roles in organizations. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) were the first to introduce the excellence theory and they did this in their paper: "Managing Public Relations".

##### 2.2.1 History of the Excellence theory

The excellence theory, which discusses how public relations should be managed for organisational effectiveness (Grunig, 2002) resulted from a study of best practices in communication management.

The excellence study is seen as a monumental study in public relations and was undertaken by a team of six researchers (Grunig, J. Grunig, L. Dozier, Ehling, Repper and White). According to Browning (2008), the excellence theory has been the most dominant paradigm of public relations theories.

The International Association of Business Communications (IABC) funded the 'excellence research'. It started in 1985 and spanned over 15 years (Grunig et al, 2006).

The study was in three (3) phases.

First, the researchers reviewed literature of theories in various disciplines that they believed gave a theoretical framework for the achievement of excellence in public relations.

The review of literature led the researchers to propose the excellence theory, which suggests that the effectiveness of an organisation depended on the ability to identify and achieve goals that are important to the organisation's self-interest, as well as the interest of publics that are affected by the organisation or have the potential to influence the goals of the organisation.

The second phase of the study was a survey and it started from 1990 to 1991 (Grammer, 2005). The objective of the second phase of the research was to test the excellence theory in the organisational setting. In other words, the practicality and validity of the theory was tested in organisational environment.

Four hundred and seven (407) senior communication managers, from a total of 327 organisations in the Canada, United States, and the United Kingdom, were surveyed. Additionally, 292 chief executive officers (or other managers of similar rank) as well as 4,631 employees were also surveyed.

Organisations of different orientation in terms of services were involved in order to give the results high generalisability potential.

The last phase of the research was centred on 25 organisations that scored the highest and lowest scores on the excellence scale in the survey as explained in the second phase. Here, case studies were conducted in each of the organisations and it involved qualitative interviews of some public relations practitioners; some heads of public relations organisations and Chief Executive Officers.

### **2.2.2. Tenets of the Excellence theory**

A combination of analysis of existing literature and the survey led to the suggestion of 14 principles of excellence in public relations, which were later consolidated into 10 principles. Grunig et al. (1998:) summarized those principles as follows:

- i. Public relations involves strategic management of an organisation.

Excellent public relations must include strategic development of programmes to communicate with both internal and external publics.

- ii. Public relations is considered as management function.

The theory posits that where excellence is required, public relations must either be empowered as part of the dominant coalition or have direct reporting relationship to senior management. It stands to reason, therefore, that for success in PR the senior public relations person should be part of, or have direct access to the highest power in the organisation.

- iii. Public relations functions are integrated.

In order to achieve excellence in public relations, there must be integration of all public relations functions into one department or have a system of coordinating the departments.

According to the theory, putting PR under another function may result in attention only to the stakeholder part of that function. For example, if PR were put under marketing, only consumers would be considered critical in public relations activities.

- iv. Public relations is a management function separate from other functions.

Many organisations reduce the public relations function by making it a supporting tool for other departments.

When PR functions are put under other functions, communication resources cannot be moved from one strategic public to another like it would if it were integrated public relations function.

- v. The public relations head is a manager rather than a technician.

According to the theory, although communication technicians are important in the daily communications activities of an organisations, excellent PR departments require at least one senior communication manager who would lead and direct public relations programmes. The absence of a communications manager will result in direct control from the dominant coalition who may have limited knowledge of public relations.

- vi. Two-way symmetrical model of public relations is practised.

According to this principle, excellent public relations outfits model their communication system on two-way symmetrical. The excellent PR department uses less of press agency, two-way asymmetrical system and public information.

- vii. A symmetrical system of internal communication is supported.

Excellent organisations decentralise their management systems and structures in order to give employees the opportunity to take part in the decision-making process.

This also includes participatory and symmetrical internal communication processes that result in greater job satisfaction.

viii. Qualification and standing of practitioners.

Public relations managers have the necessary professional skills and training to serve in the managerial role and to practise symmetrical public relations. According to this principle, the public relations officer must not only be educated and certified in the area, but must be active member of their professional associations.

ix. Diversity is embodied in all roles.

This principle emphasises diversity in the PR department, as there is diversity in the environment. Diversity is required in the area of roles, gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds.

x. Ethics and social responsibility are imbued in business practice.

Excellent public relations departments are sensitive to ethics of the practice. These departments must also be socially responsible.

In addition to the symmetrical communication, Grunig and Hunt (1984) also looked at three other public relations models. One of the three models is press agency (publicity model), which talks about public relations activities aimed at having presence and popularity. Another model is the two-way asymmetrical model. The two-way asymmetrical model causes imbalances between an organisation and its publics. The two-way asymmetry is different from the two-way symmetrical which is aimed at creating balance in the communication process in order to create mutually beneficial relationship and outcomes between the organisation and its publics.

The third model is the public information model. The public information model is motivated by the need for organisations to keep its publics informed and with the intention of generating a positive publicity. Grunig (1992) describes the information model as “Journalist in residence” which involves the dissemination of accurate and favourable information about the organisation (but unfavourable information is not disseminated).

### **2.2.3 Critiques of the Excellence Theory**

The excellence theory, like all theories, has been tested continually and out of the tests have arisen some important criticisms.

Some scholars have questioned the focus of analysis on the theory. Karlberg (1996) believes the focus was more on the function and role of personnel who were practicing in organisations, and not emphasis on the communication needs of citizen groups. This gives an indication of focusing public relations research on only professional circles, instead of enquiring into the wide scope of public relations.

Questions have also been raised about participants in the research and the extent to which their information is reliable and objective. Tench and Yeomans (2009) argue that because the researchers and proponents of the excellence theory relied on self-reports by managers and chief executive officers of organisations, one must consider results with care. They believe it is possible the high approval for symmetrical communication could mask the actual system of power that influence public relations practice on the ground.

The symmetrical model of communication, the model proposed by excellence theory as the ideal model, has been critiqued. Some people have argued that the model is just idealist and that in reality it is the interest of the organisation at a particular moment that informs the choice of communication model and for that matter the direction of public relations practice. For example, Leichty (1997, Cited in Browning, N., 2010) argued that there may be situations where the two-way symmetrical strategy will be either inapplicable or have limited applicability. He gave examples of such strategies as dialogue and collaboration.

This is supported by the work of Cheney and Christensen (2001) who posited that public relations practice is actually influenced by the organisational interests and that organisations pre-select their publics of interest and also select in advance their topics for dialogue. According to Dozier & Lauzen (2000), organisation can choose to ignore publics who, although are important to the organisation, have limited or no resources to help them pursue relationships that are mutually beneficial.

