

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN UTILITY COMPANIES AND THEIR PUBLICS: A
STUDY OF GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED**

BY

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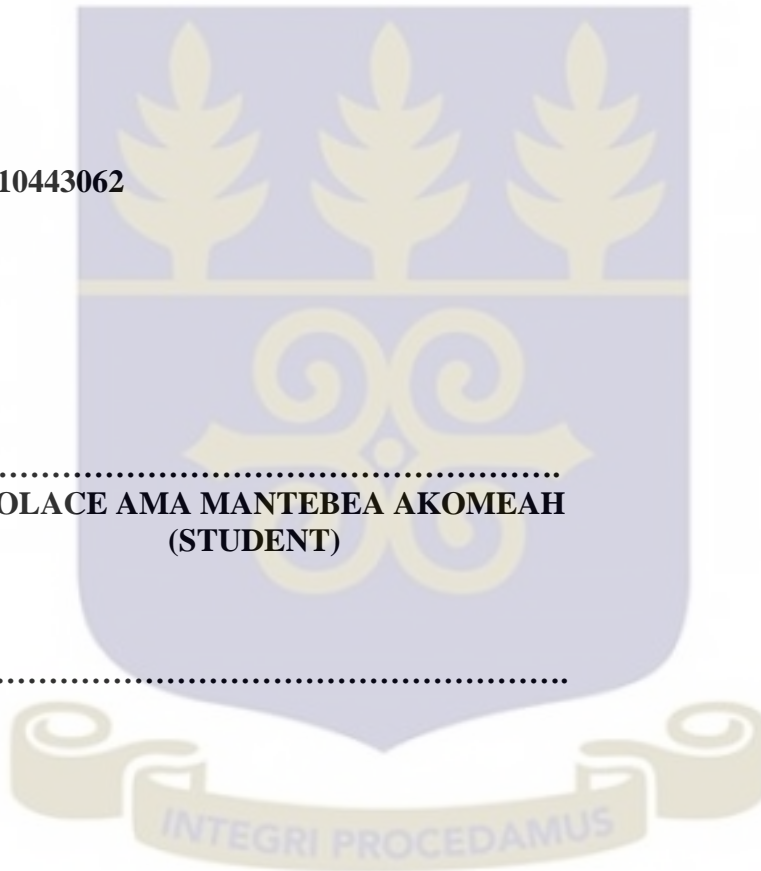
DECLARATION

I, Solace Ama Mantebea AKOMEAH, hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own research, carried out under the supervision of Professor Kwame Karikari of the Department of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana. The research was conducted between July and October 2014. Ideas, references and authors cited by this study have been duly credited.

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DEDICATION

To my dear husband, Mr. Josses Kwadwo Akomeah, who gave me the love and moral support I needed to successfully complete this course.



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I am thankful to the Almighty God, my dear father in heaven, who gave me the strength and intellectual ability to complete this Master's degree and also finish my dissertation. I am eternally thankful to him.

Special thanks to Mrs. Theodora Adomako-Adjei, Extension Services Coordinator of Community Water and Sanitation Agency. She was very instrumental in the selection of my research topic. I appreciate her for the guidelines she gave me. May God bless her.

I cannot forget Madam Fay Ephrim, Chief Investment Analyst, also of Community Water and Sanitation Agency, who introduced me to Mrs. Theodora Adomako-Adjei. Mr. Ibrahim Musah, Head of Policy and Partnership at WaterAid in Ghana, facilitated my community entry to Nima.

This work could not have been completed without the selfless dedication and meticulous supervision of Professor Kwame Karikari. I chased him with my work even when he was in seminars. I have come to admire him a lot for his humility.

It would have been impossible to carry out this study without my respondents. I am grateful for the time they sacrificed to have discussions with me.

O. T. is a young man who no student of the Department of Communication Studies could ignore and successfully finish their course of study. His mantra "*Wo nni problem*" (don't worry, you have no problem) was always reassuring. He provided every I. T. need I required during my time at the school and also for this study. Special thanks to him.

ABSTRACT

Potable water is an essential good which the United Nations regard as a human right that everyone must get access to. In many developing countries however, potable water is inadequate and so water is rationed. Research indicates that decisions regarding water utility services in developing countries can be controversial and may be received by publics with mixed feelings. Research further establishes that, if the management of a water utility company is able to communicate effectively with its varied customers, the misunderstandings that may arise could be reduced to the barest minimum.

In Ghana, Little scholarly research has investigated how utility companies communicate with their publics. This study therefore sought to evaluate the kind of communication that takes place between Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and two of its publics: the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) and some domestic consumers in Tema and Nima in the Greater Accra Region.

The study used the dialogic theory of communication as a guide and employed qualitative methods—focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews, to collect data.

The research found that, although GWCL said they routinely communicate with their diverse publics, carefully crafting different messages and using a mix of media vehicles based on the nature of audience and information being conveyed, the PURC and the consumers did not share that verdict. To them, information from GWCL was often absent or at best delayed, but in any case, reactive, often on the prompting of the PURC. Tenets of the dialogic theory were largely absent in the communication between GWCL and the PURC as well as the customers.

The study then made practical recommendations which GWCL could use to improve its communication with its publics.



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Communication between organisations and their publics is crucial because it is linked to organisational effectiveness (Murphy & Dee 1992). Companies and their publics depend on each other. The interaction that exists between the two parties can be likened to interpersonal relationships (Bolkan, Goodboy, & Bachman, 2012). And like interpersonal relationships, not all interactions between the parties involved may always be smooth and pleasant. Good communication can however, reduce any possible tension between them.

Effective communication and relationship building between organisations and their publics are linked to consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Bolkan, Griffin, & Goodboy 2014). Consumers prefer organisations that engage them, are attentive to their needs, and sensitive to their feelings (Ford, 2003).

Research has stressed that, the quality of the relationship between an organisation and its publics is an indication of public relations effectiveness since the public relations function within organisations is based on the conduct of communication between the organisation and its publics (Lane, 2010).

From the assertions above, it is obvious that when utility companies establish and maintain a positive communication relationship with customers, it would build goodwill between them.

Sinha & Reddy (1991) describe communication between a company and its publics as a complex phenomenon that affects the everyday life, overall activities, performance, success and future of the company. Although it is complex, it is nonetheless necessary because it helps in disseminating as well as seeking information; thus, fostering a two-way communication process. This movement of information often provides the organisation with insight into how the public perceives the operations of the organisation (Rawlins, 2006).

Utility companies, by their nature, are organisations which provide services to the general public, even if they are privately owned. Public utilities include electricity, gas, telecommunication and water supply companies. They usually operate as monopolies, with little or no competition. They are usually regulated by the state, and/or utility commissions under enacted state laws (Hill & Hill, 2002).

Since utility companies provide service to the general public, communication between them and their publics is very essential (Hill & Hill, 2002). This is because they have different categories of publics to appeal to. For example Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) has publics such as their regulators, the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC); Civil Society Groups and ordinary consumers. Effective communication can help them prepare and deliver “public-specific” messages to suit each category of their publics.

1.0.1 PUBLICS/STAKEHOLDER EXPLAINED

The terms “publics” and “stakeholders” are two words that are often used interchangeably. They should however, not be misunderstood one for the other because there is a slight difference between them (Rawlins, 2006). Grunig & Hunt (1984) described stakeholders as people who have a stake or interest in an organisation and as a result, affect and are affected

by the organisation. “Publics” on the other hand, are identified and classified according to the extent to which they are aware of a problem (between them and the company) and the extent to which they do something about the problem. Grunig & Hunt (1984) identified four categories of publics: non-public -- no problem is recognised or exists; latent public -- problem is there, but public does not recognise it; aware public -- group recognises that a problem exists; active public -- group is aware of the problem and organises to respond to it. Dewey (1972) also distinguished between the two terms with the explanation that, publics refers to a group of people who face a similar problem, recognises the problem, and organise themselves to do something about it. To Dewey (1972) publics organise from the ranks of stakeholders when they recognise an issue and decide to do something about it.

Although there seem to be some nuances (albeit confusing) between the two terms explained above, this study uses them interchangeably in addition to ‘consumers’, to mean people and entities that are affected and or affect the operations of GWCL. To this study these words mean the same. The PURC which is a regulator of GWCL’s operations and consumers of GWCL in Nima, a suburb of Accra and then Tema Community ‘3’ were the publics studied by this research.

A report on consumer trends in Europe submitted to the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme, Sustainable Development, Global Change and Ecosystems Thematic Priority Area (2006) suggested that, there has been recent rapid growth in the consumption of alternative drinking water such as bottled water other than tap water. This rapid growth is significantly influenced by consumers with regards to these alternative sources of household water consumption as a healthy substitute to poor quality tap water (Yardley, 2005). Globally, in terms of providing utility consumption services, the water industry has prominence in most

countries (Stenekes, Colebatch, Waite & Ashbolt, 2006). In most developing worlds, the challenge remains for access to safe drinking water (Falahee & MacRae, 1995). In Ghana, circumstances regarding the use of tap water, which is primarily under the responsibility of the GWCL also remain prominent; it appears to be a privilege for a few (Rudolf, 2005).

Means, Brueck, Dixon, Manning, Miles, & Patrick (2002) argued that, if consumers are increasingly consuming alternative sources of treated water other than tap water, then, this would suggest that, either the water industry has public relations problems or indeed water quality problems. With issues related to public relations problems, a study done for the US Environmental Protection Agency in 2003 (cited in Techneau, 2006) established that, although consumers have a basic understanding about their water supply sources, they would like more information on the administrative processes as well as recognise the importance of being able to send back reactions on received information to the water companies.

From observations within the Ghanaian environment, this study reckoned that it might not be out of place to suggest that consumers of water from GWCL shared similar sentiments as expressed in the Trend Report (2006). To this point, this study sought to qualitatively examine the communicative processes between GWCL, a state-owned water utility company in Ghana, and some two categories of their publics: the PURC as their regulator and ordinary consumers in two separate communities in the Accra/Tema metropolis.

1.1 OVERVIEW OF GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED¹ (GWCL)

Water supply systems in Ghana were managed by the Hydraulic Division of the Public Works Department during the colonial era and the early parts of Ghana's independence in 1957. With

¹ Profile of Ghana Water Company Limited was sourced from <http://www.gwcl.com.gh/pgs/history.php>

time the responsibilities of the Hydraulic Division were widened to include the planning and development of water supply systems in other parts of the country. The government of Ghana in agreement with recommendations from the World Health Organisation in 1959, established the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation in 1965 under an Act of Parliament (Act 310) as a legal public utility entity. Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation was to be responsible for:

- Water supply and sanitation in rural as well as urban areas.
- The conduct of research on water and sewerage as well as the making of engineering surveys and plans.
- The construction and operation of water and sewerage works.
- The setting of standards and prices and collection of revenues.

