UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN GHANA AND THEIR PUBLICS: A CASE STUDY OF VOLTA RIVER AUTHORITY/ NORTHERN ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY IN TECHIMAN.

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, **EDMOND CHEWANI BAWAH**, declare that this thesis, with the exclusion of the citations and the references enclosed in circulated works which have been identified, recognized and officially acknowledged, the entire work is my own original work it has neither been submitted in part or whole for any Master's degree somewhere else.

SIGNATURE……………………………….

DATED ……………………………………

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby affirm and attest to the fact that the research and presentation of this thesis was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba

NAME OF SUPERVISOR……………………………

SIGNATURE…………………………………………

DATED…………………………………………………

DEDICATION

I dedicate this precious work to my entire family most especially, my beloved parents Mrs. Amina Neembil Bawah and Mr. Bawah Chongo Laar, of blessed memory.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how public organizations in Ghana communicate with their publics VRA / NEDCO in Techiman as a case study. The study examines the kind of communication that takes place between VRA / NEDCO, PURC and the consumers in the Twimia / Koase and Tuobodom / Adantasi communities in Techiman. The study sought to identify the communication channels used by VRA/NEDCO in communicating with their publics. The study also examined how Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations are applied in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics. The study further examined the perspectives of consumers on how communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics can be improved to enhance quality service delivery. This study was underpinned by the dialogic communication and the relevance theories of public relations and was anchored on single case study using in-depth interview and focus group discussions as the data collection methods. The study was to find out from the customer service officer of VRA / NEDCO and the consumers in the two understudy communities, how they managed communication with each other, the kind of communicator roles the customer service officer of VRA / NEDCO performed and which of the Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations are applied in his communication with the publics. The findings showed the customer service officer of VRA / NEDCO mostly applied one-way public information model in their communication process to the detriment of the more acceptable two-way symmetrical model. The study recommends that VRA/ NEDCO should constantly organize community engagement to enable the company have face- to - face interaction with its publics to facilitate a two-way communication with its publics. Management of VRA / NEDCO should consider establishing community information centres in the communities, to serve as the first point of call to community members and help to collate consumers concerns for the company and the vice versa.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Public organizations and their publics rest on each other as far as decent communication and quality service delivery is concerned. The communication that occurs among the two events can be compared to interpersonal relationships (Bolkan et al. 2012). In interpersonal relationships, not all communications among the events involved may always be smooth and enjoyable.

The Public organizations industry plays an increasingly important role in the economy of many countries most especially Ghana. In today's global competitive environment, delivering quality and efficient service is regarded as an important strategy for success, survival and sustenance of an organization (Parasuraman et al.2005; Reichheld & Sasser, 2022; Zeithaml et al., 2018).

Of late the public sector organizations have come under increasing attack to deliver quality and efficient services (Randall & Senior, 1994) and improve on their reactiveness (Robinson, 2024). Customer demands and expectations are fast escalating when it comes to governmental services and their efficient requirements. Service quality and efficient practices in public sector organizations are dwindling. This is further compounded by difficulties in measuring outcomes, proper monitoring from the general public and mass media, lack of freedom to act in an arbitrary fashion and a requirement for decisions to be based in an act of law (Teicher et al., 2002).

Public utility companies, by their nature, are organizations which provide services to the ordinary consumer, whether they are for private individuals or public. Public utility organizations in Ghana include Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), Volta River

Authority/ Northern Electricity Distribution Company (VRA / NEDCO), Ghana Gas Company, Ghana telecommunication Company and Ghana Water Company Limited, just to mention but a few. These companies function as lone agents, with limited competition. They are usually controlled by the government, or public utility regulatory commissions under enacted state laws (Hill & Hill, 2002). Since public utility companies provide service to the ordinary consumer, communication between these companies and their publics in terms of quality service delivery is very important and highly regarded (Hill & Hill, 2002). This is because these public utility companies have different categories of publics to sensitize to about their service delivery. For example, Volta River Authority (VRA)/ Northern Electricity Distribution Company (NEDCO) has publics such as their mandatory regulators, thus the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC); Energy Commission, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Finance, Civil Society Groups and the almighty ordinary consumers. Well-crafted communication can assist these utility organizations to prepare adequately and present "public – specific" information to satisfy each category of their publics as much as they deserve.

Pulevary and Mathieu (2000) suggest that organizational public grading is determined by the public organization's capability to attract new consumers and sustain the present consumers; consumers' total satisfaction with the service provision experience affects organization's ability to attract new customers and retain existing customers" Peter Krampf (2003) also opined that consumer satisfaction is a key to public utility organization's sustenance in today's marketplace and competitive world. It has been widely accepted by experts and scholars alike as *"the highest order goal of a company"* (Peterson & Wilson, 1992,). There is growing agreement that quality service is an antecedent of satisfaction with quality services delivery (Birgelen et al. 2002).

Preceding studies have recommended that service quality and message quality can forecast consumer gratification (Wang, 2008; Schaupp et al. 2009), and Public Relations can envisage service quality and information quality. Public Relations supports organizations in accepting, quantifying and handling service quality, all of which are purposes of consumer happiness.

Buckley (2003) proposes that accepting, gaging and handling service quality has become a contemporary issue for guaranteeing ordinary customer gratification. Communication is a very energetic component for producing and supporting relationships between public organizations and their publics in terms of quality service delivery. It is, consequently, not astonishing that some academics have accurately labelled it as *"the nervous system" or the "life-blood"* of any human social action (Sambe, 2009).

Communication is considered outstanding when it guarantees the success of organizational quality and efficient service delivery, by helping to match organizational objectives with the prospects of its tactical elements. Lack of communication make public organizations structures and the procedures which enable the two-way exchange of information between organizations and their publics in terms of quality service delivery to become weak, it will be difficult to imagine how organizations can be responsive to public needs and expectations without proper communication (Grunig, 1992).

Haider et al. (2011) indicate that a key feature of authority is how inhabitants, leaders, and public organizations relate to each other in order to make change happen. Significantly, two-way (dialogic) communication allows an organization's publics to monitor its quality service delivery and to enter into dialogue with the organization on issues that worries them and to influence policy outcomes. This also inspires the improvement of trust between public organizations and their publics, and forms the foundation of legality for organization and the general public to communicate with one another and be sensitized for the good of the general public over a long-term.

To ensure effective communication between public organizations and their publics, Moore (1995) suggests strategic communication which, according to him, is planned to improve specific strategies or organizational policies by making them understandable and by registering the sustenance and collaboration of those who must work collectively to yield the anticipated outcome. He is of the view that, strategic communication increases the stake for communication which goes beyond nurturing consciousness to using communication to support shareholders or clients in learning fresh information and developing fresh approaches to enable implementation of fresh conducts (Moore, 1995).

For Canel (2007), Public organization's communication is equally an intangible and precise explanation of whatever the organization stands for. He relies on that through the communication, an awareness is communicated approximately about the organization; and around who runs it, and the community gesture it carries out as well as quality service delivery. Consequently, he counsels public organizations to make available communications that cause their beneficiaries to have confidence in their organization, that vindicate their survival and that spread the good work they do. Canel (2007) agrees with Moore (1995) on the necessity for a communication strategy, and suggest that the communication strategy of a public organization must be able to concentrate in different ways.

Barret (2000), points out that communication provides reliability to public organizations, and simply because they are trustworthy, important, and essential to their numerous consumers will they be gifted of magnificently confronting the future. Having recognized the significance of communication for public organizations, Bennett and Jessani (2011) are of the opinion that the high-quality of one channel over another or the use of numerous networks will be governed by the kind of communication, its content, available resources, and how the spectators adore to obtain the information. Nevertheless, Dye (2009) discloses numerous important features organizations must accept and take into consideration when dealing with their stakeholders if they desire to take full advantage of the influence of their work in terms of quality service delivery. First, they ought to be available, rapid, truthful, cooperative, and dependable and dutiful; second, they must comprehend the culture of the publics in the numerous societies or geographical area; and finally, they must be conscious of the diverse kinds of media all over the place, scandalous, ideologist, knowledgeable pack supporters, journalists, or pundits and public media. Their management of news will evidently be different. Erbiti (2003) observes that lack of communication between public organizations and their publics in terms of quality service delivery, provides an impression of a gloomy, melancholy organization with little identity about it, whose value and quality service delivery is arguable and whose survival could also be debatable.

A number of empirical studies have been conducted on communication between public organizations and their publics, a tool to enhance quality service delivery. Some of these studies include, Hinson et al (2012), who studied the dialogic communication interrogation of the online brand disposition of Banks operating in Ghana and testified that, Banks in Ghana have been fairly effective in making communication procedures with high dialogic value, with more than half of the banks sampled were aggressively applying dialogic communication philosophies in appealing to their publics, particularly with their virtual events.

In the view of Hargrove and Glidewell (1990), a public organization has a different uniqueness that is cherished, acknowledged, and reliable by shareholders. Therefore, a public organization that builds its uniqueness around dubious or intolerable performance is improbable to escape public inquiry and political interference.

Ansong (2013), also studied how state institutions in Ghana communicate with their publics, using the commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) as a case study. Supported by the media richness and systems theories, the research discovered that CHRAJ had been communicating with its external publics using mostly the traditional media (Television, Radio and Print Media) with radio being the greatest leading and favourite medium of communication. The study also established that the Commission had feedback mechanisms (such as letters, visits, and telephone) in place to permit its external publics, especially complainants, to be well-informed of happenings within the Commission. The outcomes also gave a signal that the Commission had been practicing an open system, as the numerous communication channels allowed the external publics to access information without difficulty. The Commission was, consequently, graded extremely by its external publics.

Akomeah (2015), also conducted qualitative research to examine the communicative processes between Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL), a state – owned water utility company in Ghana and some two categories of their publics: the PURC as their regulator and the consumer in two detached communities in the Greater Accra / Tema metropolises. The investigation established that, even though Ghana Water Company

Limited (GWCL) said they consistently communicate with their various publics, prudently constructing different communications and using a blend of traditional media and social media vehicles based on the nature of audience and information being conveyed, the PURC and the consumers did not share the same view. To them, communication from GWCL was often absent or at best delayed, but in any case, responsive, often on the pressure of the PURC. Principles of the dialogic communication theory were fundamentally minimal in the communication between GWCL and the PURC as well as the consumers.

This study sought to investigate communication between a public organization (VRA / NEDCO) in the Techiman operational area of the Bono East Region of Ghana and its publics to enhance quality service delivery.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Customer satisfaction has become a subject of great concern to public organizations and researchers alike in recent years where issues of quality service and customer satisfaction are concerned (Blumberg et al., 2005). These days there are a high number of complaints filed by the public due to delays in taking actions and providing services to them by some Ghanaian public organizations. For instance, several complaints from the public regarding their dissatisfactions with some public utility service providers are daily news. Consequently, service quality is quite low and this is a matter of concern to the public since they are the taxpayers and therefore expect good services to be provided to them (Abdullah, 2006).

The Publics' confidence in governmental organization is a dynamic degree of the achievement or disappointment of governance since it epitomizes a serious element of political backing, government legitimacy, and democratic stability (Easton, 1985). The government-public relationship depends on public confidence in governmental organizations (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2007; Yang, 2007). Such confidence in government-public relationships permits public organizations to function and be sustained (Grunig, & Ehling, 1992) and government also supports public organizations to resolve conflicts with the general publics (Krimsky & Plough, 1992).

> *Odartey (2009) has opined that, several organizations in Ghana are underperforming and finally collapsing because they have relegated quality management to the background. He further argues that most organizations operate as if customers are the beggars, organizations do not pay attention to the quality of their employees. Thus, training and development of employees from top to bottom is relegated to the background. The study is therefore directed towards the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in*

Omondi, (2012) opined that public Organization's inability to communicate properly to the public in terms of their quality service delivery, operations and developments makes the general public unable to track their activities and developments which leads to low consciousness, mistrust, suspicion and negative perception amongst the populace. This makes it difficult to publicize an organizations' projects and activities and because the public have no role in their activities, they have been relegated to the background.

Communication strategies become important in order to help build trust and engagement among stakeholders which is critical for the success of key projects in an organization. Effective communication ensures that stakeholders understand the project goals, their role in the project and the progress being made. This helps to ensure that the project is implemented smoothly and achieves it intended outcomes.

(Dennis agyei, 2020)

Chaman et al. (2012) proclaimed that public utility organizations are multifaceted and changeable, and occasionally involve high political intervention. This, the authors argued, is because public utility is an essential commodity, and that consequences about water or electricity utility services delivery to the customer can occasionally be challenging and may be received by publics with some mixed feelings. To them, the ability of public organization to communicate with customers can help in resolving some of the mixed feelings. Good communication as far as quality service delivery is concerned is necessary in the view of Chaman et al, (2012) it is more critical, given the diverse anticipations of consumers within the general public. Hitherto, communication was seen as a one (monologic) process of information dissemination (Servaes & Malikhao, 2011).