Furthermore, some scholars have questioned the completeness of the theory. They believe the theory's models lack adaptation to real practice. Although Pieczka (1996) admits the normative significance of the excellence theory, he believes it contains inconsistencies and contradictions. He argues that while the two-way symmetrical model of communication recommends dialogue and mutual participation of internal and external publics, public relations managers are expected to be part of management or have direct access to management in order to achieve goals and objectives.

Also, the theory's principle that gives a direct relationship between professional training and the achievement of public relations programmes seems to suggest that not all publics

have skills and resources to practice excellent public relations.

Grunig, however, believes critiques to his work, particularly those concerning the two-way symmetrical model, did not have understanding of the model. He believes persuasion, discussion and exchange of divergent views had a place in the model but listening, comprehension and building of relationships also take place. Grunig (2001) approved the mixed-motive method (a combination of the two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical models).

He posited that he did not intend to depict the two-way symmetrical as one of pure cooperation model. He argued further that using the two-way symmetrical or the mixed motive model could almost always enhance the public relations of an organisation.

The excellence theory will serve as a guide to qualitatively assess GAEC's media relations on the basis of practices that bring 'excellent' results. Although some scholars will consider Excellence Theory as a "quantitative" theory, a lot of qualitative researches have employed excellence theory. Dornyo & Adiku (2015) studied "Public relations practice of the Islamic University College and Valley View University". The study approach was qualitative, involving the use of In-depth interviews and was underpinned by the excellence theory. Similarly, Matthew Sheriko (2015), through the lens of the excellence model, analysed in-depth, semi-structured interview data on how senior managers of seven successful small nonprofit organisations account for their success and address challenges as well as how their practices reflect the excellence model. Adjei, M. K. (2014) was also guided by the excellence and roles theories, with qualitative research methodology in her study "Assessment of Public Relations Contribution in an ICT

Company: A Case Study of RLG”. In this research, data was collected using only in-depth interviews.

### **2.3. Related studies**

Generally, the related literatures reviewed in this section come from studies conducted in the West. The studies, however, are very relevant to my studies.

Berkowitz, D. & Lee, J. (2004) studied the relations between journalists and public relations practitioners. This study applied the concept of ‘Cheong’ to analyse the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners in Seoul, Korea.

According to Choi (2002, cited in Berkowitz and Lee, 2004), ‘cheong’ is the central basis of relationship between and among Koreans.

Cheong is, therefore, seen as the close relationship between married couples; among members of a family; between and among friends; among neighbours. ‘Cheong’ is maintained through unique emotions and it is seen as spiritual attachment that is unconsciously established through direct or indirect contact and common experience.

Choi (2000), posited that ‘Cheong’ grows from four important characteristics of interpersonal relationships: warm heartedness, being together, historical nature, and the absence of reserve.

The study employed in-depth interviews. Reporters from 10 major newspapers as well as 10 public relations practitioners from 10 major companies in Korea, including Samsung, LG, SK, and Hyundai were interviewed. Each respondent had more than one year of experience in media relations, a period considered long enough for the establishment of

‘Cheong’ between reporters and public relations staff. Interviewees were asked a number of open-ended questions about their interactions with journalists or public relations practitioners. Categories were formed from the answers in line with the conditions for forming ‘Cheong’. They were also asked to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question of whether they felt Cheong. They were then divided into a “yes” group and a “no” group, and their interview statements were analysed accordingly.

The major findings of the research showed that although Cheong shaped the tone of the relationship, it did not affect the content of the news produced. It was also discovered, from the interviews, that Cheong was not a corrupting influence on the role of the press, and that both parties were able to separate personal and professional dimensions of their encounters.

Some respondents said Cheong was formed in the course of calling and having series of meetings. Others felt that continued communication through telephone, e-mail and other forms of communication almost everyday over time established Cheong. Some PR practitioners said, even if reporters did not visit their company, they could meet them anytime they wanted to and that they could even discuss personal matters.

The researchers concluded that majority of the interviewees felt Cheong grew naturally from extended professional interaction, much as it does in other aspects of the Korean culture.

Wilson & Supa (2013) sought to study how public relations practitioners and journalists were using Twitter in both their personal work and in the relationship with the other profession. They conducted the study in the Midwestern state of the United State of America. The purpose of the study was to identify the direction of relationship between

journalists and PR practitioners and to look at the effect of twitter on media relations.

Quantitative research approach was used and data was collected using survey. The sample included 340 journalists and 291 public relations practitioners.

The findings indicated that there had been little change in the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists over the past 28 years. The findings also suggested that PR practitioners and journalists had not fashion out the usage of twitter to interact and engage with each other.

Wilson & Supa concluded that although the respondents did not indicate that they made substantial use of twitter in their work, they recognized it as an important information-sharing platform.

They posit that the impact of emerging technologies, particularly Twitter, had no major impact on the media relations.

Syahri et al. (2015) studied journalists' perception toward government and private public relations in Central Kalimantan, a province in Indonesia.

The study employed the quantitative approach and a survey method was used in the collection of data. A sample of 80 journalists from print and electronic media was drawn from the Indonesian Journalist Union. The sampling of 80 participants from 412 active members of the union was done using Slovin Formular.

Journalists' perception was measured using Media Relations Indicator that had been used by Kriyantono (2012c, p. 79-91). The media relations' indicators were: 1. Participants' understanding of media characteristics 2. Participants' understanding of media needs.

Result of the analysis showed that, for the category “PR practitioners’ understanding of media characteristic”, there was a difference between government and private PR, although the difference was not very significant

From “quality of PR practitioners understanding on media needs” category, the analysis showed that there was different quality between governmental and private PR that was significant, with governmental PR considered better than private PR.

The researchers concluded that there was high negative perception of journalists about both government and private media relations. Thus, PR practitioners in both government and private institutions had failed to achieve excellence.

Wijaya, et al. (2015) undertook phenomenological-based study to understand the construct formed about a unit (unit for plant conservation) of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. The study was qualitative and involved purposive sampling of five participants who were interviewed comprehensively. The research looked at the construct concerning function in the context of implementation of bureaucratic reforms by the institution. It was found that the culture of the organisation was reflected by the leader’s view of public relations function. It was concluded that the organisational structure and the position of public relations was affected by the bureaucratic reforms.

Kumar, C. S. (2014) used qualitative approach and the survey method to seek journalists’ perception about public relations practitioners and their practices. The study was undertaken in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu in the eastern part of India. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 64 journalists from both the print and electronic media. Some of the journalists belong to organisations that printed in English whilst

others belong to Tamil (the language of the Tamils) newspaper organisation. Questionnaire included questions aimed at eliciting journalists' impression about ethics in PR practice; the kind of relationship between journalists and PR practitioners and issues of gift from PR practitioners to journalist. The findings revealed relationship of a love-hate complexity—symbiotic but can be laced with suspicion and mistrust at times.