In 1987, a “Five-Year Rehabilitation and Development Plan” for the water sector in Ghana was prepared, and this resulted in the launch of the Water Sector Restructuring Project (WSRP). The main aim of the Water Sector Restructuring Project was to reduce unaccounted-for-water (water that produced but does not generate income due to certain factors) and improve efficiency of the sector.

Accordingly, a number of reforms within the Ghanaian water sector were initiated. These reforms saw the creation of several agencies and government functionaries. They include:

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which was established to ensure that water operations would not cause any harm to the environment.
- The Water Resources Commission (WRC) which was founded to be in charge of overall regulation and management of water resources utilization.
- Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) was established to be responsible for the management of rural water supply systems, hygiene education and provision of sanitary facilities.

- The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) which was also established with the purpose of setting tariffs and quality standards for the operation of public utilities.

Finally, pursuant to the Statutory Corporations (Conversion to Companies) Act 461 of 1993 as amended by LI 1648, on 1st July 1999, Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation was converted into a 100% state owned limited liability company, known as the Ghana Water Company Limited. Ghana Water Company Limited was created with the main responsibility of ensuring urban water supply only.

1.2 THE PUBLIC UTILITIES REGULATORY COMMISSION² (PURC)

The PURC was established by an act of Parliament: Public Utilities Regulatory Commission Act, 1997 (Act 538). The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission of Ghana is an independent body set up to regulate and oversee the provision of the highest quality of electricity and water services to consumers. The functions of the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission comprise:

- Providing guidelines for rates to be charged for the provision of utility services.
- Examining and approving water and electricity rates.
- Protecting the interest of consumers and providers of utility services;
- Monitoring and enforcing standards of performance for the provision of utility services;
- Promoting fair competition among public utilities;
- Receiving and investigating complaints as well as settling disputes between consumers and public utility companies.
- Advising any person or authority in respect of any public utility issues.

² Profile of Public Utilities Regulatory Commission was sourced from <http://www.purc.com.gh/purc/purc>

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Chaman, Miller & Mitchell (2012) asserted that water supply systems are complex, unpredictable, and sometimes involve high political interference. This, the authors argued, is because water is an essential good, and that decisions about water utility services can sometimes be controversial and may be received by publics with some mixed feelings. To them, the ability of management to communicate with customers can help in resolving some of the mixed feelings. Good communication in the view of Chaman et al, (2012) is more critical, given the varied expectations of consumers within the general public.

Previously, communication was seen as a one-way process of information dissemination (Servaes & Malikhao, 2011). Today however, communication has moved beyond that view. The updated view is that, two-way communication between service providers and their customers is very critical and vital for development (Chaman, Miller & Mitchel (2012). Ferguson (1984) noted that, the prominence with which an organisation handles its public relations function indicates the importance it gives to relationship building and for that matter two-way communication.

With regard to relationship-building and effectiveness of the public relations function, Grunig, Grunig & Dozier's (2002) work on the *Excellence Project* suggested that, organisational effectiveness would increase as a result of public relations efforts in building long-lasting relationships of trust and understanding with their publics. Stewart, Zediker & Black (2004) as well as Baxter (2005) recommended that, organisations should maintain two-way communication, which is often referred to as dialogue or dialogic communication, with their publics at all times.

Jahansoozi (2007) is also of the view that shifts towards a relational paradigm within organisations are as a result of demands from their publics. This is because organisations are becoming increasingly reliant on understanding, listening and developing dialogue with their publics in order to achieve their organisational goals. Botan (1997) suggested a model known as ‘adaptation or negotiation model’, which postulated that effective communication between organisations and their publics should focus on the facilitation of a give-and-take relationship between organisation and their publics. Kent and Taylor (1998) later described communication between institutions and their publics from the lens of dialogic communication. The authors in simple terms described dialogic communication as any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions.

The above statements indicate how organisations are becoming increasingly reliant on understanding, listening and developing dialogue with their publics in order to achieve their organisational goals. This study wonders whether communication between GWCL and its publics tows this give and take, negotiated model. This is because, the media in Ghana are usually filled with complaints about misunderstanding between the utility provider and its customers over unlawful water disconnections, delays in dealing with complaints, inconsistent rationing schedules among others. There seems to be a grave lack of information flow between the two parties.

A study done for the US Environmental Protection Agency in 2003 (cited in Techneau, 2006) established that, although consumers have a basic understanding about their water supply sources, they would like more information on the administrative processes as well as recognise the importance of being able to send back reactions on received information to the water companies.

From observations within the Ghanaian environment, this study reckoned that it might not be out of place to suggest that consumers of water from GWCL shared similar sentiments as expressed in the report. To this point, this study sought to qualitatively examine the communicative processes between GWCL, a state-owned water utility company in Ghana, and some two categories of their publics: the PURC as their regulator and ordinary consumers in two separate communities in the Accra/Tema metropolis.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The goal of this study was to fill the literature gap in Ghana as far studies in the water sector is concerned. The study sought to do this by examining, analysing, and reporting on how GWCL as a utility company in Ghana, communicates with its publics. Specifically, this study sought to:

- ✚ Evaluate the adequacy of the communication mechanism (channels) used by GWCL in communicating with their stakeholders.
- ✚ Find out whether the dialogic communication principles are present in the communication activities between GWCL and its publics.
- ✚ Find out whether GWCL and its publics face any communication challenges.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What channels of communication are used by Ghana Water Company Limited in communicating with its publics?
- ii. Are the channels enough for disseminating information to and receiving feedback from consumers?

- iii. Are the dialogic communication principles present in the communication activities between GWCL with its publics?
- iv. What challenges do GWCL and its publics face in the communication process?

1.6 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This study first serves as an added contribution to existing studies that have discussed issues on communication between utility companies and their publics. The study examined how GWCL as a utility company in Ghana communicates with its publics.

This study also examined how the dialogic communication theory explains the communication relationship that exists between GWCL and its publics. The study then made recommendations to help improve on GWCL's communication with its publics and also gave directions for future studies in the subject area.

1.7 CHAPTER ARRANGEMENT IN THE STUDY

This study is structured into five chapters. Chapter one deals with the background to the study - a brief profile of elements considered important for the purpose of this research work. The chapter also highlights the problem statement, objectives of the study and research questions.

Chapter two reviews significant literature on communication between subject matter. The chapter also reviews the dialogic theory of communication and outlines its principles. Chapter three concentrates on the methodology adopted for the study. The section discusses the research design, research population, sample selection, data gathering and data analysis.

It also outlines some ethical considerations.

Chapter four presents an analysis, interpretation and discussions of findings to the study. Finally chapter five presents a summary and draws inferences from findings to arrive at a conclusion for the research work and proceeds to make recommendations for future studies into the study area.



CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an in-depth focus on related research into communication between companies and their publics. Thematically, the study reviewed literature in relation to the theory of dialogic communication, the principles of dialogic communication, incorporating dialogic communication into the communication function of the organisation, as well as a review of studies that considered some perspectives of dialogic communication.

The study also presents a graphic conceptual framework that simplifies how dialogic communication occurs between an organisation and its publics.

2.1 THE DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION THEORY

According to International Communication Association (ICA) (2013, as cited in Lane, 2013), the importance of dialogue to public relations is a persistent and widespread theme in both industry and academia. Grunig & Hunt (1984, as cited in Lane, 2013) indicated that dialogue forms an integral part of a number of theoretical and conceptual perspectives in public relations, from the instrumentalist/functionalist through to the rise of the influence of the two-way symmetric model.

The relational perspective alongside its emphasis on dialogue as a means of attaining mutually-beneficial relationships between companies and their publics is an antecedent to dialogue as a distinct concept within the public relations functions of an organisation (Ledingham, 2003).

Implicitly, dialogue persists as a focal ingredient in the process of developing new viewpoints regarding the public relations function of an organisation (Lane, 2013).

Kent and Taylor (1998) explained “dialogue” as any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions. The authors, indicated that, dialogue represents efforts by parties in a relationship to engage in an honest, open and ethically based give-and-take process. Proceeding from their 1998 publication, Taylor, Kent and White (2002) provided a functional clarification to dialogue. In the clarification, Taylor et al, (2002) indicated that the move towards dialogue is not simply terminological but it is a framework for thinking about ethical and fulfilling relationships in which publics are elevated to the status of communication equals.

Traditional approaches to public relations relegate publics to a secondary role, making them instruments for meeting organisational policy or marketing needs; whereas, dialogue elevates publics to the status of communication equals with the organization (Botan 1993, as cited in Kent & Taylor, 2002: p. 4).

Prior to Kent and Taylor’s (1998) clarification, Johannesen (1974, as cited in Kent & Taylor, 2002) suggested that dialogue is intimately connected with concepts such as honesty, concern for the audience, genuineness, open-mindedness, empathy, lack of pretence, no-manipulative intentions, and encouragement of free expression.

In a broader sense, Kent and Taylor (1998) firmly posited dialogue and its proposed efficacy within the public relations functions for mediated relationships particularly for those created by communication through the internet. However, the focus of this study is not to dwell on communicative aspects of an organisation using the internet, rather the face-to-face and other mediated alternatives in light of the tenets within the dialogic communication theory spearheaded by Kent and Taylor (2002).

The concept of dialogue, which is drawn from philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, and relational communication theory (McAllister-Spooner, 2008; Wirtz & Ngondo, 2012) incorporates tacit and overt assumptions as its principles. The principles include: mutuality; propinquity; empathy; risk; and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). These five critical assumptions or principles of dialogic communication are further explained in the proceeding section.

2.2 PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

According to Kent & Taylor (2002), dialogic approach to public relations consists of several coherent assumptions that make its comprehension simpler.

Before discussing the features of dialogue in detail, it is important to note that dialogue is not an end in itself, rather a means to an end in the communication functions of an organisation. What dialogue does is place emphasis on the relationship-building between the organisation and its publics. However, dialogue cannot compel an organisation to conduct itself ethically. The organisation must willingly make dialogic commitments to publics (Kent & Taylor 2002).