Today however, communication has moved beyond that view. The simplified view is that, two-way communication between service providers and their customers is very critical and important for development and it also enhances quality service delivery (Chaman et al. 2012). Kim (2012) did an extensive literature review on the communicative relationships that exist between the publics and public organizations and how such connections could result in pressures or opportunities for the public organizations. The study concluded that the establishment and sustenance of a relationship between an organization and its publics require solving problems related to their objectives or interests. Such "problem solving," according to Kim (2012), requires both bodies to communicate. Simply put, it is the relational history between organizations and their publics that determines the tonality and magnitude of communicative actions by the publics. Kim (2012), elaborated further that through the use of dialogic communication, public organizations and their publics could better be able to manage opportunities and intimidations related to their objectives and interests by a more effectual and efficient use of knowledge and wealth.

The lack of a communication plan gives the indication of a gloomy, low-spirited organisation with little identity about it, whose value is questionable and whose survival could be questionable. Such a situation could give rise to leaked information, half-truths, and misunderstandings due to the lack of a mediator who comes between the work of the organization and the journalist charged with passing the information on to society (Erbiti, 2003).

In the Ghanaian setting, some studies have been conducted with regards to Communication between public utility organizations and their publics a tool to enhancing quality service delivery. Duncan (2013), undertook a study to ascertain the nature of the communication processes between two banks in Ghana and their informal sector customers. A straightforward supposition the author thought from the beginning of the study was that 'an active two-way communication was necessary between banks and their informal sector customers. The author's conclusions on dialogic communication practices and response by the two banks indicated that the banks used their customer service managers to carry out face-to-face communication with their informal sector customers. The study also noted that, the customer service managers used language that their informal sector customers were conversant with other than the use of English language as the formal language in Ghana. The study established that information flow and response as elements of two-way communication were present in the strategies adopted by the banks.

Ansong (2013) also conducted a quantitative research of how state institutions in Ghana communicate with their publics, using the commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) as a case study. The research discovered that CHRAJ had been communicating with its external publics using mostly the traditional media (Television, Radio and Print Media) with radio being the greatest leading and favourite channel of communication. The study recommended that future research should consider the internet as an effective medium of communication in order to reach out to the youth especially and to improve upon communication with its external public.

Akomeah (2015), also conducted a qualitative research to investigate the communicative processes between Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL), a public utility organization in Ghana and some two categories of its publics: the Public Utility Regulatory Commission (PURC) the economic regulator and the consumer in two separate communities in the Greater Accra / Tema Metropolises. The study recommended that future research could look into how other public utility organizations in Ghana communicate with their publics.

VRA / NEDCO on the other hand is a State - owned Public Utility Organization that is supposed to have relentless dialogic communications with the public. Fortunately, the Company is of the view that it has trained its staff on customer service whose duty is to visit various communities and educate the general public as regards to the services they render to the public, by providing explanation about the functions and activities of the organization to the public and also engaging and sensitizing the general public about the need to adopt and adjust to the use of smart pre-paid meters at the expense of postpaid meters. Also, the organization praises itself that it makes use of the media to inform members of the public about its activities and policies. The organization again boasts that its offices are often open to members of the public to make inquire about anything of interest to them in relation to the company's service delivery. Source: (Report on stakeholder consultations on tariff proposal for the 2022 – 2027 multi-year tariff review period. May, 2022)

From the reviewed literature above, studies on public organizations have focused on other public utility organizations in Ghana and it appears minimal studies have been conducted on the electricity sector most especially Volta river authority/ Northern electricity distribution company (VRA / NEDCO) with reference to it communication with its consumers. This study therefore seeks to investigate the communication between public organizations in Ghana and their publics: A case study of VRA / NEDCO in Techiman

1.3 Research Objectives

The study sought to:

(1) Identify the communication channels used by VRA / NEDCO in communicating with their stakeholders / publics.

(2) Examine the use of Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics.

(3) Examine the perspectives of consumers on how communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics can be improved to enhance quality service delivery.

1.4 Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

(1) What channels of communication are used by VRA / NEDCO Company limited in communicating with its publics?

(2) How are the Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations applied in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its public?

(3) What are the perspectives of consumers on how communication between VRA / NEDCO Company and its publics can be improved to enhance quality service delivery?

1.5 Delimitations.

This study focused on communication between public organizations and their publics within the Ghanaian context. Specifically, the study centred on communication between VRA / NEDCO as a public utility company and its publics. The study therefore examines the channels of communication used by VRA/ NEDCO in communicating with its various publics. The researcher also investigated how VRA / NEDCO make use of the models of relevance theory of public relations when communicating with its publics. The researcher again wanted to gather the perspectives of consumers on how communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics can be improved to enhance quality service delivery.

For the purpose of the study, a Customer Service Officer of VRA / NEDCO of Techiman operational area was interviewed by the researcher and the necessary information was elicited. The main justification for the choice of the customer service officer of Techiman VRA / NEDCO is because he is the spokesperson of the organization and therefore possess a wealth of knowledge on customer relations practice within the organization. Moreover, Techiman operational area of VRA /

NEDCO was selected because it was adjudged the best operational area in terms of improved revenue collection of 97% among the five operational areas of VRA / NEDCO. (Report on stakeholder consultations on tariff proposal for the 2022 – 2027 multi-year tariff review period. May, 2022)

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study will first serve as a contribution to existing studies that have discussed issues on communication between public organizations and their publics a tool to enhancing quality service delivery.

The study will be beneficial in the sense that it will reveal how VRA / NEDCO as a public organization in Ghana communicates with its publics to enhancing quality service delivery.

The study will talk about the benefits of this dialogic communication theory and the Relevance theory explain the communication relationship that exist between VRA / NEDCO and its publics a tool to enhancing quality service delivery.

Also, the research provides policy guidance for VRA / NEDCO and other public organisations in terms of how they can tailor their messages to reflect the needs of the Ghanaian public.

The Study is also significant as it provides a basis for further research as regards communication between public organisations and their publics

1.7 Rationale of the Study

As one of the few studies carried out in Ghana that concentrate on how Public organizations communicate with their publics, the study would help in pointing out some of the strengths, weaknesses or gaps in how public organizations (VRA / NEDCO) communicate with their external publics. Also, the study would provide a policy guide lines for VRA / NEDCO and other sister public organisations in terms of how they can modify their messages and adopt to the Grunig and Hunt's two-way symmetric models of public relations and dialogic communication to reflect the needs of their consumers and the Ghanaian public in general because it is based on research and mutual communication. The rationale of the study is to again provide a basis for further research as regards communication between other public organisations and their publics in Ghana and to ascertain Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations minimally use in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and their consumers which leads to the public outcry about their poor-quality service delivery.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is structured into five chapters Chapter one deals with the background to the study, the chapter also highlights the problem statement, objectives of the study, the research questions of the study, rationale of the study, organization of the study and the summary. Chapter two, review significant literature on communication between utility companies and their publics, the overview of Ghana's Energy sector, a brief history of VRA / NEDCO Company, a brief history of PURC, a brief history of Energy Commission and the Empirical studies. The chapter also reviews the dialogic communication theory and the relevance theory of public relations and outlines Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations. Chapter three concentrates on the methodology adopted for the study. The section discusses the research approach, research design, case selection, sample size data gathering and data analysis procedure. It also outlines some ethical considerations.

Chapter four is about the presentation and discussion 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 proceed to make recommendation for future studies into the study area.

1.9 Summary

This chapter provided the background to the study, it also looked at the problem statement of the research, objectives of the research, and research questions of the study, significance of the study, rationale of the research and organization of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at communication between public organisations and their publics, functions of public organisations, the stakeholders of public organisations, stakeholders / publics explained, Ghana's energy sector overview, brief history of VRA / NEDCO, brief history of public utility regulatory commission (PURC), brief history of Energy Commission, empirical review and theoretical framework.

2.1 Communication between Public Organisations and their Publics

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) added that, ethical public relations are fundamentally anchored on sound communication systems. Having suggested principles that characterize a dialogic communication, Kent and Taylor (2002) further suggested how organizations can incorporate dialogue into their communication with the publics. The authors mentioned that for any approach to dialogue to be effective, it requires an organizational 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 organization's publics. They include: the interpersonal, the mediated and the organizational processes.

In building interpersonal relationships with their publics, organizations must be made aware that, leadership is usually defined by an organization's ability to integrate at several levels of business and society and to create more integrated management processes through the use of diversity of their communication function with society. For that matter, organizations should train their public relations officers to acquire skills such as listening, empathy, ability to contextualize matters within the appropriate perspectives, think within both the long- and short-term scopes of the organization, etc. which are all necessary for building a strong interpersonal relationship between the organization and its publics.

According to Grunig et al., (2002), an organization whose public relations function adheres to the empowerment principle can easily balance its needs with that of the publics. This function helps organizations to effectively manage issues and minimize crises.

In the view of Kent and Taylor (2002), organizations can also strengthen their commitment to fostering more interactions in dialoguing with their publics by using mass mediated channels such as the internet, the traditional media (Television, Radio and print media) and other related social media to carry out the function of the organization communicating with their publics. Finally, in incorporating dialogue into communication between organizations and their publics, Gunson and Collins (1997) cited in Kent and Taylor (2002), noted that, organizations should adopt a procedural approach to dialogue. Pearson (1989) suggested such procedures as follows: No topic should be excluded a priori from discussions.

2.2 Functions of Public Organisations

Public organisations are usually controlled by the government, which provide public services for the society. They make proposals for the formulation of policies by government. They ensure policy implementation and the human resource development for the general public.

Public organisations deliver public services with more or less efficiency, equity, honesty and accountability. They provide goods and render quality and efficient services for the benefit of the entire country.

2.2.1 Stakeholders of public organisations

- Owners
- Consumers
- Staff
- Indigenous communities
- Suppliers and distributors.
- Non-governmental organisations
- The government of the republic of Ghana.
- Civil society organizations

2.3 Ghana's Energy Sector

Electricity is one of the most important factors of the economic affluence of every nation. It plays a significant role in undertaking daily events from cooking, lighting, heating to powering machines in the manufacturing and industrial sector. Electricity is also indispensable for excellent healthcare delivery, education, transport, effective communication, mineral exploration and many more; serving as the building block on which every sector of a country's economy booms. Ghana's electricity sector dates back to the colonial days of the Gold Coast, where electricity supply was mostly from isolated diesel generator plants dispersed across the country.

Ghana has chronicled a number of power instabilities that have endangered livings and businesses at large. Even though successive administrations have made efforts to overcome this shortfall (Anane, 2015), greatest results have been slightly improve, and basically unsustainable; leading to intermittent nation-wide energy crisis.

Interventions have mostly remained by way of increasing quantity to meet demand. Prominent amongst such interventions are supply from power barges, the West African Gas Pipeline and Jubilee Fields. In relations to access, National Electrification Scheme (NES) Program (1988) was started to make sure complete access to electricity. The self-help electrification programme was to support the economic recovery Programme started by the NDC government under the late former president Flt Lt Jerry John Rawlings and the main purpose was to increase the socioeconomic development of the country. The extension of electricity to rural areas was a way to enhance speedy socioeconomic growth, of the rural areas to decrease rural–urban migration. Presently, all regional and district capitals are connected to the national grid (Energy Outlook, 2016).Consequently, the Self-Help Electrification Programme (SHEP) was introduced with the key objective of supporting rural societies to get access to electricity. Since its commencement, the inhabitants of Ghana with access to electricity has augmented from 33% to 76% (Energy Outlook, 2016).Industrial constructions such as mines and factories, metropolises and other organizations including hospitals and schools owned most of these structures. The Gold Coast Railway Administration established the first public electricity generation system in 1914, to supply electricity for the operations of the railway sector in Sekondi (ISSER, 2005). This was extended to Takoradi in 1928. By the year 1955, electricity had been extended to some major cities in Ghana including Kumasi, Tema, Accra, Nsawam, Tamale and Bolgatanga under the patronage of the Public Works Department (PWD). The completion of the Akosombo Dam Project over the Volta River in 1972 provided a total installed capacity of 912 MW for electricity generation.

Although the primary aim of the project was to provide electricity for the aluminium industry, it also made it possible for most of the major electricity consumed to be switched from diesel generators to hydroelectricity. The major consumers of electricity during this period were the Volta Aluminium Company (VALCO) and the National Electricity Distribution Company. The completion of the Akosombo Dam also saw the Volta River Authority (VRA), managers of the Akosombo Hydroelectric Power Station, commence supply of electricity to neighbouring Togo and Benin. In 1982, the Kpong Hydroelectric Power Station was commissioned, increasing the installed generation capacity by 160 MW. Ghana, despite the intensification in generation volume, experienced its first electricity crisis in 1984. This was as a result of a severe drought that happened between 1982 and 1984, during which the total influx into the Akosombo Dam was less than 15 percent of the long term expected total. The catastrophe led to the introduction of Thermal Power Plants into Ghana's generation mix. The first of these thermal plants was a 550 MW facility (Tapco and Tico) at the Takoradi Thermal Plant managed by Volta River Authority (VRA). The total installed capacity of thermal power plants in Ghana has augmented to 2,053 MW as at the end of 2015 (Energy Commission of Ghana, 2016). Electricity crisis has become a domestic phenomenon in Ghana leading to the adoption of the local word "Dumsor" in the Akan parlance to define the circumstances. In December 2013, the 400 MW Bui Hydroelectric Power Station was commissioned to offer electricity to support the peak load of the country, which has been on an ever-increasing course.