The relationship between them was viewed as a love-hate complexity, at times symbiotic and with camaraderie, at other times tinged with suspicion and distrust. Journalists also perceived the PR practice to be ethical to some extent. Though journalists do agree with the view that receiving gift in any form was unethical, they still received gifts because they thought it was a show of appreciation.

Langett, J. (2013) studied the interpersonal discourse between journalists and public relations practitioners that promotes media relations. He analysed studies and conclusions by other researchers on the centrality of media relations to public relations practice. The study was undertaken in Virginia, USA.

Langett concluded, among others, that the interpersonal dynamics of the public relations practitioner–journalist discourse has a narrative structure that is underpinned by professionalism, integrity and politeness or civility in dialogue.

He explains that although journalists may not meet the compliance in the utilisation of public relations materials in media publications, what will enable good future association or interaction between public relation practitioners and journalists is a narrative structure built on civility.

Langett added that interpersonal interactions between public relations practitioners and journalists worked toward a particular goal. The goal was the generation of media content that was newsworthy and is in the interest of the public. This, he believes, was in contrast to relationship that was based fundamentally on emotions.

Supa (2014) examined the impact of social media on media relations practice in Miami, USA, through the use of in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners. The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of social media on the practitioner-journalist relationship. The study was underpinned by technological determinism theory. Technological determinism (TD), simply put, is the idea that technology has important effects on people. Supa found that overall, the practice of media relations would continue to evolve as new media technologies continue to be developed and adopted.

The response from practitioners indicated that the increase of social media has made significant changes to media relations. In fact, almost all thirty-three practitioners interviewed said that social media did create a change in media relations.

Super conclude that the integration of social media into the media relations mix has the potential of culminating in mutual benefits for both practitioners and journalists.

White, J. M. (2013) studied reporters' orientation toward the acquisition of knowledge in science and technology. The study also aimed at constructing the scale by which the orientation could be measured. The study was undertaken in New Mexico, USA.

The research was underpinned by some theoretical tenets in Peters, 2009 and Morella, 2005: that mass media is a very important channel for the transfer of knowledge between

the scientist and the consuming public (Peters, 2009); there are fundamental strictures that have inhibited such knowledge transfers, which include the issue of scientists and journalists speaking different language and therefore not being able to understand each other (Morelle, 2005).

Quantitative data was collected using survey. Random sampling method was used to select 306 journalists from the National Association of Science Writers and 249 public information officers.

The questionnaires were designed to elicit information on several areas of importance, including attitudes about issues in the field of science, health and technology.

The findings suggested that there was high percentage of respondents who had majored in science-related fields or in science journalism, which means there was high degree of motivation to acquire science literacy. Thirty seven (37) percent of respondents majored in science and related fields, 10 percent in science journalism and 19 percent in straight journalism.

White concluded that many reporters already had the requisite education and training for communicating science, health and technology information to audiences who do not have specialised knowledge.

Andrews and Caren (2010) studied how movement organisations make the news and the media attention they receive. They combined two primary data sources: (1) surveys with a representative sample of local environmental organisations operating in North Carolina, U.S. and (2) media coverage of those organisations identified through full text electronic searches of 11 daily newspapers in the state in 2004 and 2005. They examined 2,095

newspaper articles and used news stories, editorials, and op-eds (A page in a newspaper, opposite the editorial page and devoted to commentary, feature articles, etc).

These were examined because they were either authored by employees of the newspaper or conferred the media organisation's support. Their dependent variable was media attention and measurement of media attention was done by a weighted count of the articles that mention an organisation in 2004 and 2005 in each newspaper.

The findings indicated that the news media report more extensively on organisations that are geographically proximate; have greater organisational capacity, mobilize people through demonstrations, and use conventional tactics to target the state and the media. They also found that organisations working on issues that address economic and social dimensions of the environment gain greater media attention.

The findings also revealed new insights about the relationship between an organization's issue focus and its media coverage. It supported claims that local newspapers' tend to favour stories that highlight local angles and focus on economic issues.

Marie-Ève Maillé et al. (2010) used in-depth interviews of journalists and scientists to study the gap between the journalist and the scientist. The study was centered on the media coverage of environmental issues in Québec, Canada.

Interview was used and it was in two parts: one part concerned the professional training and experience acquired by journalists. The second part dealt with interviewees' perception of the relationship that exists between journalists and scientists, the training required and what they find easy or difficult about the relationship.

The findings revealed that although the world of research was changing, scientists were still perceived as “isolated creatures in their Ivory tower”, unable to communicate properly to the public. Majority of the scientists also thought journalists were inaccurate in their reportage and prioritised sales over quality.

The study revealed agreement between journalists and scientists that coverage of environmental issues demands time and knowledge. Although the scientists and journalists expressed strong disapproval of the constraints imposed by the structure of the media, they failed to propose any solutions or do not even seem to want a change. Marie-Ève Maillé et al concluded that bridging the gap between journalists and scientists depended on developing relationship based on trust and confidence.

Kaye et al. (2011) looked at perception of the media and scientists about plans and priorities for developing positive scientist-media interaction for communicating health research. The research was conducted in Uganda and participants involved 80 health scientists and 24 journalists. The scientists were from the Makerere University College of Health Sciences and its affiliated research projects whilst the journalists were selected from both the print and electronic media. The study is qualitative and the participants completed questionnaire containing open-ended items. The open-ended questions asked about experiences in the communication of health research; perceived barriers to communicating health research and perceived solutions to addressing challenges in health research communication. Participants were also requested to indicate the contextual factors of communicating research through the print or broadcast media, perceived barriers or strictures that militate against successful media-scientists interaction and

possible solutions. The answers were analysed thematically.

The findings suggested that although many health scientists communicated with themselves through journal publications, presentations at conferences and in scientific meetings with fellow scientists, they thought health research was complex, have ethical issues and limited funding. Scientists and journalists attributed scientists' failure to share findings, especially from primary research, to fear of the idea being stolen. They also believe that idea of active dissemination of research findings was new to the scientists and that many scientists lacked the appropriate communication skills. It was also found that most scientists embark on research to fulfill academic and promotion requirements. They may also disseminate results to sponsors of research work so their interest is not to disseminate to the general public through the media.