It is also important to note that some public relations work is necessarily reactive. Kent & Taylor (2001) reported that the timing of an event and the freedom to respond with collaborative tactics may prevent practitioners from using dialogue. The authors also posited that dialogic communication may be inappropriate in some circumstances.

The authors also asserted that, dialogue can be put to both moral and immoral ends. In a similar assertion, Gunson and Collins (1997), pointed out, that just because an organisation and its publics create “dialogic” communication structures, does not mean that they are behaving

dialogically. According to them, if one partner subverts the dialogic process through manipulation, or exclusion, then the end result will not be dialogic. Discussed below are the tenets of the dialogic communication theory, as explained by Kent and Taylor (2002).

2.2.1 MUTUALITY AS A PRINCIPLE OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

Mutuality as explained by Kent and Taylor (2002) refers to the recognition that organisations and their publics are closely knitted together. The authors indicated that mutuality is considered as either the presence of shared meaning or negotiation.

The authors posited that, in considering mutuality, organisations must adopt a framework which will account for culture and standpoints in ideology. For that matter, Anderson, Cissna & Arnett, (1994) expressed the notion that, central to the principle of mutuality in the dialogic communication is collaboration and the spirit of mutual equality. Collaboration advocates for the awareness and considerations of the varied views of the different entities while spirit of mutual equality as advanced by Freire (1994) suggests that organisations, in dealing with their publics, should strive to maintain humility and a relationship of equality.

2.2.2 PROPINQUITY AS A PRINCIPLE OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

Related to mutuality as explained above is propinquity. Propinquity as pointed out by Kent & Taylor (2002) at the basic level advocates for a type of rhetorical exchange as an orientation to a relationship. Dialogic propinquity as further elaborated by the authors, means that, the organisation consults its publics in matters that affects them, (the publics) and for that matter, the publics' willingness in such circumstances to articulate their demands to the organisation for favourable consideration (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The authors indicated that propinquity is established by three features of dialogic relationships which include: immediacy of presence, temporal flow and engagement. They clarify the processes of dialogic exchanges.

Immediacy of presence as a feature of dialogic propinquity, suggests that organisations communicate with their publics in the *present* about issues, rather than *after decisions* have been made. Immediacy of presence also suggests that parties should communicate within a shared space (Anderson, 1994, as cited in Kent and Taylor 2002). In simple terms, this means that parties must be present together in a shared space to decide on issues together before decisions are made or even if they the other party is not present physically, their views must be sought.

Temporal flow, according to Anderson et al, (1994, as cited in Kent and Taylor, 2002) expects both the organisation and their publics to relate with an understanding of the past and the present, being mindful of future relationships. Dialogue is not rooted only in the present; rather, its focus is on a continued and shared future for all participants. The last feature is engagement.

Engagement simply means that participants within the communication relationship must be accessible and respectful as it helps both parties to have a wider perspective to draw from in decision-making Anderson et al, (1994, as cited in Kent and Taylor, 2002).

2.2.3 EMPATHY AS A PRINCIPLE OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

According to Kent and Taylor (2002) empathy, which is also referred to as sympathy, indicates an atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed. This feature of dialogue is characterized by “supportiveness,” a “communal orientation,” and “confirmation or acknowledgment” of others. Kent and Taylor (2002) asserted that empathetic communication is very important because organisations can improve their communication function by understanding and acknowledging the viewpoints of their publics.

Central to the principle of empathy is supportiveness -- creating a climate in which others are not only encouraged to participate but their participation is facilitated; communal orientation - - presupposing a communal orientation between the organisation and their publics, whether they are individuals or organisations; confirmation -- acknowledging or affirming the intrinsic value of others (Freire, 1994).

2.2.4 RISK AS A PRINCIPLE OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

Leitch & Neilson (2001, as cited in Kent and Taylor 2002) noted that genuine dialogue appears to be a problematic concept for public relations. Organisations and the publics they engage in dialogue with take relational risks. The assumption of this risk according to the authors is characterized by three features in a dialogic exchange which are *vulnerability*; *unanticipated outcomes* and the recognition of *strange otherness*.

The authors explained that the dialogic relationship established between the parties involved exposes their “weaknesses” and therefore makes them vulnerable to each other. Dialogic exchanges are spontaneous (decisions emerge from the dialogue) and can therefore lead to unexpected outcomes for both parties (there may be the need for compromise at some point in the dialogue and so parties may not necessarily get exactly what they bargain for). Recognition of “strange otherness” is not limited to the interaction of strangers or acquaintances but also includes exchanges with those who are well known. It is the consciousness of the fact that the “other” is not the same as oneself.

2.2.5 COMMITMENT AS A PRINCIPLE OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

The final principle of the dialogic communication is commitment. Commitment defines three features of a dialogic encounter (Gadamer, 1994). They are, as explained in Kent and Taylor

(2002) genuineness -- describing how discussants in a dialogue are honest and forthright with each other; commitment to the conversation -- explicating the essence of having a dialogue in the first place, which provides a mutual benefit and an understanding of issues being discussed; and lastly a commitment to interpretation -- necessitating an interpretation and understanding by all parties involved, since dialogues may appear inter-subjective, and often with diverse view positions from either the organisation or the publics (Gadamer, 1994).

2.3 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR PUBLICS: INCORPORATING DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

Pearson (1989, cited in Kent and Taylor, 2002) explained that, ethical public relations practice is basically an issue of implementing and maintaining communication systems which question, discuss and validate other substantive ethical claims such as openness, and mutuality. Kent and Taylor (2002) asserted that, ethical public relations is fundamentally anchored on sound communication systems.

Having suggested principles that characterise a dialogic communication, Kent and Taylor (2002) further suggested how organisations can incorporate dialogue into their communication with publics. The authors mentioned that for any approach to dialogue to be effective, it requires an organisational commitment and an acceptance that relationship building is valuable. Kent and Taylor (2002) also went ahead to suggest at least three ways by which dialogue can be infused into the usual communication functions of communicating with the organisation's publics. They include: the interpersonal, the mediated and the organisational processes.

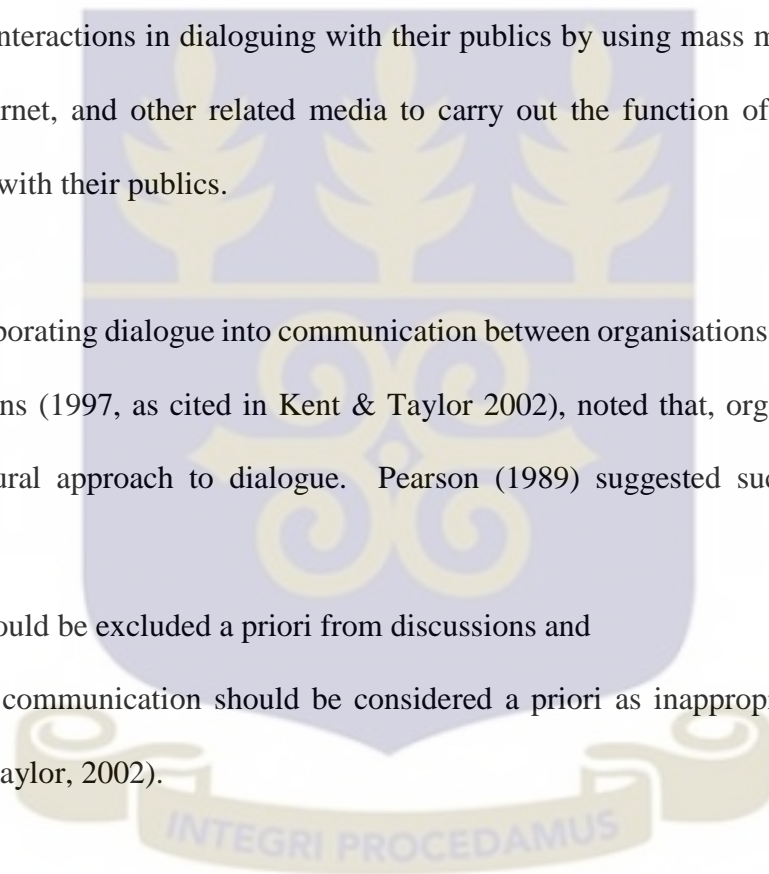
In building interpersonal relationships with their publics, organisations must be made aware that, leadership is usually defined by an organisation's ability to integrate at several levels of business and society and to create more integrated management processes through the use of

their communication function with society. For that matter, organisations should train persons in charge of the communication function to acquire skills such as listening, empathy, ability to contextualise matters within the appropriate perspectives, think within both the long and short term scopes of the organisation, etc. which are all necessary for building a strong interpersonal relationship between the organisation and its publics .

In the view of Kent and Taylor (2002), organisations can also strengthen their commitment to fostering more interactions in dialoguing with their publics by using mass mediated channels such as the internet, and other related media to carry out the function of the organisation communicating with their publics.

Finally, in incorporating dialogue into communication between organisations and their publics, Gunson & Collins (1997, as cited in Kent & Taylor 2002), noted that, organisations should adopt a procedural approach to dialogue. Pearson (1989) suggested such procedures as follows:

- No topic should be excluded a priori from discussions and
- No type of communication should be considered a priori as inappropriate or irrational (Kent and Taylor, 2002).



2.4 RELATED STUDIES

Taylor et al. (2001) argued that both interpersonal and organisation relationships rely on factors such as trust, risk and multiple interactions.

Ledingham & Bruning (1998) made significant contributions to theorising relational public relations through a perspective of interpersonal communication. Their study measured the positive impact factors of a dialogic communication between organisations and their publics; such as, trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. Their findings were inconclusive and could not firmly establish the impacts of such factors within the communication process between organisations and their publics.

Bruning & Ledingham (2004) demonstrated how stakeholders' perceptions of satisfaction, behavioural intent and actual behaviour, are influenced by an organisation's attitude towards the pursuance of a healthy relationship with its publics (Bruning & Ledingham, 2004). In a seemingly similar vein, Hon & Grunig (1999) provided a scale by which the effectiveness of an organisation's communication relationship with its related publics could be measured. In their study, they established that mutuality, advocacy, and supportiveness as well as trust were some of the key ingredients regarded as essential in an organisation's communication processes (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Kim (2012) did an extensive literature review on the communicative relationships that exist between stakeholders and organisations and how such relationships could result in threats and or opportunities for the organisations.

Kim (2012) posited that the formation and sustenance of a relationship between an organisation and its publics require solving problems related to their goals or interests. Such “problem solving,” according to Kim, requires both entities to communicate. Simply put, it is the relational history between organisations and publics that determines the tonality and magnitude of communicative actions by publics. Kim (2012) contended that through the use of dialogic communication, organisations and publics could better manage opportunities and threats related to their goals and interests by a more efficient and effective use of given knowledge and resources.