Ghana's energy sector has, over the past years, been overwhelmed with energy supply problems instigating substantial effect on the economic situation of the nation Ghana. The World Bank graded electricity as the second most important restriction to business activities in the country and projected that Ghana lost about 1.8 percent of GDP during the 2007 power crisis (Mathrani, et al., 2013). Also, the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana projected in a 2014 study that Ghana, on the average, lost production worth about US $2.1 million per day (or, US $55.8 million per month) through the power crisis alone (ISSER, 2015). This means that the country lost about US$680 million (2 percent of GDP) in 2014 due to the energy crisis. (Energy Commission of Ghana, 2016)

2.4 Share of Population with Access to Electricity in Ghana 2008-2020

As of the year 2020, nearly 90 percent of the population in Ghana had access to electricity, which represented an increase compared to the 83.9 percent registered in 2019. Between 2008 and 2019, the share of population with access to electricity rose considerably from a low of 60.5 percent to the said value in 2020. Access to electricity is higher in urban areas compared to rural communities.

(Doris Dokua Sasu, 2022)

2.5 Production of Electricity

Ghana's electricity is produced from sources such as fossil fuels, solar power, water, gas, and coal. For instance, in 2020, around 57,000-kilowatt hours net of electricity was sourced from solar energy. In total, the country produced approximately 12.5 billion kilowatt hours of electrical energy in 2020. Compared to a decade before, the generation of electricity increased.

(Doris Dokua Sasu, 2022)

2.6 Brief History of Northern Electricity Distribution Company (NEDCO)

NEDCO was created out of the Northern Electricity Department (NED) of the Volta River Authority (VRA). NED itself came into existing in April, 1987 when the northern electricity distribution operations of the then Electricity Corporation of Ghana were conceded to the VRA.

The Authority, at the time, was in the process of outspreading the national grid outside Kumasi to the northern parts of Ghana. The Volta River Development (Amendment) Law, 1987 (PNDCL 171) was passed to enable VRA to enter the distribution market at the level of the customer. At the time of the commencement of NED, some major towns were assisted by diesel generators. Some of these towns included Sunyani, Techiman, Berekum, Wenchi, Dormaa Ahenkro, Tamale, Yendi, Salaga, Bolgatanga, Navrongo, Bawku and Wa. New diesel plant was also connected in Wa through the backing of the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) in 1989. The electricity distribution network in Wa was also totally transformed through DANIDA backing in 1992.

NED initially started as three operational areas namely Upper Area, Northern Area, and Brong-Ahafo Area. In 1995, nevertheless, the Upper Area was divided into Upper East and Upper West Area. In 2003, the Brong-Ahafo Area was also additionally divided into two areas, Sunyani and Techiman.

In June 1994, the Government of Ghana initiated the Power Sector Reform (PSR) programmed aimed at bringing efficacy and managerial efficiency in the Energy Sector to advance general service delivery to all consumers. In pursuance of the Power Sector Reforms, VRA Management registered NEDCO as a wholly-owned VRA minor with a Board of Directors since 1997 to manage the operations of NED. NEDCO's current operations extend into the northern parts of Volta, now Oti region, the northern part of Ashanti, and part of Western north regions. Although NEDCO's operations cover about 64% of the geographical area of Ghana, the customer density of the operating area is low with access to electricity in the NEDCO operating area put at about 36% as at the end of 2011.

The Ghana Government, in line with its vision of making electricity available to all by the year 2020, has undertaken power extensions over the years to new towns and communities that were hitherto not served by NEDCO. VRA / NEDCO also manages VRA's electricity supply to some border towns in Burkina Faso, Togo and La Cote D'Ivoire. It was initially established as an integral part of the larger Northern Electrification and System Reinforcement project (NESRP), which connected northern part of Ghana to the national electricity grid. Customer population has therefore grown at an average rate of about 6.3 % per annum from a little over 380,000 in 2011 to 997,203 as of 2020. VRA Management took the decision to fully operationalize NEDCO in 2012. On May 8, 2012, NEDCO was, therefore, officially inaugurated and a new Board of Directors was sworn into office on the same day.(Mid –year Fiscal 5 The full operationalization of NEDCO as a VRA subsidiary seeks to achieve the following objectives:

(1) Make NEDCO economically viable and sustainable by attracting additional resources from both external and internal sources to supplement VRA"s ongoing support of the current NEDCO operations. In this arrangement, NEDCO will also be able to deal directly with multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), IMF, etc for financial support to prosecute its business agenda. It is important to note that the present support from VRA is inadequate because of equally competing demands from other departments.

(2)Authorise NEDCO to manage its own affairs more effectively by providing it with the right organizational structure and corresponding authority. Thus, NEDCO management will have the authority to take timely and appropriate decisions on customer issues and challenges to improve service delivery without recourse or reference to VRA. Empower NEDCO to streamline key procedures and decision-making processes in respect of procurement of its strategic equipment and spares, construction of needed office buildings and staff training and development, all of which are critical to efficient service delivery to our cherished customers.

(3) Empower NEDCO to deal directly with Government and regulators such as the PURC, EC on key issues pertaining to its viability and sustainability. For instance, NEDCO will be illegible to file a tariff proposal to PURC separate from what is filed by VRA.

Source: (Mid –year Fiscal policy Review of the 2019 Budget statement and economic policy).

2.7 Brief History of Energy Commission

The Energy Commission was established by an Act of the Ghanaian Parliament, the Energy Commission Act, 1997 (Act 541) and is authorized to regulator and accomplish the growth and operation of energy resources of Ghana to provide inexpensive and dependable energy supplies for socio-economic growth of the country. The commission is also tasked to by law to propagate the legal, regulatory and supervisory framework for all energy service providers in Ghana. They also award permissions for the transmission, wholesale, supply, distribution and sale of electricity and natural gas and related matters. The Act setting up the Commission (Act 541) sets out the following directive to guide its mission: to function as the Government's energy policy adviser by making national energy policy endorsements to the Minister of Energy, to communicate national policies for the growth and consumption of home-grown energy resources, to be precise, renewable energy: solar, wind and biomass, to formulate, evaluate and bring up to date occasionally revealing nationwide policies to warrant that all rational demands for energy are met and to enhance energy proficiency and prolific uses of electricity, natural gas and petroleum products.

Source: Organization's Website,(Monday, May, 2,2022)

2.8 The Brief History of Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC)

The Public Utility Regulatory Commission was established as a multi – sectorial regulator by the Government of Ghana in October 1997 under an act of Parliament known as: the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission Act, 1997 (Act 538). The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission of Ghana is an autonomous body set up to control and oversee the provision of the highest quality of electricity and water services to consumers.

Under the Energy Commission Act 1997 (Act 541), PURC is also indebted to accept charges for the supply, transportation and distribution of electricity and natural gas as well as the bulk storage and transportation of petroleum products.

The purposes of the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission comprise: providing guidelines for rates to be charged for the provision of utility services, Scrutinising and approving water and electricity rates, protecting the interest of consumers and providers of utility services, and by monitoring and enforcing standards of performance for the provision of utility services, Promoting fair competition among public utilities by receiving and investigating complaints as well as settling disputes between consumers and public utility companies and advising any person or authority in respect of any public utility issues.

The Ministry of Energy is accountable for formulating, monitoring and evaluating policies, programs and projects for the power sector in Ghana with financial backing from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MOFEP). The Ministry is also directly accountable for the execution of the National Electrification Scheme in several parts of our motherland Ghana. The Energy Commission (EC) and the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) are accountable for regulating the activities of the power sector. The PURC, on the other hand, is an autonomous supervisory agency accountable for economic regulation of the power sector, precisely approving rates for electricity sold by distribution utilities to the public. PURC is also accountable for supervising and monitoring the quality of electricity services rendered to the ordinary consumers in Ghana

Source: Organization's Website, (Thursday, May 5, 2022)

2.9 Publics/Stakeholders 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 and Hunt (1984) described stakeholders as people who have a stake or interest in an organization and as a result, affect and are affected by the organization. "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 and Hunt (1984) identified four categories of publics: non-public -- no problem is recognized or exists; latent public -- problem is there, but public does not recognize it; aware public -- group recognizes that a problem exists; active public -- group is aware of the problem and organizes 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, recognizes the problem, and organize themselves to do something about it.

To Dewey (1972) publics organize from the ranks of stakeholders when they recognize 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 VRA / NEDCO. In this study these words mean the same. The PURC which is an economic regulator of VRA/ NEDCO operations0 and consumers of VRA/ NEDCO in Twimia / Koase, a suburb of Techiman and then Tuobodom / Adantasi Communities are the publics to be studied by the researcher. To this point, this study sought to qualitatively investigate the communicative processes between VRA/ NEDC, a state-owned electricity utility company operating in the northern part of Ghana, and some two categories of their publics in terms of its quality service delivery: the PURC as their economic regulator, and the ordinary consumer on the other side.

2.10 Empirical Review

According to Hargrove and Glidewell (1990), a public institution has a distinct identity that is appreciated, accepted, and trusted by the public. Therefore, a public organization that builds its identity around questionable or unacceptable practices is unlikely to escape public scrutiny and political intervention. For institutionalization to proceed, a public organization needs to select and routinize not only solutions that work but solutions that fit with prevalent values and norms in its environment (Weeks & Galunic, 2003). This means that state organizations must embed sanctioned norms firmly into their operations, to create the coherence required to perform, as well as being responsive to the environment within which they operate. This requires that the organization absorbs new demands and adapts its structure and policy ideas when necessary (Boin & Christensen, 2008). It is, therefore, very important that organizations engage in communication with their publics so as to position themselves for changes which may occur within their environments.

Lammers (2011), in a study on 'How Institutions Communicate: Institutional Messages, Institutional Logics, and Organizational Communication,' reviews scholarly and primitive uses of institutional messages and related ideas in a variety of social science disciplines. He develops the idea of the institutional messages as carriers of institutional logics. He considers how people make sense of institutional messages as institutional logics are developed, shared, and changed. According to him, institutional messages are collations of thoughts that may have the force of law, intentionally or unintentionally spread via mediated and face-to-face interactions in organised settings. As such, institutional messages may be seen as elements of discourse, "the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing" (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004, p. 3). As Lammers further explains, reach, and incumbency; they are exchanged among individuals, organizations, and other institutions, and they Institutional messages can be specified as having varying endurance influence the behaviour of each. The institutional message communicates the core meaning of an organization to internal and external audiences. In addition, the institutional message is understood as aligning an organization's activities and image with rules established in its environment (Lammers, 2011).

Lammers (2011) explains further that institutional message can be clarified by examining the intersection of the extent to which they are intentional or purposive on the one hand, and the extent to which they hinder the receiver on the other hand. With regards to Lammers (2011), on the sending side, we can distinguish two types: those sent intentionally, and thus involving the problems of clarifying, amplifying, or otherwise getting the message across, and those sent unintentionally by virtue of the actions of the organization or organizations that make up the field. He also notes that, on the receiving side, we may also distinguish two types: messages that the receiver has an obligation to receive and act on and messages that do not obligate the receiver to take actions but, nonetheless, may make certain actions more or less likely.

Lammers (2011) suggests, further, that we can identify strong institutional messages as those that encumber responses from receivers, whether that means complying with a law, rule, or code, or recognizing the compliance of another, as in acknowledging the accreditation of an organization. In general, the more intentional and encumbering the message is, the stronger the institution. Intentional messages that do not hinder responses or behaviours from others are characteristic of fading or emerging institutions and some social movements: Membership and involvement is voluntary. Unintentional messages that do hinder defendants may be understood as miscommunication, confusion, or perverse outcomes, where the outcome is different from the intended effects. Finally, unintentional m0essages that do not hinder responses are characteristic of weak institutions.

McPhee and Zaug (2000) also discuss four message flows that contribute to the Communicative constitution of organizations. In their work, they explicitly develop the idea of messages as “the blood, the hormones, and the nerve impulses that affect and relate [the] member cells of an organization”. McPhee and Zaug identify four requisite message flows: membership negotiation; self-structuring; activity coordination; and institutional positioning.