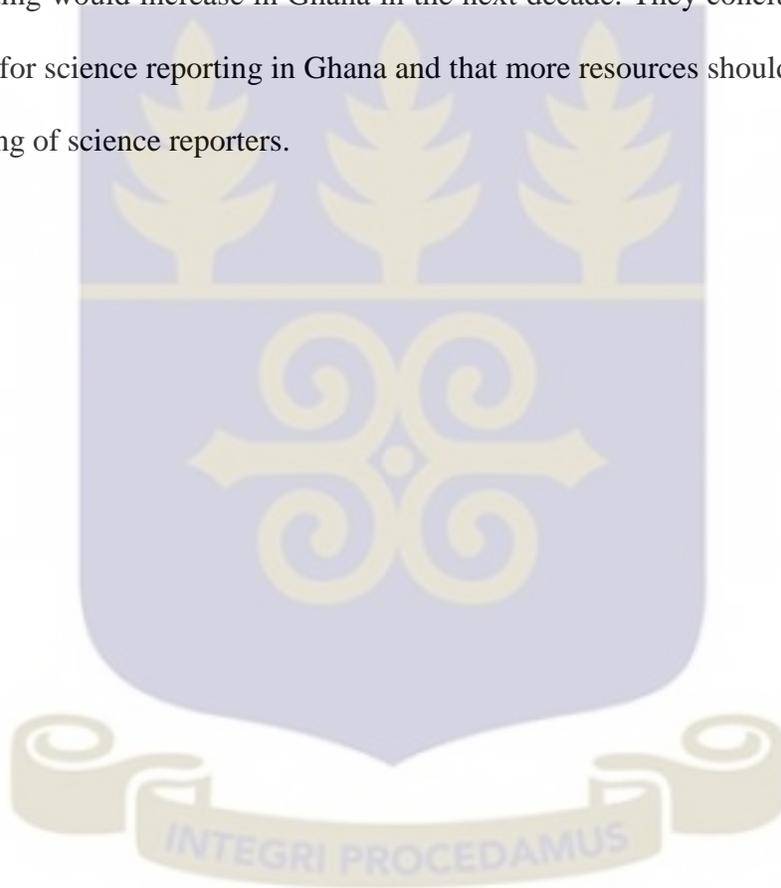
Scientists and journalists perceived fear of disseminating negative research findings as a major barrier to communicating health research. Scientists and journalists believe their interactions can be improved if newspaper editors, journal editors, TV and radio producers can undertake science communication training. They concluded that although there are perceived barriers to positive media-scientist interactions in the communication of research findings, the situation could be improved through constructive collaboration.

Appiah, et al. (2012) studied evidence-based perspective of the future of science journalism. The study was done in Ghana. The goal of the study was to use the perspective of journalists to explore the future of science journalism.

Survey research method was used and 150 journalists were surveyed. The questions were

intended to, among others, get information on the status of science journalism in Ghana, the relative amount of science reporting in Ghana and perceived barrier to information gathering.

They found that 33.6 percent of respondents believed lack of contact information about research scientists was a barrier to science reporting, 80.8 percent of respondents believe science reporting would increase in Ghana in the next decade. They concluded that there was potential for science reporting in Ghana and that more resources should be channeled into the training of science reporters.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the method used in the studies. It includes the research strategy; the population and sample; data collection instrument, data analysis, credibility and dependability of research.

#### **3.2 Research Strategy**

Bryman (2008) explained that research strategy is a general orientation to the conduct of research. The success of a research depends on the appropriate strategy used. Every researcher must, therefore, be convinced about what he or she intends to undertake. A research strategy must not be chosen arbitrarily, but must be based on a careful consideration of the objectives and research questions.

According to Saunders et al (2009) the appropriate research strategy must be selected on the basis of research questions and objectives; the level of existing knowledge on the subject area one intends to research on; the period within which the research is expected to be done; resources available, and the philosophical foundations of the researcher

Generally, three main research strategies are used for undertaking research and the strategies are qualitative, quantitative and mixed method. Quantitative research is

associated with the measurement of quantity or amount. It is useful for phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity.

Qualitative strategy is 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. Qualitative strategy generally emphasizes words but a common criticism of qualitative strategy has been its generalizability potential. It is generally believed that the results of qualitative study may not be generalisable to the larger population. This is because the sample size is usually small as compared to the population size. Sampling under qualitative research is usually nonprobability or nonrandom, which means participants are not given equal chance of being chosen.

Considering the objectives of this research, the research questions as well as time and resource available for this research, the qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate.

It is not enough to carefully select one of qualitative, quantitative or mixed research strategies. It is also important for a researcher to look at the approach that best suits the selected strategy.

There are four major research approaches under the qualitative strategy and they are case study, ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenology. Hancock et. al. (2007) explains that ethnography has a background in anthropology because the term means “portrait of a people”. Ethnographic studies, therefore, aims to understand the way a group of people live by critically considering their own perspective.

Ethnographic studies entail extensive fieldwork by the researcher because the researcher is required to interpret data from the perspective of the participants.

This study does not fit into ethnographic concept because it does not involve understanding how a group of people live or learning about the prevailing culture in their natural setting, it also does not involve extensive and prolong fieldwork.

Grounded theory approach involves the development of a new theory through the analysis of various phenomena. Grounded theory can be viewed as having two part: the first part is phenomenological, which entails the attempt to understand the way participants make sense of their experiences (without interpreting experiences using biases or relating the experiences to some ‘standard’ reality). The second part is to use the data to develop a theory. The objectives of this study does not include the development of theory from the data so grounded theory cannot be used.

The study employs the case study approach because it fits the research in terms of the unit under study and the objectives of the study.

### **3.2.1. Case study**

Case study research involves concentrating and studying a unit intensively with the aim of understanding a larger class of similar characteristics (Gerring, 2004).

According to Bryman (2008), case study is associated with a particular location such as community or an organisation. According to Yin (2003) the following should be are criteria for using case study is designing a research:

- i. the aim of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions;

- ii. one cannot manipulate the behaviour of participants in the research;
- iii. contextual conditions are relevant to phenomenon to be studied.

Case studies have weaknesses as well as strengths. A case study may offer greater details about a particular phenomenon. Stake (2005) posits that people reading a case study may make naturalistic generalisations from the personal or experience of another person. Case study also gives a complete interpretation and does not involve treatment or manipulation of social settings.

According to Yin (2003), there are three limitations associated with case studies. First, people may think that case study researchers could be influenced by biased views. Second, researchers may not be able to exhaust all issues and offer scientific generalisation. Third, data from a case study may be subjective because most case studies rely on human experiences and researchers' observation.

Fellows and Liu (2008), however, posit that the quality of a case study can be ensured if measures are taken to ensure construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability.

This research focuses on the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission, which is one of the public research organisations in Ghana. The research also seeks to employ semi-structured interview for in-depth information, which makes case study appropriate.

### **3.3 Methods of Data Collection**

This research uses only primary data and the data was acquired through semi-structured in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique involves the use detail individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation.