In the Ghanaian setting, very little has been done with regards to dialogic communication between organisations and their publics, especially relating it to public utility companies. Hinson et al, (2012), however, did a study on dialogic communication interrogation of the online brand dispositions of banks operating in Ghana and reported that, Banks in Ghana have been fairly successful in creating communication processes with high dialogic value, with over half the banks sampled actively implementing dialogic communication principles in engaging their publics, especially with their online activities.

Duncan (2013) (also within the Ghanaian context) carried out a study to determine the nature of the communication processes between two banks in Ghana and their informal sector clients. A basic assumption the author held from the inception of the study was that ‘an effective two-way communication was needful between banks and their informal sector clients.

The author’s findings on dialogic communication processes and feedback by the two banks showed that the banks used their relationship managers to carry out face-to-face communication with their informal publics. The study also noted that, the relationship

managers used language that the informal sector clients were conversant with other than the use of English language as the official language in Ghana. The study further found that the banks used television and radio to communicate with their publics. The study concluded that dialogue and feedback as elements of two-way communication were present in the strategies employed by the banks.

2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

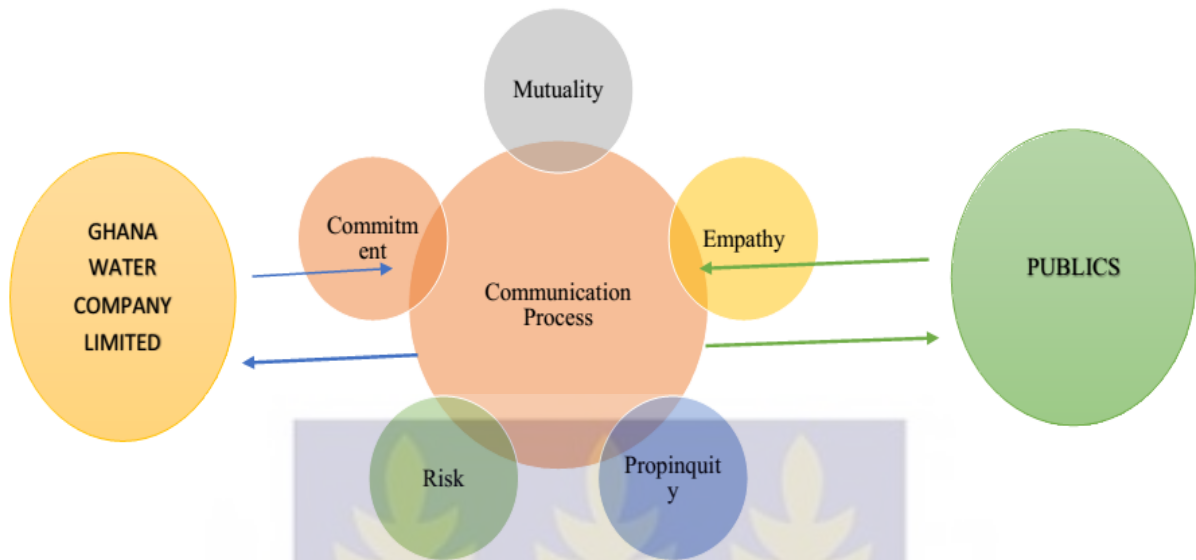
Figure 1 (below) shows a pictorial view of the elements of dialogic communication process. They are the five principles theorised by Kent and Taylor (2002). The elements comprise mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment. Together, these theoretical elements will be tested in the communication process between GWCL as a public utility organisation and its publics.

The stages, as discussed in this framework, revolve around observing the objectives for GWCL's communication with its identified publics.

The framework adopted for this study is appropriate because it helps the study to first identify and then describe the communication process that exists between the company and its publics. Not only is the framework interested in identifying and describing the communication process, but it also helps to determine how responsive the publics are, to the communication process of the organisation.

Additionally, this framework provides a simple understanding of the nature of dialogic communication.

Figure 1: Graphic explanation of dialogic communication between an organisation (GWCL) and its publics, exhibiting the elements of the dialogic theory.



Source: Researcher’s Review of Related Studies, 2014

2.6 WATER REFORMS IN GHANA & GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED

The main sources of water supply to many urban areas in Ghana are conventional treatment plants where surface water is taken from rivers. Historically, a major feature of these treatment plants has been their inability to produce enough water to meet growing urban demands (Songsore, 1992). The then Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation was not able to provide efficient and effective services to urban populations and the public became frustrated, some even lost faith in the corporation (Osumanu, 2008).

The corporation faced a number of challenges. These included high rates of water loss (about 40 percent), the inability of the supply system to meet rising demand, non/low payment of bills and illegal connections leading to high operational costs and low revenue returns as well as the vandalizing of water pipes and other facilities by people who were tapping water illegally (Osumanu, 2008; Osumanu, Abdul-Rahim, Songsore, Braimah & Mulenga, 2010).

Attempts have been made to address the constraints to the sustainable development and management of Ghana's urban water supply services. These interventions have mainly been targeted at streamlining the role, functions, and decision-making processes within the water sectors (Aryeetey, 2012). The first of these initiatives was the Urban Water Reform, which transformed the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation in 1999 into a limited liability company – Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL), as an initial step towards the introduction of private sector operation and management of urban water supply systems (GWCL, 2014³).

As part of the reform, the regulation of urban water has been shifted away from government to an independent body, the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC). As indicated earlier, the Commission is responsible for the protection of consumer interests, while at the same time maintaining a balance between tariff levels and investment, operation and maintenance costs of the water supply system to encourage private sector involvement (Amenga-Etego, 2003).

The reforms also saw into action a Water Sector Rehabilitation Project. Its purpose was to repair the country's major urban water supply systems; to restore broken down smaller urban systems, and to provide spare parts, plant and equipment to ensure sustainable operations. Subsequent to this project, a Water Sector Restructuring Programme (2003-2009) was implemented to increase urban water availability. Current attempts by the government to reform the water sector have focused on public-private partnerships (Aryeetey, 2012).

The GWCL entered into a management contract arrangement in 2006 with Aqua Vitens Rand Limited (AVRL), a private company formed by a merger between Vitens of Holland and Rand

³ Sourced from GWC 2014 diary

Water Company of South Africa, to operate urban water supply systems. The contract required that tariffs be structured so that cost recovery, and financial sustainability would be ensured. Even though reform of the urban water system is still ongoing, it has not had much of the desired results and it is anticipated to have a negative impact on the poor by restricting their access to clean water supplies as a result of anticipated higher tariffs (Osumanu, et al, 2010).

The urban water sector in Ghana has seen a lot of turbulence since the 1990s with the introduction of reforms. Management of the sector has always been described as inefficient; however, almost every attempt to restructure the sector has been met with stern opposition and agitation from civil society and the public (Fuest & Haffner 2005).

Researchers attribute opposition to reforms and new initiatives in the water sector to lack of understanding and involvement of stakeholders in the decision making process (Grieser, Khatib & Dahlan 2007; Chaman, Miller & Mitchel (2012; Fuest & Haffner, 2005).

A study found that:

Neither the Public Utilities Workers Union nor the Trade Union Congress of Ghana had been consulted in the course of the entire study dealing with the restructuring of the water sector, which was conducted between 1994 and 1995 by a commissioned consultant. No representatives from these organisations participated in the pivotal Ghana Water Sector Restructuring Workshop in 1995 where the PPP process was debated, endorsed and launched. The great majority of Ghana's citizens were unaware of the basic components of the programme and had not been consulted (International Fact-Finding Mission 2002, as cited in Fuest & Haffner 2005: p. 15).

In addition, Chaman, Miller & Mitchel (2012) posit that open, honest, and continued dialogue should not only be an initial component of new initiatives, but also an ongoing attitude.

These ideas gave this study the impetus to research into communication between GWCL and its publics.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with sources of data for the study, the case selection techniques and a description of the observations in the case study. It also presents the data collection methods adopted as well as how the data were analysed for the study, leading ultimately to analysis and interpretation. Finally, the chapter presents the ethical considerations that were observed in the course of the study.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a qualitative study, employing in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions as data collection methods.

Qualitative research, according to Wimmer & Dominick (2011), aims at gaining a deeper understanding of a specific organisation or event, rather than establishing statistical data to describe large samples of a population. It focuses on everyday life and its significance as perceived by the participants of the study. It is flexible because concepts, data collection tools and data collection methods can be adjusted as the research progresses.

Qualitative research aims at getting a better understanding of a phenomenon through first-hand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations by employing methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus groups, case studies, semiotics and content analysis (Babbie, 2010).

Qualitative research also investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The features of qualitative research have been explained to include the following: data are collected in their natural setting; the researcher is the key instrument of the research; it is descriptive, which means that it dwells on words and or pictures rather than numbers; qualitative researchers are concerned with processes rather than sampling with outcomes or products (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992). This study employed in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions in collecting data.

3.1.1 FOCUS-GROUPS

Focus-groups were used as one of the data collection methods in this study due to its advantages to a qualitative study of this nature as further detailed below. Barbie (2010) defined focus-group as a group of people interviewed together, prompting a discussion. According to him, focus-group, which is also called “group interviewing”, is a qualitative method of data collection based on structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews. It allows the researcher to question several individuals systematically and simultaneously. Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger (2005) also described focus-groups as formally organised, structured homogenous groups brought together to discuss a topic or series of topics to obtain individuals’ impressions and concerns about certain issues, services, or products during a specific period of time. The purpose of using focus-groups is to explore rather than describe or explain in any definitive sense (Barbie, 2010).

While Barbie (2010) suggested that the number of interviewees in a focus-group discussion should be between 5 - 15 other researchers put the number between 6 and 12.

3.1.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Essentially, in-depth interview is a conversation between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and follows up on specific issues raised by the respondent.

According to Barbie (2010), the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry including the topics to be covered, but not a set of questions with particular words in a particular order as what the practice is with surveys. The set of topics is discussed in-depth rather than ticking answers to standardized questions

In-depth interviews, much like focus-group discussions, are important to qualitative research because they allow for flexibility of questioning on the part of the interviewer; they allow for follow up questioning; they allow for clarification of issues; they help to elicit subtle nuances that will not be identified by surveys and they allow for deeper revelation into the subject under study (Barbie, 2010).