Public Relations (PR) scholars such as Cutlip and Broom (2006) see public relations as a systematic effort to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics. Over the years, public relations have been playing very important communication roles in society. Carlsmith & Railsback, (2001) posits that educational Public Relations is a planned, systematic management function, designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive, two-way communication process involving both internal and external publics with the goal of stimulating better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. According to the association, this kind of public relations aims at assisting in interpreting public attitudes, identifying and helping shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and carrying on involvement and information activities which earn public support and understanding National School Public Relations Association, (2002); Carlsmith & Railsback, (2001) noted that, school public relations used to be a one-way communication street which aimed at getting positive image about the school out. These scholars suggested a reverse situation where education public relations establish and promote partnerships within the school community. According to them an effective public relation must create value by giving the public the information they need. It must also ask for information just as much as it transmits it. VRA / NEDCO through its public relations unit must try to understand the needs and desires of their publics and helps them (the public) understand the entire organizational process and how it will contribute to bringing out the best from the workers. This will create positive communication, builds confidence in the organizational system and its goals and establishes avenues of open communication Carlsmith & Railsback, (2001). With the proliferation of public relations units in Ghanaian tertiary institutions, one wonders if the practitioners have changed from the old one-way publicity model or they have embraced the two-way symmetrical model being propounded by public relations scholars. Palmer (2005) emphasized that a wide range of public relations tools are available and suitability of each tool depends on the promotional objective. Belch and Belch (2001) echoed that public relations uses a variety of tools including special publications, participation in community activities, fund-raising, and sponsorships of special events, advertising and public affairs activities to enhance an organizational image. The tools are described as controlled (e.g. House ads, Public service ads, Publications, Photographs, Displays, exhibits), uncontrolled (e.g. News release, Press conferences, Talk and interview shows, Public service announcements) and semi-controlled (e.g. Electronic communication (web sites, chat rooms), Special events and sponsorship, Word of mouth). Lancaster (2005) states that companies that use television as a medium of communication stand the chance of achieving a high level of impact on their customers or public due to its visual nature. The author observed that during a television program, individual's explanation regarding issues relating to their companies could be supported with either products or footage of the company's participation in a sponsored event. This, the author argued, has the ability to erase any erroneous impressions about such companies. Lancaster (2005) further mentions exhibition as one of the potential tools for creating the opportunity for public relations officers as well as marketing communicators to come into face-to-face contact with desired targeted audience or visitors. The author claimed that since visitors treat exhibitions as a shop window and an opportunity to gather technical information, the public relations officer would have the opportunity to explain and provide all the necessary information that can inspire confidence and trust in an organization by the customer or the targeted public and build relationship.

In a study on Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) and their Communication Strategies, Gonzalez, Lopez and Garcia (2008), analyse the communication strategies developed by European Union Supreme Audit Institutions in order to publicize the results of their activity and to provide the public with an overall vision of what they do. They find in their study that when institutions begin to open up to the public, they become more accountable, justify their existence, and that forms an essential component of their independence and efficiency, and also brings about measures to assess the impact of their work.

In furtherance, Gonzalez *et al* (2008) note that SAIs' adoption of communication strategies will enhance transparency and accountability. Gonzalez, Lopez, and Garcia (2008) put forward various reasons that explain why SAIs need to have a communication strategy: The capacity of public bodies to demonstrate the results of their activity allows them to justify their existence (Waerness, 1999,). SAI freedom to define their own communication policy toward the media and the general public is an essential component of their independence and efficiency (European Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions [EUROSAI], 1999). Having a communication policy favours the establishment of impact assessment measures. SAIs regard press coverage as indicative of the value of their work (Lonsdale, 1999,). A communication policy can positively influence SAI compliance with freedom of information legislation because it allows for information release through the different channels open to it. Lack of a communication policy gives the impression of a dull, gloomy institution with little known about it, whose worth is debatable and whose existence could be called into question. Such a situation could give rise to leaked information, half-truths, and misunderstandings due to the lack of a mediator who comes between the work of the institution and the journalist charged with passing the information on to society (Erbiti, 2003).

In another study by Gonzalez *et al* (2012) which focused on Communication as a transparency and accountability strategy in SAIs, they emphasize the fact that these organizations should base their strategy on three fundamental props—target audience, message, and channels of communication. The study reveals, for instance, that the German SAI has set its communication objectives as to fulfil its constitutional mandate, satisfy stakeholders' information needs, build a reputation for integrity and excellence and enhance audit impact. Its communication strategy is aimed at three groups--audited bodies, constitutional bodies (including Parliament and the Federal Government), and civil society, media, and citizens (Winter, 2011,). Apart from civil society, all these sectors are considered by INTOSAI to be major recipients of its communication strategy.

Ansong (2013) also investigated how state institutions in Ghana communicate with the publics, using the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) as a reference point. Underpinned by the media richness and systems theories, the study revealed that CHRAJ had been communicating with its external publics using mainly the traditional media, with radio being the most dominant and preferred medium. The study also found that the Commission had feedback mechanisms (such as letters, visits, and telephone) in place to allow its external publics, especially complainants, to keep abreast of happenings within the Commission. The results also gave an indication that the Commission had been practicing an open system, as the various communication channels allowed the external publics to access information without much difficulty. The Commission was, therefore, rated highly by its external publics.

Akomeah (2015), also conducted a qualitative research to examine the communicative processes between GWCL, a state – owned water utility company in Ghana and two categories of their publics: the PURC and ordinary domestic consumers in two separate communities in the Accra / Tema metropolis. This study therefore sought to evaluate the kind of communication that takes place between Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and these publics.

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 usually communicate with their various publics, carefully crafting different messages and using different channels of communication based on the nature of audience and information being conveyed, the PURC and the consumers did not share that opinion. 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 communication theory were largely absent in the communication between GWCL and the PURC as well as the customers.

In a study done by Newton and Norris (1999) in the UK on confidence in public institutions: faith, culture or performance, the scholars take a close look at institutions of representative democracy and do an assessment of whether the public still has confidence in their ability to deliver to their expectation. Based on a comparison of seventeen trilateral democracies, the study finds that an erosion of confidence in the major institutions of society, especially those of representative democracy, is a far more serious threat to democracy than a loss of trust in other citizens or politicians. Giddens

(1990) and Seligman (1997) also argue that in our large-scale and impersonal modern world, social and political stability and integration increasingly depend on confidence in institutions rather than trust in individuals, so vibrant institutions matter more to contemporary democracies than does the quality of interpersonal relations among citizens.

The study concludes that at the national level, social trust and confidence in government and its public organizations are strongly associated with each other. It finds further that social trust can help build effective social and political organizations, which can help governments perform effectively, and this in turn encourages confidence in civic institutions. However, as Pharr *et al*. (2000) observe, it is important to keep in mind that citizens' performance evaluations reflect subjective perceptions rather than objective measurements, and as such they are dependent upon access to information through mass media and other sources.

2.11 Theoretical framework

2.11.1 Introduction

Academic scholars are of the view that theories can help to predict the way things work or happens because they provide an understanding of the relationship between actions and events. This study employed two related areas of theories for the study. These are dialogic communication theory and the relevance theory as its framework and these theories also help us to analyse the findings. These theories are explained below.

2.11.2 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 organization (Ledingham, 2003).

Indirectly, dialogue persists as a focal ingredient in the process of developing new viewpoints regarding the public relations function of an organization (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 et al. (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.

Old-fashioned approaches to public relations downgrade publics to a secondary role, making them instruments for meeting organizational 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 and 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 nutshell, 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 organization using the internet, rather the face-to-face and other mediated alternatives in the 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.

2.11.3 Principles of dialogic communication

According to Kent and Taylor (2002), dialogic approach to public relations comprises of several coherent assumptions that make its comprehension simpler. Before discussing the features of dialogue in detail, it is imperative to note that dialogue is not an end in itself, rather a means to an end in the communication roles of an organization. What dialogue does is place stress on the relationship-building between the organization and its publics. However, dialogue cannot coerce an organization to conduct itself morally.

The organization must willingly make dialogic commitments to their publics (Kent & Taylor 2002). It is also important to note that some public relations work is necessarily reactive. Kent and 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 are also of the view that dialogic communication may be unsuitable in some circumstances. The authors also stressed that, dialogue can be put to both moral and immoral ends. In a similar proclamation, Gunson and Collins (1997), pointed out that, just because an organization and its publics create "dialogic" communication structures does not mean that they are behaving dialogically. According to them, if one partner undermines the dialogic process through manipulation, or exclusion, then the end result will not be dialogic. Discussed below are the principles of the dialogic communication theory, as explained by Kent and Taylor (2002).

2.11.4 Mutuality as a principle of dialogic communication

According to Kent and Taylor (2002), mutuality refers to the recognition that organizations and their publics are closely joined together. The authors indicated that mutuality is considered as either the presence of shared meaning or negotiation. The authors posited that, in considering mutuality, organizations must adopt a framework which will account for culture and standpoints in ideology. For that matter, Anderson, Cissna and 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 organizations, in dealing with their publics, should strive to maintain humility and a relationship of equality.

2.11.5 Propinquity as a principle of dialogic communication

Connected to mutuality as explained above is propinquity. Propinquity as pointed out by Kent and Taylor (2002) at the elementary 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 organization 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 organization 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 organizations 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 & Taylor, 2002) expects both the organization 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 & Taylor, 2002).

2.11.6 Empathy as a principle of dialogic communication

According to Kent and Taylor (2002) empathy, which is also referred to as compassion, 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 organizations 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 assisted; communal orientation - presupposing a communal orientation between the organization and their publics, whether they are individuals or organizations; confirmation -- acknowledging or affirming the intrinsic value of others (Freire, 1994).

2.11.7 Risk as a principle of dialogic communication

Leitch and Neilson (2001, as cited in Kent and Taylor 2002) noted that genuine dialogue appears to be a problematic concept for public relations. Organizations and the publics they engage in dialogue which 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.

2.11.8 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 organization or the publics (Gadamer, 1994).

2.12 The Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory which Boakye et al., 2012 claimed was founded by International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) in 1984 formed the basis of this study. It is a general theory of public relations (PR) that specifies how public relations is organized, managed and how it (PR) makes an organization more effective. The theory, according to these scholars, also shows how the monetary value of public relations can be determined and the conditions and environments that make PR more effective in an organization. Scholars such as Grunig, (1992) and Grunig et al., (2002) did further works on the theory and came out with a set of characteristics of an excellent public relations function which they grouped into four categories empowerment function, communicator roles, integrated function and relationship with other functions, and models of public relations. The empowerment Public Relations Function involves the senior practitioners in the dominant coalition, managing communication programs strategically and building a direct reporting relationship between the public relations executive and the dominant coalition Grunig et al., (2002). According to Grunig et al., (2002), an organization whose public relations function adheres to the empowerment principle can easily balance its needs with that of publics. This function helps organizations to effectively manage issues and minimize crises. An integrated public relations unit is able to quickly respond to issues and allocate resources to address problems without delay Grunig et al., (2002). Of the four models of public relations, Grunig et al., (2002) claim that excellent public relations units utilize the two-way symmetrical communication model instead of the public information, press agentry, or the two-way asymmetrical models. The two-way symmetrical model uses research to facilitate mutual understanding and communication. According to these scholars, this model helps Public relations managers to adjust the behaviours of dominant coalitions and bring the public and dominant coalition closer together. Based on the above principles, the present study sought to find out if the public relations units of VRA/NEDCO are engaging in excellent public relations practices. Related Work Communications scholars such as Pirozez & Heskova, (2003) claim that public relations practice in public organizations used to be one-way asymmetrical communication process. These scholars posit that communication practitioners in those days were much concerned with providing accurate but favourable information about their institutions to their publics. Consequently, the major communicator roles performed by the practitioners were media relations. Consistent with this assertion, Coman, (2003) indicates that in the past, public relations practice at the organizations in the former soviet bloc was a mixture of marketing, advertising, and lobbying. This communication style by the organization contradicted the main tenet of excellent theorists who argue that effective public relations should involve two-way symmetrical process. Recent studies, however, point to the fact that the trend for public relations practice in educational institutions has changed. Similarly, Kaverina, (2003) also claimed that the relationship between a state university he studied and its key publics were strengthened through the university's use of the two-way symmetrical models of public relations. It will be interesting to find out if the public relations units of the Ghanaian public organization (VRA / NEDCO) under study is using the two-way symmetrical models or they are still adhering to the old one-way communication style.

The benefits that communication practitioners stand to gain from excellent principles of public relations practice have made a lot of scholars advocate their (the excellent principles) acceptance and use by all public relations practitioners. Whilst Grillis, T. (1997) earlier advocated the need for public relations practitioners to have access to the top leaders within their respective organisations, Jarrell, A. (2003) argued that if the public organizations go a step further to involve public relations practitioners in decision making, it will help minimize crises in the organisations. Other scholars DeSanto & Garner, (2001); Ross, (2004) stressed the need for all public organizations' public relations practitioners to set clearly defined goals, identify key stakeholders, use research on their stakeholders as the basis of drawing their programmes and conduct evaluations on every program they have undertaken. These, the scholars believe, will not only enhance the work of the communication practitioners, but will also make them relevant to the organisations they work in. This study, therefore, sought to find out how the public relations practitioner of VRA /NEDCO applied Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations to enhancing quality service delivery. The Excellence theory is a general theory of public relations that specifies how public relations makes organizations more effective, how it is organized and managed and how the monetary value of public relations can be determined (Onsongo et al., 2017). The Excellence Theory explained that the cost of public relations lies in an organization-public relations

(Mitrović & Drača, 2013). A good relationship with strategic publics is helpful for an organization to develop and achieve goals desired by both the organization and its publics, reduce costs of negative publicity, and increase revenue by providing products and services needed by stakeholders. Hence, in the VRA / NEDCO, its development and continued existence is reliant on the delivery of quality service to the society and maintaining a good relationship with all its stakeholders. A better understanding of its stakeholders and how these stakeholders can be served better will help in the understanding of the social responsibility of VRA / NEDCO to its stakeholders. To maximize the value of public relations, public relations must identify strategic publics and build long-term relationships with them through regular communication programmes.