### **3.3.1 The Study Population and Sample**

The population of the study was all journalists of news media organisations in Accra. List of journalist was collected from the public relations section of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission. With the help of one of the media relations officers, a list of journalists who had covered activities of GAEC was made. Ten journalists were then selected on the basis of experience in the coverage of GAEC; availability, as well as accessibility to the journalists for the interview. Accessibility and availability decisions were taken after phone calls to the journalist to discuss their accessibility and availability within the time the research was to be undertaken.

The ten journalists selected were from Ghana News Agency (GNA), Ghanaian Times, Daily Graphic, the Enquirer, Ghana Television (GTV), TV3, Peace FM, Radio Gold and GBC Radio. Two journalists were interviewed from the Ghana News Agency and one journalist each from the rest of the media houses.

#### **3.3.1.1 Purposive sampling**

Purposive (judgmental) sampling “is a type of nonprobability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher’s judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (Babbie, E. 2010, 193). It becomes necessary,

sometimes, to select the sample of interest based on ones knowledge about the population because the purpose of the study may require some unique characteristics. In other words, the researcher may be required to select the most productive sample to respond to questions.

Participants were selected on the basis of their experience in journalism practice and experience in reporting on the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission. Issues of availability and accessibility of journalists for the interview and the interviewee's ability to be a source of useful data for the research were considered.

#### **3.4. Instrument**

Semi-structured interview was used to get relevant information from the sampled journalists. An interview guide was, therefore, constructed to give direction and uniformity to the interview.

The interview guide was drafted to answer questions and issues arising from the research questions and objectives, as well as the dimensions and indicators of the study. Dimension is a specifiable aspect of a concept.

The dimensions of the concept "media relations" in this research are reactive media relations, proactive media relations and interactive media relations. An indicator is a sign of the presence or absence of the concept of study so the questions were indicators of the dimension.

Although the interview guide was followed, follow up questions were asked where necessary for better clarification.

The following questions are expected to indicate the presence or otherwise of the concept or dimensions of this study:

- i. Who do you talk to at the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission if you want information or clarification on an issue?
- ii. What kind of information do you get from the GAEC?
- iii. Under what context/circumstances do you meet the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission?
- iv. As a journalist, do you think media relations is important for public scientific research organisations like the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission?
- v. Is GAEC's media relation different from corporate organisations that you have covered like the Banks, Telecommunications companies etc?
- vi. Have you been informed by GAEC about the channels of communication with journalists?
- vii. What constructs of news from GAEC would be most important for you and the general public?
- viii. Does GAEC organise workshops to educate you about the institution's vision, mission and activities?
- ix. Do you have enough information about the major activities of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission?
- x. Would you say GAEC has a reasonable mix of press release, press conference (with issuance of backgrounders), media soiree, workshops and plant tours?
- xi. Do you find the messages too technical?

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

After the recording had been transcribed, a coding exercise was applied. Coding is defined as marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names. Descriptive words were used for the initial coding. The coding was done using the 'review menu' in Microsoft Word.

The transcript was read carefully and thoughtfully and was pre-coded; this was done by bolding and colouring important quotes in the transcript. Another reading was done, this time all answers to a particular question were read at a time. For example all ten (10) responses to the question of who journalist talk to were read before moving to another set of responses. The coloured sections were then coded using some descriptive words to represent the sentences. The process was continued until all the coloured portions have been coded; this is the initial coding. Some of the codes that were similar were merged to form a different category and five themes emerged out of the merger. The five themes are: who journalists talk to or contact at GAEC; the context under which journalists meet GAEC; journalists' perception of how GAEC's media relations compares to others; the kind of news from GAEC journalists consider important and journalists' knowledge about GAEC and the means through which GAEC educates journalists.

Code-Recode Strategy was also adopted; transcribed interview was coded twice in 7 days interval and the two codings were compared.

### **3.6 Credibility and Dependability**

Every research must pass some trustworthiness criteria. In this research work, credibility and dependability were considered as trustworthiness criteria.

### 3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility establishes whether or not the results of the research represent reasonable information that is derived from participants' original data and in accordance with views of the participants (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

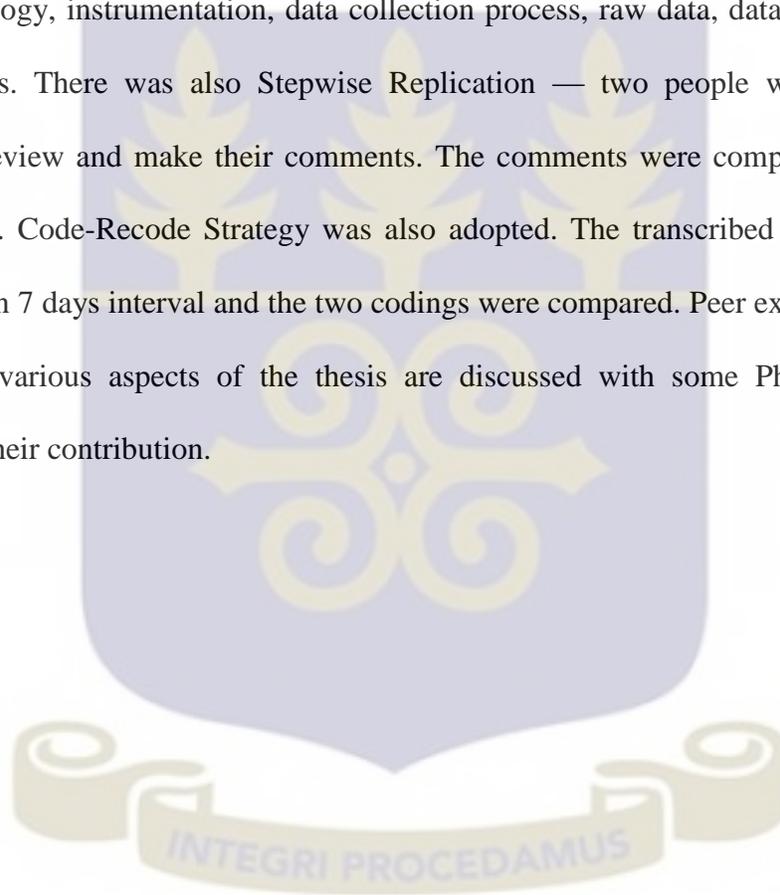
In order to increase the credibility of this research, the following were adopted:

- i. Use of peer debriefing: At every stage of the research, colleagues in the MA Communication Studies, as well as MPhil and PhD students were invited to make input and raise questions about the process and the outcome. Data collection methods and process, transcripts, data analysis procedure and research findings were all subjected to peer debriefing.
- ii. Persistent Observation: Where required, there was extended and prolonged interaction with interviewees in order to exhaust issues that seem unclear initially.
- iii. Member checking: The interpretation of the data was sent to participants to confirm if they have not been misreported. This was aimed at testing the analysis and interpretation of raw data or information from the informants. It is expected that this would eliminate any personal bias at the time of analyzing and interpreting the results.
- iv. Transferability was ensured using "thick description": there is detailed description of the methodology and context. Sampling process, data collection, and data analysis have all been elucidated clearly. This will enable any interested person to replicate the research. Researcher also assessed his own perception, background and interest in the research.