In this study, two separate interview guides were designed to guide the researcher in the discussions with the various respondents. Four focus-group discussions were conducted, comprising six people in a group. For the in-depth interviews, two respondents were interviewed; The Chief Manager for Public Relations of GWCL and the Director of Public Affairs and External Relations of the PURC. Responses were recorded, analysed narratively and descriptively.

Descriptive narrative aims predominantly at describing, observing and documenting aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs rather than explaining them (Polit & Hungler, 1999). This approach was adopted to give the study a natural flow without attempting to give undue comments on the views of the interviewees.

3.2 CASE SELECTION

In order for a case study to provide insight into a broader phenomenon, it must be representative of a broader set of cases. Hence, a typical case study demonstrates what is considered to be a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 1994; Gerring, 2007). The case selected for this study is the GWCL.

GWCL as indicated earlier in Chapter One of this study is a public utility company in Ghana. They provide one of the very essential utility services (potable water) to the citizenry of the country.

GWCL was selected because it is the only water supply company in the country in charge of urban water supply to households and industry. In addition, the company is usually lambasted in the media whenever they announce new initiatives. For instance, when GWCL announced its intention to introduce a pre-paid metering programme in January 2014, the initiative was opposed by stakeholders such as the Parliamentary Select Committee on Water, Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), the coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) and the members of the general public. GWCL received a lot of ‘bad press’⁴ on the issue.

3.3 STUDY SAMPLE

The sample of this study comprises one official each from GWCL and PURC and twenty-four (24) respondents in four separate focus-group discussions. Discussants in the focus-groups were made up of consumers of GWCL in Nima East and Tema Community Three, Site ‘B’, all

⁴ (graphiconline.com February 12, 2014; citifmonline.com January 21 2014 Daily Graphic, Friday, 17 January 2014)

in the Accra/Tema metropolis. Respondents were made up of people who had been GWCL's consumers for at least one year.

The PURC was selected for this study because they are one of the key publics of GWCL. They are the body that is primarily concerned with ensuring that adequate tariffs are charged for services the Ghana Water Company Limited provides, in addition to ensuring that consumers are served by the company with the proficient standards expected. They are the regulatory body for all utilities in Ghana.

Nima East and Tema Community Three were also selected to afford the researcher insight into views from the two different socio-economic residential areas; Nima considered an urban slum and Tema Community Three as a middle-class residential area. These groups were identified as the company's publics because they are all served by GWCL.

In all, there were four separate groups made up of six discussants in each group. Discussants were grouped by gender. This was to allow for free expression. Culturally, Ghanaian women are not expressive when they are in the company of men. In addition water supply issues affect women more because in the Ghanaian setting they are the managers of the home. Respondents for the in-depth interview from both GWCL and the PURC were communication/public relations officials.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were mainly primary data. Data were collected through responses gathered from the in-depth interviews with officers in the public relations departments of GWCL and PURC as well as responses that were gathered from the focus group discussions in Nima and Tema Community Three.

3.5 COMMUNITY ENTRY

An introductory letter was sent to the respondents of the interviews and leaders of the two communities, Nima and Tema, to allow the researcher access to respondents. At Nima, the researcher got access to the community through the leader of a local Water and Sanitation (WASH) Committee. The committee was formed by WaterAid⁵ in Ghana, to help with information dissemination on healthy practices with regards to water and sanitation.

In Tema, the researcher entered the community through the Assemblyman who helped to arrange for discussants.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

In order to carry out a detailed analysis to achieve the stated objectives of the study, responses gathered from respondents were transcribed to generate data for the analysis and discussions. The discussions and the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder.

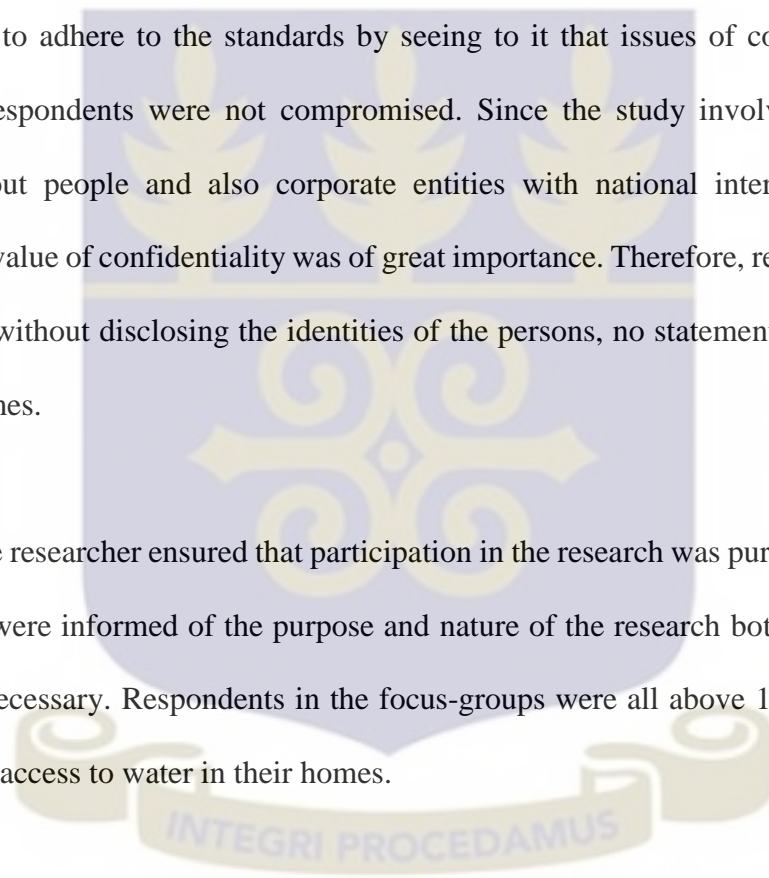
⁵ A non for profit organisation in which deals with sanitation issues in deprived communities in Ghana.

While the interview was conducted fully in English, the focus-group discussions were conducted in English, “broken English” and Twi. The researcher transcribed responses into English before analysing them.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Clearly noting the demands of the conventional ethical standards in academic research, the researcher tried to adhere to the standards by seeing to it that issues of confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were not compromised. Since the study involved collection of information about people and also corporate entities with national interest and political undertones, the value of confidentiality was of great importance. Therefore, responses gathered were presented without disclosing the identities of the persons, no statements were attributed to particular names.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that participation in the research was purely voluntary and all participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the research both verbally and in writing where necessary. Respondents in the focus-groups were all above 18 years and were people who had access to water in their homes.



CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a presentation, analysis and discussion of the findings of the study. The chapter discusses the communication process between GWCL and its publics in light of the tenets of the dialogic theory. It presents the views of the various respondents of the study: their current experiences and their expectations as far as communication between them and GWCL is concerned.

4.1 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GWCL AND ITS PUBLICS

The communication process of an organisation can simply be explained as the sharing of meaningful information between the organisation and its stakeholders, with the goal of establishing understanding (Berlo, 2007). According to Guffey (2007), the effectiveness of an organisation's internal and external communication processes is very important to its overall organisational success.

4.1.1 COMMUNICATION PROCESS: THE VIEW OF GWCL

Data gathered through an in-depth interview with the Chief Manager for public relations of GWCL suggested that, the company always communicated with their stakeholders on important issues that concern the stakeholders. The respondent indicated that GWCL's publics were diverse and as a result, the company carefully crafts the content of their messages to fairly meet the needs of the various groups they deal with.

The following quotation highlights the respondent's opinion:

We decide on the content of the message to be sent. We also decide on the most effective way the desired message could be carried out to our publics. All of this is done with our publics in mind. We try to understand the needs of every group within our publics, either internal or external and try to use the appropriate message content to get the desired impact. In communicating with our publics, we consider ‘what words to use and how to convey the message.

(GWCL Respondent, Friday, September 19, 2014)

The GWCL respondent further indicated that, the medium they used in communicating with their publics usually depended on the section of the publics they were addressing and the nature of the information they intended to pass on. The respondent indicated GWCL used communication channels such as letters, emails, corporate website, public fora and the mass media.

Throwing more light on this response, the Chief Manager mentioned that:

Because our publics are at different places at different times and require different information for different purposes, we use several channels to communicate with them. For instance, when we want to communicate with the PURC, our regulators, we usually use letters or telephone calls. On the other hand, if we are communicating with communities affected by our operations, we use the mass media as they have the ability to reach several of them at the same time.

(GWCL Respondent, Friday, September 19, 2014)

With regard to what the company usually communicated to their publics especially the ordinary consumer, the respondent indicated that the company usually communicated to

its publics about operational challenges, interruption of water supply and issues to do with tariff reviews.

Explaining how accessible the company is to its publics to enable them give feedback to the company, the GWCL official indicated that the company was very accessible to its publics. He said consumers are able to send their concerns to the company without any stress. He indicated that the company had a toll-free telephone line through which its publics were able to reach GWCL.

Responding to the kind of concerns consumers send to the company, the respondent indicated that feedback received by GWCL from consumers frequently bordered on burst pipes, over billing, no flow of water and several others. Recorded below is an extract from the interviewee:

We receive feedback from our publics all the time. We have our toll-free line and other contact number on the water bills we give to consumers. They are meant for customers to get back to us with their concerns. We receive feedback on so many issues, almost about every aspect of the company: burst pipes, meter reading challenges, complaints about increase in tariffs and many more.

(GWCL Respondent, Friday, September 19, 2014)

4.1.2 COMMUNICATION PROCESS: THE VIEW OF PURC

According to PURC's respondent, GWCL's communication with its publics is abysmal and ineffective. The PURC respondent explained that, GWCL either did not communicate at all or usually delayed in communicating with them although they (the PURC) are an important stakeholder of GWCL.

The respondent also indicated that most often, GWCL communicated to the consuming public when the PURC put pressure on them to do so. Commenting on getting complaints across to GWCL, the respondent gave the impression that it was difficult to do so.

Below are some of the extracts that clearly amplify the views of the PURC:

I can say that Ghana Water Company does not communicate with its publics at all. When they do, they are either under pressure from the PURC, or the Ministry in charge of Water, or perhaps the Parliamentary Select Committee on Water. Where they are even compelled to communicate with publics, the communication is issued late, when the reason for issuing such communication might have already taken place. For instance, if there is going to be a shutdown or interruption in supply, you would realise that before they come out to alert the public the shutdown may have already taken place without any provision for a contingency plan.