2.13 Grunig and Hunt's Models of Public Relations

Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed four models of public relations that describe the field's various management and organizational practices. These models serve as guidelines to create programs, strategies, and tactics

2.12.1Press Agentry

Rawlins and Stoker (1999) refer to the press agentry model as publicity and assert that its main goal is to change the attitudes and opinions of the public to align them to those of the organization. This model is mainly based on propaganda that has the elements of exaggerations, half-truths, and lies. This relies on advertising and public persuasion to capture the feelings of the public and ensure that they buy into the ideas of the organization.

The most applicable example of this model is in the promotion of football. The model, in this case, involves the advocacy for football so that the public can get interested in watching and pleading for financial support from the donors and businesses as a way of social responsibility. Further, the model is based on massive media coverage that factors in the elements of entertainment and recreation, creation of a good sports culture through constant competitions, development of the sport, prestige from the game and popularity of the players, clubs and the game, development of the players through coaching and advancement of careers for the players and coaches (Jackowski, 2007).

The model's applicability to football is evident by the massive media coverage and advertisements especially in events such as the ongoing FIFA World Cup and other events such as the Euro games among others. Additionally, the financial support of football is provided by multinational organizations through sponsorship of the players, clubs, and events. Exaggeration is further seen in the large advocacy of clubs and countries' popularity while careers of the players are guarded with huge paychecks and training as well as the buying and shifting of players among clubs.

2.12.2 Public Information

This model is based on one-way communication but with emphasis on truth and accuracy (Smith, 2002). It is also based on the ethics of providing objective information perceived to be needed by the public (Rawlins & Stoker, 1999).

This model does not consider information about the audience to be essential in constructing messages and releases. In the early 20th century there was move among some enlightened public relations practitioners towards more truthful and accurate messages. They move away from half- truths and outright falsehoods was the precursor to increasing ethical practices. Although this model still does not have any methods for quantitative analysis of the results practitioners are slightly more inclined to gather feedback from their audiences. This model is used mostly by government agencies, military units, and law enforcement agencies.

The most applicable example of this model is in institutions of higher learning. The model is applied in the clear mission and vision statements of the institutions which are communicated with emphasis based on the core values. The model is also applied in the dissemination of information regarding the courses offered that are mainly advertised in the media. Further, the courses have a set duration of completion and the topics to be covered for the ultimate graduation. The preliminary requirements for the courses are given in terms of the relevant course background and the payment requirements. The model is further applied in the teaching process that mainly involves the dissemination of information from the instructors to the students and the requirements of the assignments. Additionally, the requirements for the pass marks from the courses are given while the rules and regulations of the institution are communicated together with the services available to the students (Moss, Warnaby & Thame, 1996).

The relevance of the model is revealed in the use of brochures to pass the information on the activities the institution is involved in, maps that give the direction of the institution, and other publications to pass the information on the occurrences in the institutions. Further, the application of the model is seen in the issue of press releases when the institutions wish to pass a certain message, clarification, or explanation of the issues affecting it.

2.12.3Two-Way Asymmetrical

This model is based on the reliance on feedback as a way of improving the level of the messages passed by an organization (Smith, 2002). It relies on listening to the public to establish better strategic communication through strategic and persuasive messages. The effectiveness of the model is based on research to change the perspectives of the public and align them to the objectives of the organization.

The model is best applied in financial institutions such as banks due to the need for two-way communication between various stakeholders such as the shareholders, investors, and the general public (Marin, 2007). Banks offer different products and services that are meant to target a specific audience that provides feedback on the same. They also enhance their services through the incorporation of technology such as e-banking, automated machines, money transfer services among others. Further, the management strategies of these organizations are based on adequate research of the market on what is best for them based on feedback from the market.

The services offered by banks are scrutinized by the public. For instance, the quality of customer services is determined by the customers' opinions on how they are treated at the bank. The financial information of the institutions is disseminated to the shareholders who then give their opinions on the same. The application of the model is supported by the marketing strategies used before the products and services are promoted. Furthermore, the model is revealed in the launch of new products to the public where communication lines are open for feedback (Heath, 2005).

2.12.4 Two-Way Symmetrical

This model is based on the advocacy for the flow of information that is equal and free between the organization and the public (Moss et al., 1996). The model aims at mutual understanding and high degrees of responsiveness coupled with the change of attitudes for both the public and the organization. It relies on feedback for altering the opinions of the public (Smith, 2002).

The model is most applicable in non-profit making organizations (Slater, 2002). This is revealed in the mission, vision, and objectives of the organizations which are based on fulfilling a certain purpose for the community. These organizations are not established for profit-making but rather for providing services for the benefit of the community. This requires adequate research for them to be engaged in activities that benefit the people. They also require reliance on the community they serve since the public has to give information on what it needs. This involves training and educating the public to align its objectives with the organization's objectives.

The effectiveness of the model is revealed through negotiation, honest feedback, and the adaptation of change through the actual involvement of both the organization and the public. It is also revealed in the management of the organizations in which the community is actively involved. Furthermore, the fact that the projects involve massive funds, adequate and honest feedback is required for accountancy purposes. Additionally, it is relevant in the resolution of conflicts and feedback from other agencies either as criticisms or commendations that enhance their effectiveness (Rawlins & Stoker, 1999).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the research approach, research design, sample size, sampling technique, data collection methods, techniques for data analysis, validity and credibility of the study, ethical considerations as well as procedures for data collection.

3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

The study employed the qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2018), a qualitative research approach is an approach for exploring and understanding meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social phenomenon or problem. Similarly, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) assert that qualitative researchers seek to preserve and analyse the situated form, content and experiences of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformation. Kreuger and Neuman (2006) are of the view that, in a qualitative research approach, social reality is produced in the form of meanings and interpretations, which are based on lived experiences of people. This therefore required that data were collected from individuals who had in-depth knowledge and experience on the field to enrich the study; hence, the choice of a qualitative approach for this study.

With regards to Baxter and Jack (2008) qualitative study is a methodology that provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their context. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), when the approach is applied appropriately, it becomes a valuable method for researchers to develop theory, valuate programme and develop interventions that may be necessary in a given situation. Qualitative studies afford researchers opportunity to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources. It allows the researcher to explore individuals or organizations from simple to complex interventions, relationships, communities, or program and supports the deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena.

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 discussions, case studies, semiotics and content analysis (Babbie, 2010).

Qualitative research also investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials (Fraenkel et al., 2012). 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 approach is valuable because of its flexibility and rigor, (Yin, 2003 as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008). Creswell (2012) summarizes the characteristics of qualitative research approach and amongst them is; that qualitative case study must be conducted in a natural setting / environment. By this, it means the research approach collects data in a natural setting / environment and mostly on the field where the participants are studied in their natural environment. Individuals are not sent to the laboratory to be studied nor do individuals complete an instrument. Researchers interact with their subject face to face over a period of time.

The study used the qualitative research approach, especially as the goal of the research was exploratory. Exploratory research allows a researcher to examine a phenomenon in detail by engaging practitioners who are knowledgeable about a topic or process. Exploratory research also occurs when a researcher investigates a new area of interest or when the phenomenon being studied itself is of relative interest (Sue & Ritter, 2012, Babbie, 2011,). As exploratory research is usually qualitative in nature, the qualitative approach was therefore seen as appropriate for the research.

3.2 Research Design

Zikmund and Babin (2007) state that the purpose of research design is to present a master plan that will specify the methods for collecting and analysing data. Similarly, Creswell (2018) explains that research design refers to the procedures and strategies of conducting an investigation. The scholar indicates that the selection of an appropriate research design depends on the nature of the research, the research problem and the question, personal experiences of the researcher and the type of audience to be used for the study. Research designs, especially in qualitative research environment, include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. This study employed the case study design by investigating communication between public Utility organizations and their publics a tool to enhancing quality service delivery.

3.2.1 Case Study

With respect to Kusi (2012), a case study is a form of qualitative research design which is widely used by researchers in the social sciences. A case study is an in-depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon. Similarly, Creswell (2014) states that a case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates present-day phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined.

This study employed the single case design. Creswell (2014) indicates further that a case study is a design of enquiry found in many fields, especially the ones in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case. This case could be a programme, an activity, an event, a process or one or more individuals.

3.3 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). Public organizations in Ghana are unable to engage their publics by paying attention to their needs and predicaments and being sensitive to their feelings. VRA / NEDCO is a typical example of those public utility organizations which minimally engage their public. This necessitated the case selection of VRA / NEDCO for this study in the Techiman operational area. VRA/ NEDCO contains five operational areas, they are: the Northern operational area, the Upper East operational area, the Upper West operational area, the Sunyani operational area and the Techiman operational area. The Techiman operational area covers the entire Bono East region, parts of Ashanti region, Bono, and Savannah regions. The operational area contains 95 communities. The Techiman operational area was selected because it was adjudged the best operational area in terms of improved revenue collection of 97% among the five operational areas of VRA / NEDCO Company.

VRA / NEDCO provide one of the very essential utility services (reliable power supply) to the citizenry of the Techiman operational area in the middle belt of Ghana.

(Report on stakeholder consultation on tariff proposal for the 2022 – 2027 multi – year tarrif review period. May, 2022)

3.4 Sampling Technique

Sampling is the process of selecting a group of individuals from a population to study them and characterize them. Sampling technique is therefore a procedure used to obtain samples and data from a target population (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).There are different type of sampling techniques use in qualitative research, these include: purposive sampling, snowball sampling, maximum variation sampling and typical or extreme case purposive sampling.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), sampling Technique or strategy guides the researcher as to the choices of what to observe or whom to interview. They stress that an intelligent sampling technique enables researchers to make systematic contact with communication phenomenon with a minimum of wasted effort. This study employed the extreme case purposive sampling technique. Kumekpor (2002) states that in extreme case purposive sampling, the units of the sample are selected not by random procedure, but they are intentionally picked for the study because they satisfy certain qualities which are of interest to the researcher. These qualities include:

(1)The participants must be 18 years and above.

(2) He / she must be someone who has used prepaid or credit meter for more than one year

(3) He /she must be someone who has been to the VRA / NEDCO complaints office many times to lay complain.

The Customer Service Officer of VRA / NEDCO Office in Techiman operational area was purposively sampled for in-depth interview because he is the spokesperson of the Company and therefore possess a wealth of knowledge on customer relations practice within the organization and he leads the team that goes out to hold community engagement and sensitization on revenue mobilization every year. The Public Relations officer of the PURC in Sunyani was also purposively sampled because he is the leader of the PURC team on stakeholder consultations on tariff proposal. He constantly engages the publics by leading the team to sensitize the consumers about the work of public utility organizations and for calling on consumers to channel their complaints through the right medium should there be any for the necessary action to be taken.

Kusi (2012) is of the view that in considering a sample size for a qualitative study, it is imperative for researchers to determine an aspect of the population to be used in the study and justify why they have chosen such a sample size. However, Silverman (2010) is of the view that although the validity of qualitative analysis depends on the sample size, the quality of the analysis is also significant. Schwandt (2015) asserts that a sample of 6 – 15 participants for qualitative case studies may be sufficient to enable the development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations, especially for studies with a high level of similarity among the populations. Based on these proclamations by the above-mentioned scholars, a sample size of twenty-four (24) participants were used for this study. These included eleven participants from each of the two communities under study, one customer service officer of VRA / NEDCO and one Public Relations Officer of PURC.

With regards to the sampling technique used, the researcher used the extreme case purposive sampling technique to identify communities with numerous complaints with the assistance of the VRA / NEDCO complaints logbook. The researcher realised that, Twimia / Koase electoral area in the Techiman Municipality and Tuobodom / Adantaasi electoral area in the Techiman North District were the two communities where the complaints were coming from frequently.

With respect to the selection of the participants, the researcher had to again rely on the data from VRA /NEDCO complaints logbook (work order book) to identify persons who frequently visit the VRA / NEDCO complaints office to give complaints from the two communities: Twimia / Koase electoral area and Tuobodom / Adantase electoral area and took their particulars. The researcher contacted the participants of Twimia /koase electoral area through the Assemblyman who doubles as the head teacher of Twimia / Koase Methodist JHS. The researcher again contacted the participants of Tuobodom / Adantaasi electoral area through the Assembly woman of the area. The participants selected were 11 each in the two communities, five Male and six Female each. The researcher purposively selected 22 participants. The participants were the inhabitants of the two communities aged between 18 and 60 years and have been to the VRA / NEDCO Complains Office a number of times to lay complain about intermittent power outages or any other issue related to electricity. The participants were selected from the two communities using the purposive sampling technique (extreme case sampling technique) because the researcher wanted to collect cases that are more likely to give him the most information about the research topic being investigated.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Data for this study were mainly primary data. Data were collected through responses gathered from the in- depth interview with the two Officers in the Customer Service Departments of VRA / NEDCO and the Public Relations Officer of PURC as well as the responses that were gathered from the Focus Group discussions in Twimia / Koase and Tuobodom / Adantasi electoral areas.