### 3.6.2 Dependability

According to Tobin & Begley (2004), dependability entails participants' evaluation of the interpretations, conclusions and recommendations of the study in order to ensure that they are supported by data from the interviewees or informants.

An audit trail was used where the supervisor critically examined documents on design and methodology, instrumentation, data collection process, raw data, data reduction and analysis notes. There was also Stepwise Replication — two people were given the research to review and make their comments. The comments were compared to ensure dependability. Code-Recode Strategy was also adopted. The transcribed interview was coded twice in 7 days interval and the two codings were compared. Peer examination was also used —various aspects of the thesis are discussed with some PhD and MPhil students for their contribution.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 FINDINGS

##### 4.1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with journalists of some media organisations in Accra. Ten (10) journalists were interviewed. The journalists interviewed were from Ghana News Agency (GNA), Ghanaian Times, Daily Graphic, the Enquirer, Ghana Television (GTV), TV3, Peace FM, Radio Gold and GBC Radio. Two journalists were interviewed from the Ghana News Agency and one journalist was interviewed from each media house. The findings are presented according to the five themes that emerged from the coding process.

##### 4.1.2 Who journalists talk to or contact at GAEC

Responses to this question suggest journalists talked to two personalities if they needed information or clarification on an issue. All the journalists mentioned two names: the Director General and one PR person whose designation and official name they did not know.

They all seem familiar with the nickname 'Sankara' and some journalists seem to consider him as the public relation officer of the Ghana Atomic Energy commission. One respondent explained:

*“Each time there is story or there is an issue I want some clarification or some explanation to, I send the Director General a message and if he is around he tells me that ok he is around and that this day or that I can come for an interview”.*

Another respondent puts it this way:

*“There is no agreed upon structure or procedure as such but what I normally do or what exist is to contact Sankara or the Director General”.*

#### **4.1.3 The context under which journalists meet GAEC**

From the responses, it was clear all journalists usually have interaction with the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission at conferences organised by the commission, workshops to build journalists capacity on GAEC’s activities and special events with government officials or ministers present. Some journalists have had the opportunity to travel with GAEC officials to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Austria to cover programmes. Additionally, some journalists go to GAEC themselves to make follow-ups on stories or to seek clarification on issues.

This response from one journalist captures all the responses in connection with this question:

*“Usually they call us when they have programmes...scientific exhibition, regional and international conferences. They also organise workshops for journalists at times. Those of us who have interest in their research and nuclear power issues also do follow up on some of the conferences and workshops. Some journalist also had the opportunity to travel with some GAEC people outside Ghana and they came back to write or put together some documentaries”.*

Almost all the journalists believe GAEC has only had workshops and organised plant tours for journalists. Generally, journalists believe GAEC has failed to have press releases, press conferences and press soirees. GAEC has, therefore, failed in taking advantage of very important PR tool like press release, press conference (with issuance of backgrounders), media soiree etc. One respondent's response was very illustrative:

*“They don't release...the issuance of press releases is a problem there. They should update their website so that journalist can have a lot of stories and follow up through the website...you check their website. Like I also said earlier, social media is very important in our time so they should adopt it. Plants tour? Yes...we have had a few. They have never organised press soiree...not that I know. Press conferences? No...they have not issued backgrounders before...so you see, a lot of work to be done in those areas”.*

The statement also shows the journalist's concern about GAEC's usage of social media. Wilson & Supa (2013) studied public relations practitioners and journalists usage Twitter in their personal their professional engagement and found that in the Midwestern state of the United State of America. They found that PR practitioners and journalists had not fashion out the usage of twitter to interact and engage with each other. It seems GAEC has also not fashion out the usage of social media as a tool for engaging with journalists.

#### **4.1.4 Journalists' perception of how GAEC's media relations compares with others**

There were varied responses on this question. While some journalists believe GAEC media relations compares favourably with other institutions they have covered, others believe that GAEC is not open enough and GAEC is not forthright with information.

There are some who believe unlike GAEC, some organisations are more bureaucratic. One journalist said some institutions have long chain bureaucratic processes but for GAEC it is easy going. Some journalists also believe the difference is not too great but not unexpected because of the differences in their activities.

In line with this, one journalist said because of the nature of their operations, the PRO would usually consult departmental heads before releasing information to journalists in order to avoid misrepresentation of information.

A journalist also thought GAEC's media relations is comparatively not good enough because they do not have strong public relations department like other organisations. This is how he puts it:

*“I have covered a lot of media...I mean corporate organisations. Other organisations that are also government enterprises and I think that GAEC has not done much when it comes to media engagement, media relations and co. What I think is that the corporate bodies or the other organisations already have very strong public relations departments that are up to the task, and had competent people who knew what they had to but since I got to GAEC, I have not seen that kind of well established communications department that is really into those things”.*

This quote also seems to resonate with the findings of Marie-Ève Maillé et al. (2010) who found that although the world of research was changing, scientists were still perceived as “isolated creatures in their Ivory tower”, unable to communicate properly to the public.

#### 4.1.5 The kind of news from GAEC journalists consider important

Generally, journalists believe that everything GAEC does must be in the interest of the journalist and the general public. Some journalists believe a news construct that dispels the negative perception of the general public would be important. Some journalists also think news on energy, specifically nuclear energy would be very important. A journalist said although he could not speak for the general public, he believed discussing nuclear energy, as an alternative energy source, would be crucial and important to the general public. He thought this was even more significant in the era of frequent power outages. Some journalist would not single out anything because they believe everything GAEC does is important to report on.

Some journalist also believe the application of nuclear technology in industry, health and agriculture would be paramount. Some journalists believe GAEC must issue statements on any happenings in the country that borders science and nuclear related. Most of the responses on this question seemed to have been summarized by this response from one of a journalist:

*“GAEC does a lot of things, they build tankers, they operate radiotherapy equipment in some of our hospitals, they produce a variety of seedlings, they preserve food...these are just a few things I have mentioned...even forgot to mention the nuclear power programme. Every journalist who is interested in science and development should be interested in these. The general public would also be interested in all the things they do if we are able to break the language down for easy understanding”.*

All the journalists believe the issues are technical. Some journalist, however believe that GAEC officials try as much as possible to break things down for easy understanding. Some journalists also believe that it is the responsibility of journalists to seek clarification on issues they find too technical for the understanding of the layman.