In general, it is very difficult to receive information from Ghana Water. Even we officials of the PURC sometimes send correspondence to GWCL and they are not responded to. Although the company makes available some contact telephone lines to the consumers, it is difficult for consumers to get response from them after lodging complaints.

(PURC respondent, Thursday, September 18, 2014)



4.1.3 COMMUNICATION PROCESS: VIEWS OF CONSUMERS

In order to get the views of the ordinary consumer of GWCL, the study sought the views of some consumers within Tema and Nima through focus-group discussions.

Four groups were constituted; two made up of men only and the other two made up of women. The men were separated from the women to ensure maximum expression and participation because culturally, most African women are not expressive in the presence

of men. The separation was also to find out whether different views would emerge from the men and women's groups, however, the study realised that concerns and views of the different groups, both men and women, were very similar. Findings were therefore not categorised according to gender.

Expressing their experiences with GWCL as far as communication is concerned, most of the discussants indicated that there was virtually no communication between them and the company. The views of the discussants quoted below reflect that of the majority of discussants:

For me, I don't hear anything from Ghana Water. The only time I hear from the company is when they bring me water bill for water I have not consumed. Sometimes you also hear from the radio that they are about to cut supply to your area. In fact, sometimes by the time you hear the announcement, the water would have stopped flowing already. They are the only times I hear anything about the company. Even with my water bill, by the time I come back from work, it would be slipped under my gate, so when I come back from work I find it there.

(Discussant in Focus Group, Tema, September 21, 2014)

I don't remember the last time I heard anything from anyone in the company. The taps don't flow, sometimes for weeks and several months but they don't tell you anything. The person who brings my water bill is the only officer from the company that I used to complain to but he doesn't seem to have any explanation for me so technically, I don't hear from the company and they also don't hear from me.

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Nima, 20th September, 2014)

There was a general consensus that discussants had very limited information about GWCL. The limited information they received about the company was usually about tariff increase and interruption of supply which they indicated usually got to them late. Apart from such information, discussants indicated that they had virtually no knowledge

about happenings in the company. For instance the GWCL respondent indicated that the company was undertaking a series of projects to augment the water supply in the country but the discussants (consumers) said they were not aware of such projects.

The study observed that the general view of the discussants was that any time they heard something about the company, it was only about things that would benefit the company and not the consumer and so information about increments of tariffs was the most recurrent information most discussants identified as the information they usually heard through the mass media.

In response to questions about whether discussants understood the billing and metering of GWCL, the dominant response was that consumers did not understand and so usually had issues with their bills.

Some of the discussants pointed out that they believed the charges on their bills did not show their actual consumption. Discussants indicated that they were tired of complaining because they received no explanation from the company.

The following quotation throws more light on discussants' frustration:

When the 'bill-man' comes around, I don't bother to ask him for any explanation on the bill anymore because he himself does not understand the way things work on the bill. He once told me, 'madam, if you don't understand anything on the bill, please do well to call the office, they will help you.' Having had such a response from an official of the company, do I have any cause to ask him further questions? I don't think so.

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Nima, 20th September, 2014)

The following further explains consumers' frustrations:

I have tried to understand the bill before, but then, I said to myself ‘why bother about understanding the bill?’ I just had to give up, because whether I understand it or not, it is not going to change how much they are charging me for what I have not consumed. So when I have money, I pay what I can.

In answering to whether they were aware that GWCL has a toll-free number that consumers could reach them on, most of the discussants responded in the negative. Those who said they were aware of the toll-free number said when they called the line to lodge complaints, GWCL did not respond promptly to them.

The extracts bellow explain more:

...I made a phone call to the district office in Tema the other day. The one who responded to me spoke nicely, but they did not respond immediately. I had to call again two days later before they sent somebody.

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Tema, 21st September, 2014)

There are several illegal pipe connections in this area, I called Ghana Water once to report it but nothing was done about it for several months, and then I decided to walk to the office personally to report it but I later realised the procedure involved in making such reports were tedious so I gave up, and up to now, people are still doing those illegal connections in Nima here, the company does not care.

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Nima, 20th September, 2014)

I came across a burst pipe and I called their office at ‘37’ to inform them about it, unfortunately for me, the receiver of the call kept me waiting on the call till my call credits got finished. No one called me back, I also couldn’t go to their office to report it, and the water kept gushing out through the burst pipes for several days.”

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Nima, 20th September, 2014)

On the whole, respondents viewed communication between them and GWCL as very poor.

The responses above suggest that the main channel of communication usually used by GWCL to reach consumers is the mass media; information flow to consumers is inadequate the information received by consumers is mostly related to tariff increments and plant shutdown.

With regard to sending feedback to the company and getting response, the views gathered indicate a great deal of difficulty for publics, which in turn discourages consumers from providing feedback to the company.

4.2 EVALUATING THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS BETWEEN GWCL AND ITS PUBLICS IN LIGHT OF THE PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGIC THEORY

This section of the study evaluated the responses obtained from the interviews and the focus-group discussions to detect whether the principles of the dialogic theory were present in the communication between GWCL and its publics, that is, the PURC and consumers in Nima and Tema.

4.2.1 PRESENCE OF MUTUALITY

Mutuality as explained earlier in chapter two, simply means the ability of the parties involved in the communication process to recognise that they are knitted together. This means that both parties must have a sense of information exchange and reciprocity with each other.

From the responses gathered, it appeared there is a disconnection between GWCL and its publics, especially the consumers. The official from GWCL claimed that the company communicated constantly with consumers. However, responses from discussants revealed otherwise. They hardly got information from the company or knew what the company was up to. The information they got usually centred on tariff increase and even that was usually thrown out in the media with no recourse to what consumers' views were about it. Consumers are not informed before such decisions are taken by the company.

The study observed that there is no mutual sharing of information between the parties. Consumers did not have the sense of duty to give feedback to the company. In instances where they send feedback, it is done unwillingly because consumers feel the company has no regard for their concerns.

The study observed that GWCL's communication with the PURC is also poor even though they are bound by law to constantly liaise with them.

The absence of communication mutuality can be detected in the responses below:

I can say that Ghana Water Company does not communicate with its publics at all. When they do, they are either under pressure from the PURC, or the sector Ministry or perhaps the Parliamentary select committee on water.

Where they are even compelled to communicate with publics, the communication is issued late, when the reason for issuing such communication might have already taken place. For instance, if there is going to be a shutdown or interruption in supply, you would realise that before they come out to alert the public the shutdown may have already taken place without any provision for a contingency plan.

(PURC Official, Thursday September 18, 2014)

For me, I don't hear anything from Ghana Water Company. The only time I hear from the company is when they bring me water bill for water I have not consumed. Sometimes you also hear from the radio that they are about to cut supply to your area. In fact, sometimes by the time you hear the announcement, the water would have stopped flowing already. They are the only times I hear anything about the company. Even with my water bill, by the time I come back from work, it would be slipped under my gate, so when I come back from work I find it there.

(Discussant in Focus Group, Tema, 21st September, 2014)

In the researcher's view, communication mutuality is non-existent in the communication process between GWCL and its publics perhaps because the company has no competitor and also perhaps because water has no substitute. GWCL is the only urban water supplier in Ghana. Consumers are forced to stick with the company regardless of whether the company regards them as communicative equals or starves them of information about the company's activities, even though the consumers may be affected by such activities.

In contrast, Grieser, Khatib & Dahlan (2007), reported that the best utilities in the world put the customer 'front and center' in their operations. The authors also posited that learning to listen to the publics a company serves has become a crucial feature of providing utility services, even where there is no apparent competition.

4.2.2 PRESENCE OF PROPINQUITY

The dimension of dialogic propinquity in any communication process as explained by Kent and Taylor (2002) is the ability of the organisation to consult its publics in matters that affects them, (the publics) and for that matter, the publics' willingness in such circumstances to articulate their demands to the organisation for favourable consideration (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Propinquity also suggests that parties in the communication process should communicate within a shared space (Anderson, 1994, as cited in Kent and Taylor 2002). In

simple terms, this means that parties must be present together in a shared space to decide on issues together before decisions are made (like a public forum discussion). It also suggests that the views of affected parties must be considered before decisions are taken. In addition, the principle of propinquity requires parties in a communicative relationship to have mutual respect and be accessible at all times to each other.

From this explanation, it can be observed from the responses gathered that dialogic propinquity as a tenet of the dialogic theory is missing in the communication process between GWCL and its publics. The quotations presented below support the assertion by the researcher that the principle of dialogic propinquity is missing in the communication process between GWCL and its publics:

.... for instance I heard on radio that the company wanted to introduce prepaid meters in their operations. Although I believed it was a good initiative, I thought the timing was wrong and consumers had not been educated on it. The PURC was not even aware that Ghana Water wanted to take such initiative. I was not surprised that consumers criticised the idea so heavily. At least when it comes to tariff adjustments, they consult with us but they did not seek our views on the prepaid metering issue.”

(PURC respondent, Thursday September 18, 2014)

The following quotation, however, seems to suggest that GWCL is very accessible to its publics and therefore it could be argued that there is some aspect of dialogic propinquity present.

...we have our toll-free line and other contact numbers on the water bills we give to consumers. They are meant for customers to get back to us with their concerns. We receive feedback on so many issues, almost about every aspect of the company: burst pipes, meter reading challenges, complains about increase in tariffs and many more.

(GWCL respondent Friday, September 19, 2014)

Despite the above claims, the study observed that consumers had doubts in reaching out to the company most of the time with their concerns because they held a perception that the company did not care about their plight. Their experiences with the company seemed to inform them that their complaints would usually not be responded to and so many consumers were becoming reluctant in continuing to complain to the company.

If the company makes itself accessible to its publics and still does not address their concerns, then that accessibility could be said to be useless. It also signals the company's lack of respect for its publics. The study therefore concludes that dialogic propinquity is lacking in the communication between GWCL and its publics.

4.2.3 PRESENCE OF EMPATHY

According to Kent and Taylor (2002) empathy, which is also referred to as sympathy, indicates an atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed between an organisation and its stakeholders. This feature of dialogue is characterized by supportiveness, a communal orientation and acknowledgment of the other party in a communicative exchange. Kent and Taylor (2002) asserted that empathetic communication is very important because organisations can improve their communication function by understanding and acknowledging the viewpoints of their publics.

From the responses gathered, this study categorically indicates that, the principle of empathy is also not present in the communication process between GWCL and its publics. Consumers do not trust that the company is concerned about them. As some of the responses stated earlier indicate, some consumers think the company over-bills them for the water they consume. It is

also indicated in some of the quotations that, some consumers do not bother any more to complain or report issues to GWCL because their experiences show that the company does not respond promptly or even does not respond at all to concerns they raise with them.