3.5.1 In-depth interviews

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), interviews are key features of qualitative research and help to provide understanding of the social actors' experiences and perspective through stories, accounts, and explanations. Most researchers normally select persons for interviews only if their experiences are central to the research problem in some way – especially due to their skills, expertise or wealth of knowledge that can answer the critical questions and satisfy the objectives of the research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). For this reason, an interview guide was prepared based on the research questions with a number of questions critical to the study. The views of the respondents were sought on the various research questions with the aid of the interview guide. The in-depth interview was conducted with the interviewer using his Tecno Mobile phone to record with the permission of the respondent. The interviews were later transcribed and the responses from the respondents were analysed. The emerging issues were transcribed and put into themes based on the most recurring issues.

There were seven (7) face – to – face in –depth interviews in this research and each lasted between 40 – 45 minutes. The researcher interviewed the Customer Service Officer of VRA / NEDCO limited at Techiman operational area in the Bono East Region of Ghana for three times and the Public Relations Officer of PURC at the Bono Regional capital Sunyani for four times. The rationale for the discrepancy in the in-depth interview is attributed to the busy schedule of the customer relations officer of VRA/NEDCO, in fact he was leading the sensitization team to various communities as well as the disconnection team. The focus of each in-depth interview and the information sought for each in-depth interview is to get first-hand information from them as the spokes persons of their respective organizations about the communication between public organizations and their consumers and they have vast knowledge and ideas about the daily happiness in their organizations

3.5.2 Focus-Groups Discussion

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. Barbie (2018) 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 et al (2014) also described focus-groups as formally organized, 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. There were four (4) separate Focus group discussion in both Twimia / Koase and Tuobodom / Adantasi communities respectively. The study lasted for 12 months from December, 2021 to December, 2022.

The purpose of using focus-groups is to explore rather than describe or explain in any definitive sense (Barbie, 2018).While Barbie (2018) 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. With regards to this study, there were four focus Group discussions and each was composed of eleven (11) participants in each of the two communities. The discussion lasted for 90 minutes in each group. The Focus Group discussion targeted general community folks who are between 18 – 60 years and have been to the VRA / NEDCO Office a number of times to lay complain and have had the experience of intermittent light off, paying exorbitant service charges and had enough information about electricity issues in their community and how VRA / NEDCO scarcely communicate to them about their policy initiatives. The rationale for using Focus Group discussion aside the face – face interviews in the communities is further grounded in Lindlof and Taylor (2002) as cited in Morgan (2018) that "the explicit use of the group interaction (produces) data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group"

The Focus group discussion guide consisted of 16 open ended questions. The focus group guide was developed and refined by the researcher on the basis of the research objectives. The group discussion was held in a congenial atmosphere with the researcher asking series of open – ended questions. This approach helped the participants to answer the questions vividly. Major issues explored in the focus group discussions centred on communication between VRA / NEDCO and its consumers in the two aforementioned communities.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that involves reading through a set of data and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes (Braun &Clarke, 2018). In this vain, it is an active process of reflexivity in which the researcher's subjective experience is at the centre of making sense of the data. The recording of the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by the researcher. No software was used to assist in the coding or transcription of data. The findings of this research were coded and analysed using thematic analysis approach with close reference to the research objectives and research questions. The researcher categorised the data into themes. The researcher coded the various interviews and focus group discussions conducted with the participants. The researcher noted the issues that run through the interviews and focus group discussions and categorised them under various themes. The researcher used the inductive type of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2018) where the researcher does not fit the data into any form of preconceived analysis or pre-existing coding frame. The researcher further interpreted the findings using theories to draw meaning of responses from participants. Direct quotes were also used to support the discussions and interpretations of meaning.

During the process, the researcher organised the codes into main themes and sub-themes. Initially, codes were generated from the research objectives on communication between public organizations and their consumers. Then, the researcher reviewed the codes in context, providing labels and definitions reflective of the raw data. Further, in accordance with DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011) recommendations, the second round of coding was conducted on the level of meaning via a data-driven method, which enables codes to be developed on the sentence and paragraph level. In this round of coding, the researcher checked whether any new theme or sub-theme could be identified. In this process, the recorded data were transcribed immediately from one interview to another. The transcribed data were cross checked to ensure the prevention of any loss in meaning and also to avoid researcher's bias. Data was then analysed systematically.

The researcher also jotted some notes during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. After the interview and the focus group discussion, he transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by the researchers. The findings of this research were coded and analysed using thematic analysis approach with close reference to the research objectives and research questions. The researcher categorized the data into themes. The researcher coded the various interviews and focus group discussions conducted with the participants. The researcher noted the issues that run through the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and categorized them under various themes. The researcher further interpreted the findings using theories to draw meaning of responses from the participants.

In order to carry out a detailed analysis to achieve the stated objectives of the study, responses gathered from participants were transcribed to generate data for the analysis and discussions. The focus group discussions and the in- depth interviews were recorded using the researcher's Tecno Spark 20 smart phone to record the interaction. While the in-depth interview was conducted fully in English, the Focus-group discussions were conducted in the local language, Akan. These were recorded, translated into English and subsequently, transcribed. The translation was done by an Akan language expert/ Lecturer, teaching at the Akan – Nzema department of the Ajumako campus of University of Education, Winneba. The entire period of study lasted 12 months. It commenced in December, 2021 and ended in December, 2022.

3.7 Credibility of the Study

Creswell (2018) is of the view that validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account. Creswell (2018) therefore suggests eight primary procedures/strategies that researchers can use to validate qualitative studies. They are triangulation of data sources, use member checking, use rich/thick description to convey findings, clarify biases, negative case analysis, spend prolonged time in the field, use peer review and debriefing, and use an external auditor to review the project. Two of these verification procedures, namely triangulation and rich / thick description were employed in this research. With respect to triangulation procedure, the study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as data collection methods. Relative to the study, the participants were purposively sampled for in-depth interviews and for focus group discussion. Open-ended questions were carefully designed to answer the research questions as well as address the research objectives. The open-ended interview guide thus, generated qualitative and opinion-related information to answer research questions one and two. The interview guide was developed on the basis of concepts from extant literature on communication between public organizations and their consumers. The rationale for conducting interviews was to avoid delays in filling and returning questionnaires by participants and also to have access to highly opinionated views as data for the study. The participants were interviewed in a conversational manner within a period of 40 to 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted at a place of convenience of the participants. Data collected were then recorded and transcribed for patterns of themes to emerge. The researcher also took notes so that in the event the recording failed he would rely on it. With regards to the rich / thick description procedure employed by the researcher in the study, the researcher gave a detailed description of participants used for the in- depth interview and the focus group discussion as well as the setting of the study.

Creswell (2014) further observes that credibility in qualitative research is very important. Credibility means reliability, dependability or consistency and this is determined based on the researcher's approach as to whether it is consistent across different researchers and projects. Yin (2003) suggests that qualitative researchers must always document the procedures of their case studies as well as the steps of procedure as possible. In this regard, data collection methods such as interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed before being analysed. The transcribed data was sent back to the respective interviewees for cross-checking and validation. An interview guide was used to guide the researcher to conduct the face-to-face interviews with the Customer service officer of VRA / NEDCO of Techiman operational area, the Public Relations Officer of PURC and the Focus – group discussion with the 22 participants from the Twimia / Koase and Tuobodom / Adantasi Communities.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

According to Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015), when conducting research, especially with human subjects in particular, ethics are of utmost importance. Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015) propose three principles that researchers must adhere to – informed consent, level of participant's privacy and debriefing. The participants were therefore fully informed of the purpose of this study and they gave their consent before the study was carried out. Again, informants were assured of their utmost confidentiality and duly briefed on all aspects and purposes of the study. The participants were given the chance to ask questions and further clarifications before participating in the study.

Similarly, Creswell (2009) points out that when conducting research, researchers need to protect their research participants, acknowledge all sources, develop trust with the participants, promote the integrity of the research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions and also cope with new challenging problems. Since the study involved collection of information about people and also corporate entities with national interest and political undertones, the issue of confidentiality was of great importance. Therefore, responses gathered were presented without disclosing the identities of the respondents, 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.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation, and discussion of the findings of the study. The chapter discusses the Communication process between VRA / NEDCO and its publics a tool to enhancing quality service delivery in the light of the tenets of the dialogic Communication and relevance theories. It presents the views of the various participants of the study: their current experiences and their expectations as far as communication between the consumers being the publics and VRA / NEDCO is concerned.

4.1 RQ. 1. What channels of communication are used by VRA / NEDCO limited in communicating with its publics?

Based on the interviews with the VRA / NEDCO's Customer Relation Officer, the PURC's Public Relations Officer and the Focus group discussion with the consumers from the two communities. These channels were identified as channels which VRA / NEDCO uses to communicate with its publics. They include Community Radio, local Television network and print media (Techiman Times) other traditional channels identified were welfare meetings, Durbars, Community engagement / sensitization, organizational newsletters, Workshops and policy documents. It was discovered from the study that VRA / NEDCO limited uses any of these channels depending on the problem at hand. The table below shows the various channels which were used by VRA / NEDCO in communicating with their publics, how they are used and what they intend to achieve.

The Channels of Communication used by VRA / NEDCO

Channels of communication	How they are used.	What they intend to achieve.
Radio	VRA/ NEDCO uses community radio (Akina radio&Classic Fm) to give impromptu announcement to its customers most especially in the hard-to-reach areas.	Radio broadcast provides real time information and the most recent updates to the listeners to act upon
Television	Asare Television network is used to educate consumers on VRA / NEDCO policies and projects because they speak the native language to them.	Asare Television network is meant to educates the huge illiterate population about VRA / NEDCO policies and projects at a go
Letters	The letters are used as aids in formal communication between the two organizations, they serve as legal document, and they create goodwill.	The main purpose of letter is to send information and official communication to any of the organisations.
Information van	A car with speakers on top of it goes round communities to make announcement on programs	It is used to make announcement in the community and people acted upon hearing the information van.

	and activities of VRA / NEDCO.	
Community engagement.	VRA / NEDCO works collaboratively with customers by engaging them on VRA / NEDCO policies and projects during durbars and festivals.	The engagements are meant to promote sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interest of all participants to VRA/NEDCO
Information centre	VRA / NEDCO visit the information centres to make announcement of VRA /NEDCO policies and projects.	The purpose is to provide community with information on many programs and activities of VRA / NEDCO.
Phone call.	Phone calls involves VRA / NEDCO and the customers interacting with mobile phone devices to enhance quality service delivery.	Telephone conversations may save time as people take time to meet for face-to-face communication with VRA / NEDCO officials.

Source: Fieldwork data, December 2022.

4.1.1 Rural (Community) Radio

The findings from the focus group discussion revealed that consumers prefer community radio to that of commercial radio. According to the participants, that Community radio has become so imperative of a tool for the rapid diffusion of important messages that concerns VRA / NEDCO to the consumers. The participants said that its broadcast provides real-time information and the most recent updates to listeners and consumers in the hard- to- reach areas and in the rural areas and the announcement is done in the native speaker's language to the understanding of the rural folks. VRA / NEDCO uses community radio to pass information to a geographically disperse large audience. The company uses community radio to announce an annual meeting to the stakeholders or launch a new product or project of the organization. For example, the company usually provides media briefing or public address in multiple community radio stations about tariff increase, power outage and routine maintenance work. A participant from Twimia / Koase said that VRA / NEDCO use of community radio in recent times for its announcement has help most of the consumers because it represents the opportunity of placing the means of communication in the hands of the grassroots people, it also allows community members to access information services that addresses their livelihood challenges and it provides a platform for community members to make inputs into programming which specifically addresses their aspirations, perceptions and desires.

Below are excerpts from the focus group discussion that support the use of local radio.

> *"For me, I use not to hear anything from VRA / NEDCO. The only time I hear from the company is when they started giving their announcements in the community radio about routine maintenance work*

> *and the installation of smart pre-paid meters. Sometimes ago, you only hear from the commercial radio that they are about to cut supply of power in your area and its late. In fact, sometimes by the time you hear the announcement, you might have been in darkness. This is the only times I hear anything about the company in a community radio and it is fantastic".*
>
> *(Participant in Focus Group, Twimia / Koase, December 21, 2021)*

> *"We do remember that the last time we heard from anyone in the company was three weeks ago in a community radio and it was about how to conserve current. The power is not stable, sometimes for weeks and several months but they don't tell you anything. The person who* sells *prepaid credit 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, we don't hear from VRA / NEDCO always and they don't hear from us".*
>
> *(Participant in the Focus Group, Tuobodom / Adantaasi 20th December, 2021).*

The findings from the focus group discussion in the two communities show that consumers prefer to listen to Community radio to that of commercial radio on VRA / NEDCO issues. This therefore buttressed the findings from Kent and Taylor (2002) that Organizations must dialogue face – to -face with their publics with open mind, honesty, concern for audience and encouragement of free expression from the publics to enhance organizational growth.

The findings also confirm the dialogic communication theory philosophy which states that "dialogue" is any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinion by parties in a relationship, which involves ethically based give – and - take process.