One journalist said:

*“Where I find it extremely difficult to understand, I ask for further clarification on the issue”.*

Another journalist who thought a lot needs to be done said:

*“I have been expecting this question, they should really make things open and very transparent. The megawatts and the watts and watts and those things they have to break it down...they have some really big words in there that they have to really break down”.*

One journalist also thought GAEC normally simplifies for the media to digest but there are certain areas like Chemistry that is problematic and needs better explanation for easy understanding. There are some journalists who have individuals at GAEC who are involved with breaking down seemingly complex phenomenon. For example, a journalist said:

*“So far, yes when I got associated with GAEC, I found it a bit technical but people like Prof. Shiloh, a director of an institute in GAEC, helped me to really get to understand some of these things”*

#### 4.1.6 Journalists' knowledge about GAEC and the means through which GAEC educates journalists

Some journalists said they have enough information on GAEC. Other journalists said GAEC is too big for a journalist to make that conclusion. Some journalists said they could not claim they have enough information because in most situations, the interaction is not enough and that the nature of GAEC's activities will require prolonged engagement with journalist for them to come to that conclusion. A journalist suggested that even those at GAEC could not say they know all they are suppose to know. Those who claim to have enough information believe getting enough information depends on the experience and passion of the journalist for science and atomic issues. One journalist said:

*“Why not? The seasoned journalists who are interested in the activities of atomic energy, they know...they have enough information, plus me and that is why I have agreed to talk to you. The young ones who do not know the role and importance of atomic energy...”*

One journalist who believes he has enough information about GAEC because he has been involved extensively with GAEC said:

*“I have been close with GAEC, I have read a lot of materials on GAEC, I have also travelled on international trip, I have been able to associate with all partners GAEC works with, I have been able to liaise with the public relations department, I have been part of a training workshop. I have actually facilitated one of their workshops; I have also been an MC at their programmes so I have done a lot of things for GAEC. I have done a whole documentary on GAEC and so I know a lot of things about what GAEC does.”*

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## 4.2 DISCUSSIONS

It was revealed from the responses of journalists that there is no clear structure as far as GAEC's media relations is concerned. Journalists seem to talk to two people: the Director General and one PR person whose designation journalists do not know. The DG appears to be the main contact for journalists. The 8<sup>th</sup> principle of the excellence theory talks about qualification and standing of public relations practitioners. According to the principle, public relations officers must not only be educated and certified in the area, but must be active members of their professional associations.

The Director General is not a trained public relations person, and not a member of the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (a professional body of public relations practitioners in Ghana). This means GAEC's media relations, deviates from excellence.

According to the 6<sup>th</sup> principle of the excellence theory, an excellent public relations outfit uses less of press agency, two-way asymmetrical system and public information models. Grunig believes excellence could be achieved through the two-way symmetrical model, which involves the principle of truth-telling, understanding between client and publics, facilitated through research and a mutually beneficial relationship. The purpose of public information, which is also one-way, is the dissemination of truthful information. GAEC's PR model can be best described as a public information model, where journalists are invited to cover programmes so that they can report for the consumption of the general public. This is one-dimensional and has no basis in research to understand the needs of their publics. On the basis of this, GAEC has failed to achieve excellence.

Although respondents appreciate that GAEC has a public relations department, they think it is not well structured. This is manifested in participants' responses to questions about the people they contact when they need to make follow-ups. Although respondents mention the Director General and another person in the PR department, they do not even know the designation of the PR person. They failed to mention the official name and rather referred to the PR person by his nickname.

In its PR department, GAEC has four personnel, including the head of PR but journalists consistently acknowledged only one. This reveals that there is no conscious effort at developing formal structures.

In the study of the relations between journalists and public relations practitioners, Berkowitz, D. & Lee, J. (2004) found that although 'Cheong' shaped the tone of the relationship, it did not affect the content of the news produced. Similarly, it appears the mention of the nickname of the PR person may suggest familiarity and 'Cheong' but it also shows that GAEC's media relations' strategy is non-existent or lacks formality.

It was clear from the responses that journalists meet GAEC mostly during conferences and special programmes where journalists are invited to cover. Journalists also allude to attending some workshops and scientific exhibitions. Some journalists believe the frequency of meetings was low but they think it is understandable because of financial and logistical constraints. Some proposed the formation of a media core where a few journalists are prioritised in terms of capacity building so that they can be better mouthpiece for GAEC. Two of the journalists said sometimes some journalists get the opportunity to travel with GAEC officials abroad to cover programmes.

It is clear that GAEC is not aggressive enough in terms of its media engagement and for that matter its engagement with the general public. GAEC has failed to make extensive use of all the public relations tools. Respondents did not mention press releases, press conferences with issuance of backgrounders, press soirees etc. Press soiree in particular will give GAEC the opportunity to interact more and build personal relationships with journalists. Building personal and strong relationships would result in favourable reportage from journalists.

Respondents had varied opinions and experiences about the media relations of GAEC and how it compares to other corporate organisations. Some respondents believe that after getting close to GAEC officials, further interactions are very easy. Conversely, some respondents think GAEC were not open because if they were, the general public will not be ignorant about their activities. There are others who believe that the difference lies in GAEC's weaker public relations department as compared to other corporate organisations they have covered. They argue that other organisations have proper PR structures and are more aggressive and consistent. Some respondents believe the difference is in the porous nature of GAEC's information.

Another respondent thought the difference results from the strength of the PR departments in other organisations. He believes some corporate organisation he had covered had very strong and well-organised public relations departments.

Almost all respondents think that some or all GAEC's activities are important to the journalist and the general public. Whilst some journalists believe nuclear energy issues are more important, others believe activities on agriculture will be paramount.

Clearly, journalists appreciate what GAEC is doing but they believe if these are not well communicated, the negative perception of the general populace about GAEC will persist. In accordance with this, other journalists think information from GAEC should be packaged to dispel the negative perception the general public has about the commission, especially on the manufacture of atomic bomb.

Another respondent felt in the era of ‘dumso’ (intermittent power outages), the merits and demerits of alternative sources of energy, especially nuclear energy will be interesting to the journalist and the general public. He believes GAEC must set the agenda for discussion on this subject

Journalists seem to have idea about what GAEC does. Some areas of GAEC activities were, however, emphasized by some journalists. Some emphasised nuclear applications in agriculture; others emphasized nuclear power or energy. Others looked at application in industry. This could account for different experiences with GAEC and journalists’ interest.

Answering the question on how their capacity is built by GAEC, all journalists said through workshops. Each respondent agree to have attended one or more workshops aimed at educating journalists. Journalists, however, complained about the frequency of the workshops. Respondents who made an attempt to recall the last time they attended a GAEC-organised workshop said they had it during the celebration of GAEC’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was launched in April 2013. It stands to reason, therefore, that GAEC has gone over a year without organising any capacity-building programme for journalists.