This study could therefore conclude that there is neither support nor trust among GWCL and its publics. It could also be argued that GWCL does not acknowledge the views of its publics as essential in its decision.

4.2.4 PRESENCE OF RISK

The principle of risk in the explanation provided by Kent and Taylor (2002) simply means that parties in the communication process are exposed to some relational risks. These risks according to Kent and Taylor (2002) include vulnerability, unanticipated outcomes and the recognition of the other party in the communication as different from oneself.

The authors explained that the dialogic relationship established between the parties involved exposes their “weaknesses” and therefore, makes them vulnerable to each other. Dialogic exchanges are spontaneous (decisions emerge from the dialogue) and can therefore lead to unexpected outcomes for both parties (there may be the need for compromise at some point in the dialogue and so parties may not necessarily get exactly what they bargain for). Communicative risk is important because it offers both parties the bargaining right to get a fair deal out of discussion. The ‘risk’ in the dialogue is the fact that due to how the discussions go, parties may need to do some compromises.

Inferring from the responses gathered through the interviews and discussions, it could be said that, GWCL takes relational risks with the PURC but not with the consumer. The respondent

from PURC indicated that GWCL consults with them on tariff adjustment issues. The following quotation is indicative of that:

At least when it comes to tariff adjustments, they consult with us but they did not seek our views on the prepaid metering issue.

(PURC Official, Thursday September 18, 2014)

As explained in chapter one, PURC regulates tariffs of all utility companies in Ghana. GWCL is bound by law to consult them for tariff reviews. Those consultations could result in PURC denying GWCL any intended increase in tariff. It could be argued that perhaps GWCL takes this relational risk with the PURC because it is bound by law to do so. This argument is sustained by an earlier response from the PURC official about the fact that GWCL did not inform them about their intentions to introduce prepaid meters.

On the part of the ordinary consumer, GWCL does not take any relational risk with them at all. Consumers do not have any chance to negotiate with GWCL about how certain decisions should be taken even though such decisions may directly affect the consumers.

Again this study could argue that GWCL does not offer the platform for consumers to have negotiations with them because it is the only urban water supplier in the country and consumers have no alternatives. It could also be argued that perhaps the large customer base of the company makes it difficult for the company to hold frequent dialogues with consumers.

4.2.5 PRESENCE OF COMMITMENT

Finally, the study sought to identify the element of commitment as a principle of dialogic communication in the communication process of GWCL. The principle of commitment as explained by Kent and Taylor (2002) has three features, namely: genuineness; commitment to the conversation and commitment to interpretation.

Genuineness, requires the parties in dialogue to be honest and forthright with each other. Commitment to the conversation requires parties to the dialogue to approach the dialogue with an understanding of issues and find the dialogue mutually beneficial. The last feature, commitment to interpretation necessitates that all parties to the dialogue clearly explain issues to each other in the process.

Responses gathered from the study reveal that, GWCL does not actively engage its publics in dialogue; that when the company issues rationing programmes they do not follow it. It is therefore conclusive that the principle of commitment as espoused by the dialogic theory is non-existent in the communication between GWCL and its publics. Commitment can be ensured if the parties engage each other and take decisions that bind them all or when the company offers to do something and actually does what it commits to do. In the absence of such, commitment cannot exist. Even in GWCL's communications with the PURC, as indicated earlier by the PURC respondent, GWCL is usually pressurised before they react to the agreement they have reached with the PURC.

4.3 PREFERRED MEDIA OR CHANNEL BY MOST DISCUSSANTS

Having identified the discrepancies in the communication between GWCL and its publics, the study sought to establish how the consumers would want to be communicated

to by GWCL to ensure adequate flow of information between both parties and to also enable consumers have meaningful access to the company to send their concerns across.

Respondents mentioned similar media and channels to be considered by GWCL. The quotations below capture respondents' preferred media:

In an area like this, it will be better for them to have local representatives so that the company can pass on information through them to us and we can also send our concerns through them.

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Nima, 20th September, 2014)

People in this area usually listen to the radio station here because they speak our language. So if they send information to the station, we will hear it.

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Nima, 20th September, 2014)

I believe that Ghana Water can send bulk messages to consumers just like what the telecommunication companies do. These days they send all sorts of messages that we do not need. Ghana Water should contact them to help. For instance if I get a message that they are going to shut the tap I will also tell people around me and I believe a lot of people will hear it.

(Discussant in the Focus Group, Tema, 21st September, 2014)

Other responses also indicated that the use of public announcement vans and community forums could help improve information flow between GWCL and its publics.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary of the findings and the conclusions of the study. It also makes recommendations based on findings from the study

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In sum, the major findings of the study include the following

- GWCL say they routinely communicate with their diverse publics, carefully crafting different messages and using a mix of media vehicles based on the nature of audience and information being conveyed;
- The content of the messages is usually about operational challenges, interruptions of supply and tariff reviews;
- GWCL has feedback systems by which their publics might express their concerns to the company “without any stress”; notably, a toll-free telephone line for reporting faults and making complaints;
- PURC and consumers do not share this verdict. From the point of view of PURC, communication from GWCL is often absent or at best delayed; but in any case reactive - often on the prompting of the PURC;
- Consumers receive no routine communication from GWCL; except in the sense that officials deliver water bills to them every month. Otherwise any information they might receive is invariably on tariff increases or plant shutdowns and the attendant interruptions to supply; which in any event, often comes after – rather than prior to – the fact.

- Although GWCL has a feedback system, complaints lodged by consumers often do not receive response from the company.

Evaluation based on dialogic principles, found that, four of the five principles of the dialogic theory were all absent in GWCL's communication with its publics. The four principles are mutuality, empathy, and commitment as well as communication propinquity. A trace of relational risk was however found specifically between the communication processes between GWCL and the PURC. GWCL consults the PURC on tariff proposals. Such consultations take the form of negotiations for the benefit of all involved. Nonetheless, since GWCL is bound by law to consult the PURC on tariff issues, it can be concluded that GWCL does not engage the PURC willingly.

For improvement in information flow, the study found that consumers preferred the use of community radio stations, text messages and public forums as against the company's regular use of the mass media.

5.2 CONCLUSION

As outlined in chapter two, research has established that it is important for companies to build dialogic relationships with their publics. Chaman, Miller and Mitchell (2012) asserted that water is an essential good, and decisions regarding water utility services can be controversial and may be received by publics with mixed feelings. Nonetheless, the authors posited that, the ability of management of a water utility company to communicate with its customers could help resolve some of the misunderstanding that may arise. Good communication, as understood by Chaman et al (2012) is critical for utility companies, given the varied expectations of their consumers.

In line with the above assertion, the study sought to evaluate communication between GWCL and its publics and was guided by the dialogic theory of communication. The study specifically sought to find answers to the following questions:

- i. What channels of communication are used by Ghana Water Company Limited in communicating with its publics?
- ii. Are the channels enough for disseminating information to and receiving feedback from consumers?
- iii. Are the dialogic communication principles present in the communication activities between GWCL with its publics?
- iv. What challenges do GWCL and its publics face in the communication process?

Responses gathered by the study indicated that GWCL usually used the mass media to disseminate information to its publics. The study also gathered that dissemination of the information through the mass media was inadequate as consumers hardly received information from the company.

With regard to feedback, the study gathered that GWCL had contact telephone numbers on their water bills for their customers to use in reaching them. The study however found that GWCL's response rate to consumers' concerns was very low.

In assessing the presence of dialogic principles, the study found that, of the two publics studied, that is the PURC and GWCL's consumers in Tema and Nima, four principles of the dialogic theory were completely absent in the communication that occurred between GWCL and the

consumers. Traces of one of the principles, that is relational risk, were however present in the communication between the PURC and GWCL.

The study found that communication between GWCL and its publics was fundamentally very poor. As alluded to earlier, many reforms and initiatives introduced by GWCL are usually faced with fierce opposition by stakeholders. Researchers attribute opposition to reforms and initiatives in the water sector to lack of understanding on the part of stakeholders (Grieser, Khatib & Dahlan 2007; Chaman, Miller & Mitchel 2012; Fuest & Haffner, 2005).

This study can conclusively say, therefore, that GWCL faces public agitations because its communication with its publics is poor. The study therefore outlined the recommendations below to help the management of the company to step up their communication with its publics.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to improve on communication between GWCL and its publics, especially ordinary consumers of water:

- **Community/stakeholder forum:** GWCL should frequently organise forums to enable them have meaningful face-to-face interactions with their stakeholders. Constant dialogue with them can help create mutual understanding and reduce antagonism between the company and its stakeholders.

- **Community-based committees and or boards:** Management of GWCL should consider the establishment of community-based boards. Such boards can serve as first points of call to community members and can also help to collate consumers' concerns for the company.

- **Alternative Channels:** In addition to mass media usage, the company should consider using alternative channels such as community radio stations, bulk text messaging, and announcement vans to reach out to its publics.
- **Training of bill distribution officials:** Since bill distributors are usually in touch with consumers, GWCL should give them training on customer care and also equip them with adequate knowledge for them to be able to handle customer concerns they come across as they distribute bills.
- **GWCL should do more education on their contact telephone lines.**
- **Active usage of the company's web site:** The study observed that even though GWCL has a web site, the useful information there was only about the company's history. Kent & Taylor (2002) recognised that organisations can use their web sites as dialogic tools to engage their publics. This study therefore recommends that the company should begin using its web site actively. If the web site is well resourced with relevant information about the company and services they render to the public coupled with the relevant contact lines and interactive features, it would also help in their communication.

In addition, Kent and Taylor (2002) asserted that, for any approach to dialogue to be effective, it requires commitment from the entire organisation; the organisation must accept that there is value in relationship building.

Pohl and Vandeventer (2001, cited in Kent and Taylor, 2002) also suggested that organisations should train persons in charge of the communication function to acquire skills necessary for building a strong interpersonal relationship between the organisation and its publics.

The study believes that adherence to these recommendations would help GWCL to inculcate dialogic principles into its communication with its publics.