4.1.2 Asare Television network

During the focus group discussion, the findings from the participants in the two communities revealed that one important communication approach that can be used to communicate to the public to improve their awareness on VRA / NEDCO service delivery is the use of local Television network. It was revealed from the discussion that the local digital television stations have the enormous potential to promote the advancement of community development through public participation and involvement in decision-making. It has the greatest of impact of influencing the people and as such has the ability to shape values, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of a community or society both in positive and negative ways. The local digital Television stations based in Techiman here are powerful, prestigious and empowering tool that can be used to raise awareness about VRA / NEDCO to residents and generate discussion and increase knowledge of VRA / NEDCO policies or programs within the Techiman operational area.

That it is an important channel for advocacy and for drawing policy-makers' attention to the potential of local needs and for promoting the inclusion of suitable strategies on development programs.

The consumers want VRA / NEDCO to channel their announcement, education, sensitization and engagement to Asare Television networks within the Techiman operational area. The local Television network communication involves the use of traditional media platforms such as Rock TV to pass information to a large audience. If

VRA / NEDCO wishes to announce an annual general meeting to its stakeholders / consumers or launch a new product it should use the local television network. For example, A participant in the Tuobodom / Adantasi focus group said that the VRA / NEDCO's area Manager has started providing a media briefing or public address in such TV stations to its target audience within the catchment area which is a good initiative because the announcement is done in the native language which enhances easy understanding on the part of the rural dwellers.

> *"We heard that the VRA / NEDCO Management has been on the local Television stations based in Techiman here to address issues affecting the consumers which is a step in the right direction"*
>
> *(Participant in a Focused Group, Twimia / Koase. December 21, 2021)*
>
> *"We were told that the VRA / NEDCO disconnection team was at Offuman information centre last week to educate and sensitize their consumers on issues of illegal connection, high service charge, the replacement of old credit meters with digital smart prepaid meters and the consumers were appreciative of that"*
>
> *(A participant in a focus group, Tuobodom / Adantasi, December, 2021)*

The findings revealed that the consumers are comfortable watching and listening to the Asare digital Television network and they are much appreciated to watching VRA / NEDCO's area manager on the TV station sensitizing consumers about their policies, programs and initiatives in the native language. This reinforced the assertion of Lammers (2011) research findings on 'How institutions communicate': institutional message communicates the core meaning of an organization to its internal and external audiences, by aligning an organization's activities and image with rules established in its environment. This confirms the dialogic communication theory setting which states that dialogue forms an integral part of a number of theoretical and conceptual perspectives in public relations functions of an organization.

4.1.3 Letters

Based on the in – depth interview with the Customer Relations Officer of VRA / NEDCO and the Public Relations Officer of PURC, the findings revealed that formal letters act as official methods of communication as they are often ascribed with signatures and they allow you to communicate with your colleagues, bosses, other companies or those in authoritative position like government representatives. Sending formal letters can show your professionalism and seriousness with regards to the working relationship as it takes more efforts to write formal letters. According to the Customer's relations Officer of VRA / NEDCO limited, that the company always uses written channels of communication which include electronic and paper forms of communication, where messages are written. Examples of written communications are: text messages, memos, letters, emails, documents, reports, spreadsheets, and newsletters to communicate officially with PURC and Energy commission because they are the regulators.

Throwing more light on this response, the Customer service officer mentioned that:

> *"Because VRA / NEDCO publics are at different places 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 or Energy commission, our regulators, we usually use letters, telephone calls, meetings or workshops. On the other hand, if we are communicating with communities affected by our operations or we want to educate the general*

public we use the traditional media like the Community radio and the Local Television network stations and public fora as well as community engagement|" (Direct quotation from Customer Service Officer of VRA / NEDCO).

"VRA / NEDCO has been communicating with PURC through Letters, quarterly review meetings, phone calls, seminars and workshops…"
(PURC'S PRO at Sunyani, December,21,2021).

The findings revealed that formal letters act as official method of communication between organizations, for instance, a subordinate to a superior, among colleagues, to Bosses and to those in authoritative position like government representatives. This therefore buttressed the findings of Lammers (2011), that organizational messages may be seen as elements of discourse, "the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing" (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, &Putnam, 2004,). It is in line with the dialogic communication theory's perspective which states that dialogue is a means of attaining mutually beneficial relationship between organizations and their publics to enhance quality service delivery.

4.1.4 Information van

The Public Relations Officer of PURC and the participants in a focus group discussion indicated that VRA / NEDCO occasionally employed the services of a moving truck with speakers on top with an announcer inside giving the announcement to it consumers about their operations. These vans used commentators who use the language the residents are mostly familiar with or the language of the native speaker.

The findings revealed that the information van is used to make announcement and people acted upon hearing the information from the van. VRA / NEDCO occasionally employ the services of the van to make announcement in some communities about their policy initiatives or power outages or routine maintenance work.

The extract below is an indicative.

> *"Sometimes the VRA / NEDCO Officials normally seek the services of information service department's van to educate the inhabitants in the villages about VRA /NEDCO digital smart pre-paid meters billing system and the issue of high service charges…"*
>
> *(PURC Official at Sunyani)*

The findings revealed that the information van used commentators who are native speakers, so when they speak the consumers easily understand the announcement and acted upon hearing the information from the van on VRA / NEDCO issues. This therefore buttressed the findings of Lammers (2011) that we can identify strong institutional messages as those that encumber responses from receivers, whether that means complying with a law, rule, or code, or recognising the compliance of another, as in acknowledging the accreditation of an organization. This study also confirms the dialogic communication theory's philosophy which states that 'dialogue' is any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions by two or more parties in a relationship, which is ethically based in a give – and – take process.

4.1.5 Community engagement

Based on the focus group discussion with participants, the findings revealed that Community engagement adopted by VRA / NEDCO is the best way of working collaboratively with the consumers which will enhance quality service delivery and also build the trust and confidence between VRA / NEDCO and the ordinary consumer.

Community engagement according to a participant at Tuobodom / Adantaasi during a focus group discussion will promotes sustainable decision by recognizing and communicating the needs and interest of all participants – including decision makers. The findings further revealed that VRA / NEDCO Company should frequently engaged communities in it operational area on new policies and projects it wanted to embark on.

The extract below explains more.

> *"Last three weeks, I came from farm and I was*
> *told that VRA / NEDCO Officials came to the Tuobodom Chief's*
> *Palace to sensitize residents on the installation and usage of the digital smart*
> *Pre- paid meters…"*
> *(Participant in a Focus Group discussion at Tuobodom / Adantasi)*

The findings revealed that stakeholder / consumers' engagement is the best and effective communication strategies to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and engaged.

Working collaboratively with consumers will promotes trust and confidence between the consumer and VRA / NEDCO. It will again lead to addressing the concerns of consumers which is key to the successful implementation and sustainability of VRA / NEDCO's programs and projects. This therefore buttressed the findings of Kent and Taylor (2002), which suggest that dialogue is intimately connected with concepts such as honesty, concerns for audience, genuineness, open – minded, empathy, no manipulative intentions and encouragement of free expression. The findings also confirm the dialogic communication theory's setting which states that dialogue is not an end in itself, rather a means to an end in the communication roles of an organization

(Kent & Taylor, 2002). What dialogue does is place emphases on the relationship – building between an organization and its publics.

4.1.6 Information centres

The participants in a focus group discussion elaborated the significance of the information centres and commended VRA / NEDCO for adopting it use to disseminate information to their consumers.

The findings in the in - depth interview and the focus group discussion revealed that Information centre is a centre designed specifically for storing, processing and retrieving information for dissemination at regular interval on demand or selectively according to express needs of users. The purpose is to provide communities with development and real – time information in areas of health, VRA / NEDCO matters, local governance, environment, agriculture, and many others. VRA / NEDCO should constantly engaged rural communities on their policies initiatives through information centres located in the various communities within its catchment area. A typical example is the Tuobodom information centre and Offuman information centre.

> *"We sometimes use the Tuobodom information centre*
> *and the Offuman information centre to sensitize our consumers*
> *about tariff increase, the billing system of the smart pre-paid*
> *Meters and other policy initiatives"*
> *(VRA / NEDCO Respondent, December, 19, 2021)*

The findings revealed that VRA / NEDCO should continue to use information centres to address the issues of consumers and also sensitize them on pertinent issues regarding the organization and its publics. This will enable persons without radio or Television sets to hear about the happenings in VRA / NEDCO. This therefore reinforced the findings of Gonzalez et al (2012) which focused on communication as a transparency and accountability strategy in supreme audit institutions (SAIs), they emphasize the fact that these organizations should base their strategy on three fundamental props – target audience, messages and channel of communication. The study revealed that the German SAI has set its communication objectives as to satisfy stakeholder in information needs, build a reputation for integrity and excellence and enhance audit impact. The study confirms the relevance theory philosophy as explain by Grunig et al According to Grunig et al., (2002), an organization whose public relations function adheres to the empowerment principle can easily balance its needs with that of the publics. This function helps organizations to effectively manage issues and minimize crises.

RQ 4. 2. How are the Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations applied in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics?

The results obtained from the in- depth interview and the Focus group discussion were analysed to ascertain how the Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations are applied in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics.

4.2.1 The theme of press agentry

Rawlins and Stoker (1999) refer to the press agentry model as publicity and assert that its main goal is to change the attitudes and opinions of the public to align them to those of the organization. This model is mainly based on propaganda that has the elements of exaggerations, half-truths, and lies. This relies on advertising and public persuasion to capture the feelings of the public and ensure that they buy into the ideas of the organization.

The principal goal is to generate publicity (and not even necessarily positive publicity) to change audience behaviour, with no intention of being responsive.

Press agentry, with regards to the research findings simply means the ability of VRA NEDCO to change the attitudes and opinion of their consumers to be in line with the organization's philosophy, vision and mission. This is done base on propaganda on the part of VRA / NEDCO which contain elements of over exaggeration, half-truth and full of lies with the intention of persuading the consumers to come into terms with the public organization. This means that VRA /NEDCO and the consumers must have a sense of information exchange and interchange as well as negotiating with each other in order for the consumer to buy the idea of the organization to enhance quality service delivery.

From the answers gathered, it appears the press agentry model could not be applied between VRA / NEDCO and its publics, especially the consumers. The officials from VRA / NEDCO does not embark on advertising and public persuasion of their organization to capture the feeling of their publics simply because they feel that they are the only energy producing company in the middle belt and the northern part of the country, so there is no competition, they have monopolised the entire area. Responses from participants revealed that consumers hardly got information from the organization or knew what the company was up to. The information they got usually centred on tariff increase and even that was usually decisions already taken by the company and thrown out in the commercial media with no recourse to what consumers' opinions were about it. Consumers are not consulted before such conclusions are drawn by the organization.

The study revealed that the press agentry model of relevance theory of public relations is not applicable in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics. Consumers did not have the sense of duty to give feedback to the company. In instances where they send response, it is done unwillingly because consumers feel the company has no respects for their worries.

The study revealed that VRA / NEDCO Company's communication with the PURC, the economic regulator is also poor even though they are bound by law to constantly liaise with them. The company is using the Top – bottom approach in passing information instead of the bottom – up approach.

The absence of Grunig and Hunt's press agentry model of public relations can be detected in the responses below:

> *"I can say that VRA / NEDCO Company does not communicate With its publics quiet well. When they do, sometimes they are either under pressure from the PURC, or the sector Ministry or perhaps the Parliamentary select committee on mines and energy. 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 light or interruption in power supply, you would realize that before they come out to alert the public the power outage may have already taken place without any provision for a contingency plan".*
>
> *(PURC Official, Thursday December 18, 2021)*

> *"For me, I don't hear anything from VRA / NEDCO. The only time I hear from the company is when they bring me light bill for electricity 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 electricity would have been off already. These are the only times I hear anything about the company."*
>
> *(Participant in Focus Group, Twimia / Koase, 21st December, 2021)*

The findings revealed that, press agentry model of relevance theory of public relations is minimal in the communication process between VRA / NEDCO and its publics perhaps because the company has no competitor and also perhaps because electricity has no substitute. VRA / NEDCO is the only power supplier organization in the northern part of Ghana. Customers are obliged 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 centre' in their operations. The authors are of the view that organizations must learn to listen to their publics because it is a crucial feature of providing utility services and quality service delivery to the publics, even where there is no apparent competition. The findings of the study is in contrast with Cutlip and Broom (2006), they see public relations as a systematic effort to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics. The findings is also against the excellent theorists such as Grunig. L. A. Grunig et al(2002) philosophy, that effective public relations should focus on building relationship with strategic publics through communication as such relations can be sustained even during crisis.

4.2.2 The theme of public information

This model is based on one-way communication but with emphasis on truth and accuracy (Smith, 2002). It is also based on the ethics of providing objective information perceived to be needed by the public (Rawlins & Stoker, 1999). The public information model moves away from the manipulative tactics used in the press agentry model and presents more accurate information. However, the communication pattern is still one-way. Practitioners do not conduct audience analysis research to guide their strategies or tactics. Some press releases and newsletters are created based on this model, when audiences are not necessarily targeted or researched beforehand. This model is fashioned after early 20th century journalism; the primary vehicle for this model is distribution through the mainstream media.