One journalist, although, thought GAEC does not organise workshops frequently, believes it was understandable because GAEC is a purely a research institution and not a commercial institution that is compelled to be in the media all the time.

One journalist who had the most comprehensive response to this question puts it this way:

*“I have attended some of them and I think that there is more room for them to do this consistently. In a year, we should have about 2 or 3 workshops that are targeted at media houses that can really put GAEC in the media landscape and they should also be having training programmes. They have a whole school for training...SNAS is there and I think that they can even sponsor some journalists to take some courses there. GAEC ought to find ways and means of putting up a short course to help journalists, people who are interested in scientific reporting. You know journalists are there for the taking and the person who offers them the best opportunities are the people they associate with”.*

The call by this journalist for proper capacity building by GAEC, using the resources of the Graduate School of Nuclear and Allied Science seems to resonate with Appiah, et al. (2012), who concluded in their study that there was potential for science reporting in Ghana and that more resources should be channeled into the training of science reporters.

On the issue of the technical nature of news from a scientific research institution, whereas respondents agree that parts of GAEC’s information is technical, they think GAEC officials try as much as possible to explain very technical issues in simple language.

On the basis of the research questions one, which is about journalists' knowledge level about the core activities of GAEC, it was revealed that journalists have some minimum amount of information from the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission but the information is not concrete enough. Journalists, especially, are aware that GAEC is involved with scientific research and nuclear energy issues. The level of knowledge is reflected in their eagerness to have more training programmes and a media core that will constantly interact with the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission.

The second research question enquires about the extent to which GAEC's media relations builds journalist. Although journalists agreed to have covered some programmes concerning GAEC and GAEC has found a way of communicating very technical information to the understanding of journalists, it is still clear that adequate capacity has not been built. Even though attempts had been made to enable journalists, the infrequent nature of the workshops seemed to have eroded gains that had been made. GAEC's website, which could serve as a quick reference and educative resource for journalists has failed to play that significant role.

Considering the third research question, which talks about the extent to which GAEC's media relations can be categorized as reactive, proactive or interactive, it is clear that GAEC's media relations cannot be described as proactive, neither can it be described as reactive because there is not so much of reacting to media enquiries. It is also not interactive enough to generate the right publicity. GAEC has, however, found a way of explaining technical terms to journalists. It appears GAEC has had few media enquiries because it has been 'proactive' in inviting the media to its programmes and GAEC

officials are always available to clarify issues. GAEC has, however, failed to take advantage of press releases, press conferences, press soirees etc, which could deepen relationship with the media and increase publicity.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Conclusions

The study was undertaken to explore the perception of journalists about media relations practice at the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission. The study employed in-depth interview to understand the level of information journalists have about the core activities of GAEC; the extent to which GAEC's media relations enable journalists to report on its activities and the extent to which GAEC's media relations could be described as reactive, proactive or interactive.

This dissertation was also guided by the following objectives: (i) to find out how much information journalists get from GAEC and how often they get the information; (ii) to find out the context/circumstances under which journalists meet GAEC; (iii) to find out whether the existing relationship between the media and GAEC builds the media's capacity and understanding of GAEC's activities (iv) to find out if media relations is only used to generate publicity or if it also played a strategic role in relationship building. The excellence theory formed the basis of the research. Related literature was also reviewed in order to appreciate the depth of research and findings in the area of media relations.

The topic and the research questions were carefully chosen to understand the current media relations practice of a public scientific research organisation like GAEC.

This is to enable the researcher add to the body of knowledge and provide literature for

further studies in the area of media relations; provoke further research in the area and recommend ways to address lapses, if any, as perceived by journalists.

From the findings, it can be concluded that although journalists have some information about GAEC, it is not enough to build their capacity to talk about GAEC's activities, without the input of GAEC officials. The evidence of this is seen in the unanimous call by journalists for more training workshops. Journalists appreciate the importance of media relations in image building and favourable publicity but the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission has failed to take advantage of the goodwill of journalists.

GAEC's readiness to break down highly technical and scientific issues for better understanding and their overall engagement with journalist is an indication of a foundation for building a strong relationship. However, there seems to be a limitation in the usage of a reasonable mix of press releases; press conferences; and media soiree. GAEC meets journalists under limited context and has, therefore, lost the opportunity to engage the general public on a more regular basis.

Reactive media relations respond to media inquiries; Proactive media relations promote and publicise the organisation; interactive media relations take a step even further to develop relations with the media practitioners. Although GAEC cannot be described as reactive or responding to media enquiries, one cannot also describe them as completely proactive and completely interactive. From all the responses, it is clear that a GAEC has failed to achieve excellence and its practices, as far as media engagement is concerned, have no public relations elements.

GAEC's media relations deviates from some of the tenets of the excellence theory. It deviates from qualification and standing of practitioners. It is also contrary to the tenet that requires the minimal usage press agency, two-way asymmetrical system and public information models.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The findings from this research work have revealed some lapses that require attention and a few recommendations have been made for consideration.

There is urgent need for re-organisation of the public relations department of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission. The department should have a PR manager who should be part of the dominant coalition. This is because the public relations manager's job seems to be done by the Director General, who has no formal training and does not belong to a professional association of PR practitioners.

The names and designations of PR officers and technicians should be clearly communicated to journalists. From the responses, it was clear that journalists know only one person from the public relations section, whose official name and designation they do not know.

GAEC must form a group of journalists who will be on their beat. This will make it easy for GAEC's management in terms of numbers and resources for educating the journalists. Although GAEC's usage of workshops and conferences is important in building capacity for journalists, it would not result in publicity about their core business without sustained effort aimed at educating the general public about GAEC's activities.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Guide

These questions are a Guide to Semi-structured Interviews on the Thesis Topic: Journalists' Perception of Media Relations: A case of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission

- xii. Who do you talk to at the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission if you want information or clarification on an issue?
- xiii. What kind of information do you get from the GAEC?
- xiv. Under what context/circumstances do you meet the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission?
- xv. As a journalist, do you think media relations important for public scientific research organisations like the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission?
- xvi. Is GAEC's media relation different from corporate organisations that you have covered like the Banks, Telecommunications companies etc?
- xvii. Have you been informed by GAEC about the channels of communication with journalists?
- xviii. What constructs of news from GAEC would be most important for you and the general public?
- xix. Does GAEC organise workshops to educate you about the institution's vision, mission and activities?
- xx. Do you have enough information about the major activities of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission?
- xxi. Would you say GAEC has a reasonable mix of press release, press conference (with issuance of backgrounders), media soiree, workshops and plant tours?
- xxii. Do you find the messages too technical?