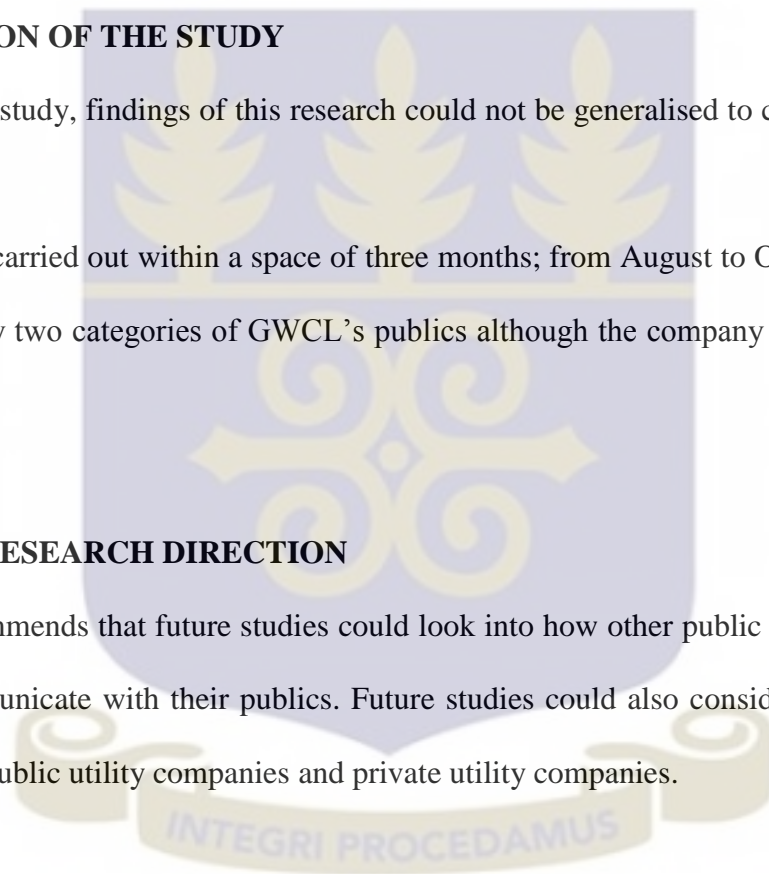
5.4 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

As a qualitative study, findings of this research could not be generalised to cover other utility companies.

This study was carried out within a space of three months; from August to October, 2014 and could only study two categories of GWCL's publics although the company has a wide range of publics.

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The study recommends that future studies could look into how other public utility companies in Ghana communicate with their publics. Future studies could also consider a comparative study between public utility companies and private utility companies.



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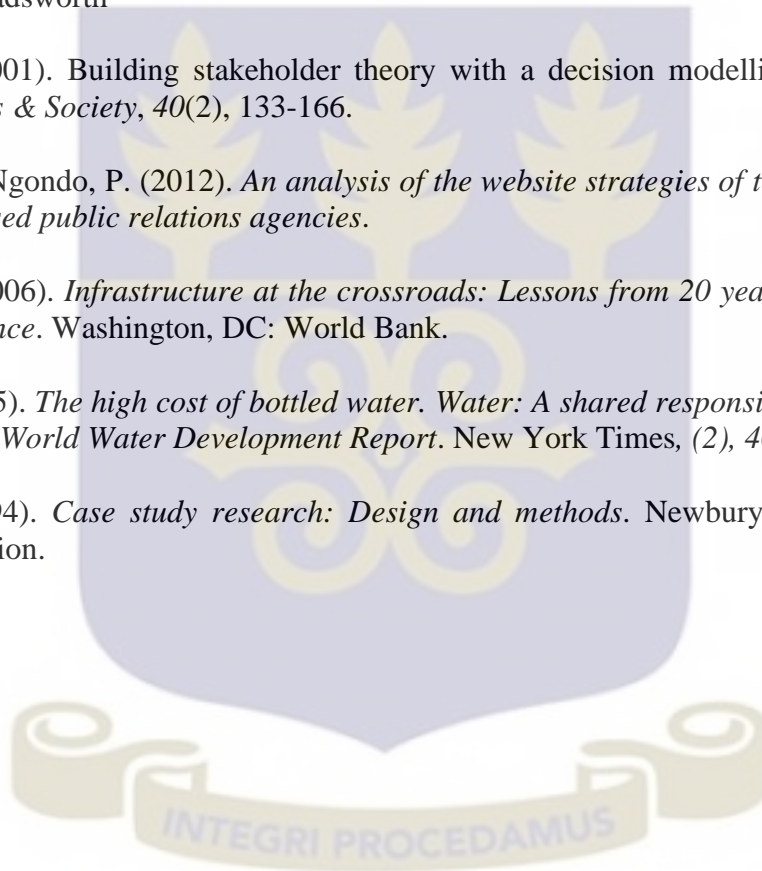
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Please, my name is SOLACE AKOMEAH. I am from the University of Ghana, School of Communication Studies. As part of the requirements for my course of study, I am conducting a research on the topic “**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN UTILITY COMPANIES AND THEIR PUBLICS: A STUDY OF GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED.**” The research is about the communication processes of the company and the extent to which its publics are informed about the company’s policies, operations and services.

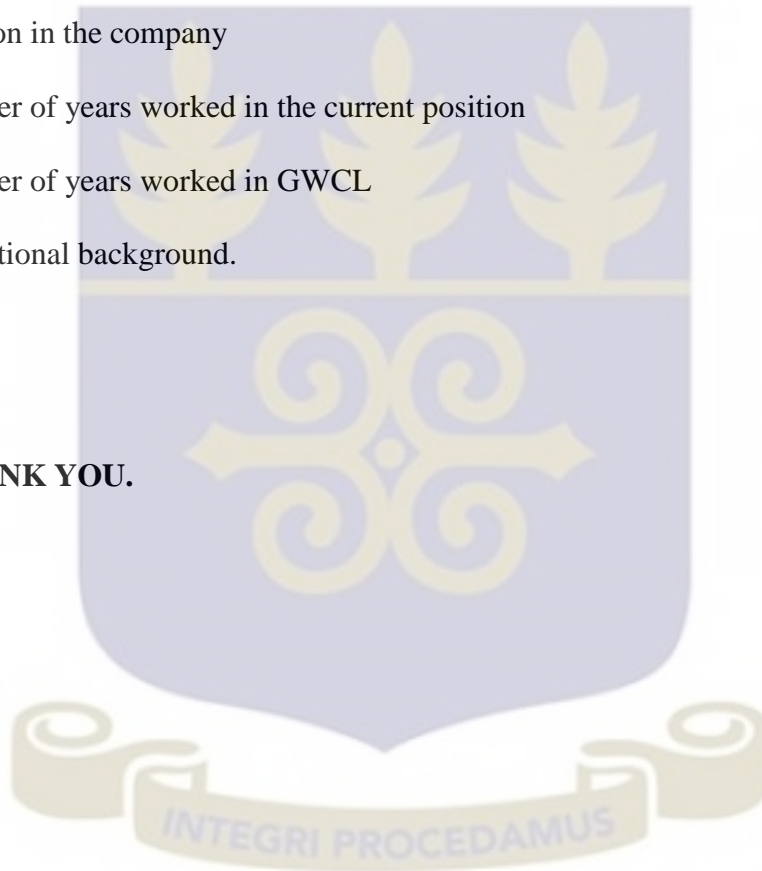
You have been identified as a respondent in the research and I would like to have a short discussion with you.

Thank you.

- Who are GWCL’s publics? (Confirm whether your study area forms part of these).
- How does GWCL communicate with them, in terms of media use?
 - a. Which media do you use for which publics?
 - b. Which media do you prefer using most of the time and why?
 - c. Do you use the Internet and social media?
- What issues do you mostly communicate to your publics about?
- How do the publics you serve communicate back to you as a company?
- What issues do the publics you serve mostly communicate to you about?

- Does GWCL have a policy/plan on communication?
- When you engage in communication, what are your objectives?
- At what point in its operation does GWCL communicate with its publics?
- How often does GWCL communicate with its publics?
- Does GWCL encounter any challenge in communicating with its publics?
- Please can you provide this study with responses relating to yourself?
 - Name.
 - Position in the company
 - Number of years worked in the current position
 - Number of years worked in GWCL
 - Educational background.
 - Age

THANK YOU.



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC UTILITIES REGULATORY COMMISSION

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Please, my name is SOLACE AKOMEAH. I am from the University of Ghana, School of Communication Studies. As part of the requirements for my course of study, I am conducting a research on the topic “**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN UTILITY COMPANIES AND THEIR PUBLICS: A STUDY OF GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED.**” The research is about the communication processes of the company and the extent to which its publics are informed about the company’s policies, operations and services.

You have been identified as a respondent in the research because the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission has been identified as a key public of the Ghana Water Company Limited. I would be glad to have a short discussion with you on the topic.

Thank you.

- In your view how does Ghana Water Company Limited communicate with its publics; for instance your organisation and the ordinary consumer?
- What do they usually communicate to their consumers about?
- What channels do they use in communicating with the PURC?

- How does the PURC communicate their concerns to GWCL?
- How does Ghana Water Company Limited respond to issues raised by your organisation?
- How often does GWCL give you information about their operations or new initiatives?
- Does PURC face any challenges in communicating your concerns to GWCL?
- Do you receive complaints from consumers of GWCL with regards to the company's communication with its publics?
- Any recommendations about how to improve communication between GWCL and its publics?
- Please can you provide this study with responses relating to yourself?
 - Name.
 - Position in the company
 - Number of years worked in the current position
 - Number of years worked with PURC
 - Educational background.
 - Age

THANK YOU.



APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PUBLICS (FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Please, my name is SOLACE AKOMEAH. I am from the University of Ghana, School of Communication Studies. As part of the requirements for my course of study, I am conducting a research on the topic “**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN UTILITY COMPANIES AND THEIR PUBLICS: A STUDY OF GHANA WATER COMPANY LIMITED.**” The research is about the communication processes of the company and the extent to which its publics are informed about the company’s policies, operations and services.

This study is purely for academic purposes. I assure you that the information you give me will be used for this purpose only. Your names will not be mentioned in any part of the report that will be generated.

Consent Note:

Having understood the purpose of this study and having been promised anonymity, I hereby give my consent to take part in this study.

Signature.....

Thumbprint.....

Themes for the Discussion

- Do you understand the operations of GWCL in terms of meter reading, water bills etc.?
- Do you receive information concerning policies, operations and activities of Ghana Water Company Limited?
- How do you receive it, through what channel?
- How often do you receive such information
- What kind of information do you usually receive?
- When you have issues about the policies, operations and or service of GWCL, how do you communicate them to the company?
- How does the company respond to the issues you raise?
- Any recommendations as to how you want the company to communicate with you?

THANK YOU.