Carlsmith & Railsback, (2001) noted that, Public organizations public relations used to be a one-way communication street which aimed at getting positive image about the organization. These scholars suggested a reverse situation where organization public relations establish and promote partnerships within the organization community. According to them an effective public relation must create value by giving the public the information they need. It must also ask for information just as much as it transmits it. The organization through its public relations unit must try to understand the needs and desires of their publics and helps them (the public) understand the entire organizational process and how it will contribute to bringing out the best from the staff. This will create positive communication, builds confidence in the organization system and its goals and establishes avenues of open communication Carlsmith & Railsback, (2001).

Belch and Belch (2001) echoed that public relations uses a variety of tools including special publications, participation in community activities, fund-raising, and sponsorships of special events, advertising and public affairs activities to enhance an organizational image. The tools are described as controlled (e.g. House ads, Public service ads, Publications, Photographs, Displays, exhibits), uncontrolled (e.g. News release, Press conferences, Talk and interview shows, Public service announcements) and semi-controlled (e.g. Electronic communication (web sites, chat rooms), Special events and sponsorship, Word of mouth)

The research findings revealed that VRA / NEDCO is applying the one-way public information model in dealing with it publics. Because this model does not consider information about the public to be essential in constructing messages and press releases.

The findings revealed that VRA / NEDCO's customer service officer applied this one-way public communication model in their day to day interaction with the publics. Media relations emerged as the dominant role this communicator performed. The over emphasis on media relations made the customer relations manager of VRA / NEDCO mostly applied one-way public information model in their communication with the consumers.

The quotations presented below support the assertion by the researcher that customer service officer of VRA /NEDCO applied one- way public information to the consumers.

> *"…. for instance, PURC was told that VRA / NEDCO wanted to introduce prepaid meters in their Techiman operational areas. Although I believed it was a good initiative, I thought the timing was wrong and consumers had not been engaged on it. The PURC was not even aware that VRA / NEDCO*

Company wanted to take such initiative with such alacrity. I was not surprised that consumers criticized the idea so heavily on radio. At least when it comes to tariff adjustments, they do consult with us but they did not hide to our advice on the prepaid metering issue."

(PURC respondent, Thursday December 21, 2021)

"…we do not have a toll-free line but our PRO do goes to Akina radio to educate our cherish consumers about our latest policy initiatives.

Radio hour is meant for customers to get to us with their concerns.

We receive feedback on so many issues, almost about every aspect of the company: light off, meter reading challenges, complains about increase in tariffs and many more".

(VRA / NEDCO Official Friday, December19, 2021)

The study therefore concludes that the one- way public information model propounded by Grunig and Hunt (1984) has a lot of relevancies. The relevance of the model according to the findings is revealed in the use of brochures to pass the information on the activities VRA / NEDCO is involved in, maps that give the direction of the organisation, and other publications to pass the information on the occurrences in the organisations. Furthermore, the application of the model is seen in the issue of press releases when the organisation wish to pass a certain message, clarification, or explanation of the issues affecting it.

The revelation suggests that VRA / NEDCO were still adhering to the age old practice of public relations that Coman. M. (2003) identified in the former soviet bloc. This goes against the argument of the excellent theorists such as Grunig. L.A.Grunig et al (2002) that effective public relations should focus on building relationship with strategic publics through communication as such relations can be sustained even during crisis.

4.2.3 The theme of two- way asymmetrical model of public relations

This model is based on the reliance on feedback as a way of improving the level of the messages passed by an organization (Smith, 2002). It relies on listening to the public to establish better strategic communication through strategic and persuasive messages. The effectiveness of the model is based on research to change the perspectives of the public and align them to the objectives of the organization.

The model is best applied in financial institutions such as banks due to the need for two-way communication between various stakeholders such as the shareholders, investors, and the general public (Marin, 2007). Banks offer different products and services that are meant to target a specific audience that provides feedback on the same. They also enhance their services through the incorporation of technology such as e-banking, automated machines, money transfer services among others. Further, the management strategies of these organizations are based on adequate research of the market on what is best for them based on feedback from the consumers.

Pirozez & Heskova, (2003) claim that public relations practice in public organizations used to be one-way asymmetrical communication process. These scholars posit that communication practitioners in those days were much concerned with providing accurate but favourable information about their organisations to their publics. Consequently, the major communicator roles performed by the practitioners were media relations

The quotation below can attest to a Customer service officer of VRA / NEDCO using the two- way asymmetrical model of public relations in communicating with their public.

"VRA / NEDCO has being truthful and honest
and helpful to this community. We
have sympathy on you the consumers for
the number of times you have slept in darkness and the
highest service charges you experience nowadays.
The organization has come to this community to sensitize …"
(A participant in a Focus group discussion at Twimia / Koase, 20th Dec, 2021)

4.2.4 The Theme of Two – way Symmetrical Model of public relations

This model is based on the advocacy for the flow of information that is equal and free between the organization and the public (Moss et al., 1996). The model aims at mutual understanding and high degrees of responsiveness coupled with the change of attitudes for both the public and the organization. It relies on feedback for altering the opinions of the public (Smith, 2002).

The model is most applicable in non-profit making organizations (Slater, 2002). This is revealed in the mission, vision, and objectives of the organizations which are based on fulfilling a certain purpose for the community. These organizations are not established for profit-making but rather for providing services for the benefit of the community. This requires adequate research for them to be engaged in activities that benefit the people. They also require reliance on the community they serve since the public has to give information on what it needs. This involves training and educating the public to align its objectives with the organization's objectives.

According to Cutlip and Broom (2006), public relations is a systematic effort to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics. Over the years, public relations have been playing very important communication roles in society.

The findings revealed that VRA / NEDCO was minimally applying the two – way symmetrical model in communicating with its publics. This is also against the philosophy of excellence theory propounded by Grunig and Hunt (1984). According to the excellence theorists, modern communication activities should be based on two-way symmetrical communication since it leads to a better and long-term relationship between the organization and its publics. Two-way symmetrical strategies are perceived as balancing the interests of both publics and the organization and ethical in nature. In other words, two-way symmetrical communication changes not only the behavior of the publics but also of the organization.

Among the four models of public relations, Grunig et al., (2002) claim that excellent public relations units utilize the two-way symmetrical communication model instead of the public information, press agentry, or the two-way asymmetrical models. The two-way symmetrical model uses research to facilitate mutual understanding and communication. According to these scholars, this model helps PR managers to adjust the behaviours of dominant coalitions and bring the public and dominant coalition closer together.

The following excerpts below can attest to the fact:

> *"At least when it comes to tariff adjustments, they consult with us and they did seek our views and we advised them to engage the consumers on the prepaid metering issue but it seems they went ahead with installation without sensitization…"*
>
> *(PURC Official, Thursday December 18, 2021)*

Company consults with them on tariff adjustment issues and issues from the consumers

The following quotation is indicative of that:

> *"At least when it comes to tariff adjustments,*
>
> *They do consult with us but they did not listen to our advice on the prepaid meters installation issue and the concerns from the consumers…".*
>
> *(PURC Official, Thursday December 18, 2021)*

Based on the above findings and discussions, the study revealed that among the four models of Grunig and Hunt (1984), only the public information model of public relations was fully applied by the Customer Service officer of VRA / NEDCO in his interaction with the publics. However, the Press agentry model, the two- way Asymmetrical model and the two- way symmetrical models were minimally applied in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its consumers. This also goes against Grunig and Hunt (1984) suggestion that public organizations should incorporate dialogue into their communication with their publics.

Findings from the study reveal that, VRA / NEDCO does not actively engage its public in dialogue; that the company does not engage or dialogue with its publics in its policies initiatives. It is therefore conclusive that only one out of four models of public relations as espoused by Grunig and Hunt (1984) is applied in the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics. Two-way symmetrical model can be ensured if the parties engage each other and take decisions that bind each other .What the two-way symmetrical model of public relations does is to place emphasis on the relationship – building and research between an organization and its publics. The research findings shows that VRA / NEDCO is not willing to make dialogic commitment to its consumers.

4.3 RQ.3 What are the perspectives of the consumers on how communication between VRA / NEDCO limited and its publics can be improved to enhance quality service delivery?

The findings revealed that consumers in the two communities now have sophisticated media preferences with a lot of diversity, accordingly, to be able to meet and engage with them, VRA / NEDCO must use these channels and messages to the preference of consumers. The study established that the consumers preferred channel of communication which are very prompt and smart. When VRA / NEDCO uses those channels to communicate to its consumers it can enhance sufficient flow of information between both parties and to also enable consumers have meaningful access to the company to channel their concerns across. Participants mentioned preferred media and channels to be considered by VRA / NEDCO in communicating with its publics.

Data obtained have been reduced into themes. The study revealed five themes as preferred media and channels to be considered by VRA / NEDCO in communicating with its publics. The qualitative findings revealed, community – based VRA / NEDCO customer service centre, Community radio stations, Community engagement /

sensitization, alternative channels, and active usage of the company's website as the preferred channels the consumers want the organization to rely on in order to have a meaningful interaction with its consumers.

4.3.1 Community – based VRA / NEDCO customer service centre.

The findings established that consumers prefer community – based VRA / NEDCO customer service centres to serve as the first point of call to VRA / NEDCO Company when it is entering every community. The customers' service centres can also help to collate the concerns of consumers to the company and the company can as well through these customer service centres reach the consumers with its new policies and programmes to enhance quality service delivery.

The quotations below capture participants' preferred media:

> *"In an area like this, it will be better for them to have local Board/ Committee* members *so that the company can pass on information through them to us and we can also send our concerns through them or they should create a WhatsApp platform and other social media platforms."*
>
> *(Participant in the Focus Group, Twimia / Koase 1, 20th December, 2021*)

The findings revealed that consumers want VRA / NEDCO to established VRA / NEDCO boards / committees in every community within its operational area to serve as a first point of call when the organization want to share information or engage the consumers or when the consumers want to express their views about the services of the organization, they should channel it through the VRA / NEDCO customer service centres in their communities. This buttressed the findings of Mehta and Xavier (2009) which states that the purpose of an organization is to create and achieve goals that will benefit both the organization and the environment it operates in. Such goals can consist of growth in profits and sales, gaining investor confidence / support, improving employment ratio, creating new products, or a lower carbon footprint (2009,) They suggest the need for communication to bring about understanding, development, profit, acquisition of vast knowledge, investor confidence and cooperation between an organization and its publics to enhance quality service delivery. The findings of the study are in line with the relevance theory philosophy, according to the excellence theorist perspective, communication activities should be based on two-way symmetrical communication since it leads to a better and long-term relationship between the organization and its publics. Two-way symmetrical strategies are perceived as balancing the interests of both publics and the organization and ethical in nature. In other words, two-way symmetrical communication changes not only the behaviour of the publics but also of the organization.

4.3.2 Community Radio stations.

The participants in the focus group discussion in the two communities said that they would like VRA / NEDCO to channel their programmes, policy initiatives and announcements to the community radio stations within their catchment area so that consumers can easily hear about happenings in the company. The community radio provides real time information and the most recent updates to the listeners and the announcers speak the language of the natives.

> *"People in this area usually listen to the radio (Akina FM and Gaskia FM) stations here because they speak our language. So, if they send information to these stations, we will hear it".*
>
> *(Participant in the Focus Group, Twimia / Koase, 20th December, 2021)*

In a nutshell, the finding revealed that Community radio was the preferred medium of communication for consumers over the commercial media. Aside the fact that Community radio is very cheap and fast, it is also very mobile which allows people to listen on the go. Again, most Community radio stations review the various newspapers every morning which allows listeners to stay on top of issues. Community Radio also provides the opportunity for listeners to phone-in to programs to ask questions or make contributions to the discussion, providing mechanisms for feedback from listeners and vice versa. Community Radio can, therefore, be said to be a rich medium for VRA /NEDCO to communicate with its external publics, because out of the twenty-four (24) participants and respondents who participated in the study, eleven (11) of them were adults between the ages of 40 -60 years who wants VRA / NEDCO to always educate them on their policy initiatives and again engage them on community radio talk show about latest development in the organization. This therefore reinforced the findings of Cutlip et al (2000) which states that there is the need for an effective two – way symmetrical communication with inbuilt feedback mechanism between an organization and their publics to ensure the continuous growth of the organization. The study findings confirm the relevance theory perspectives which states that communication activities should be based on two-way symmetrical communication since it leads to a better and long-term relationship between the organization and its publics. Two-way symmetrical strategies are perceived as balancing the interests of both publics and the organization and ethical in nature. In other words, two-way symmetrical communication changes not only the behaviour of the publics but also of the organization.

4.3.3 Community engagement / Sensitization.

The research findings revealed that participants preferred other medium of communication, such as community engagement / sensitization otherwise known as Face – to – face meetings. The consumers prefer VRA / NEDCO Company to always engage / sensitize consumers during community durbars, festivals, and many more. This will give VRA / NEDCO the platform to sensitize / engage consumers on VRA / NEDCO policies initiatives and programmes.

The extract below throws more light.

> *"… about exorbitant service charge and the installation of smart pre – paid meters.* Addressing *the concerns of consumers or stakeholders is key to the successful implementation of VRA / NEDCO Company policies and programmes.*
>
> *(Participants in a Focus group discussion, Twimia / Koase, 20th December, 2021)*

The findings revealed that VRA / NEDCO should use the right communication strategies to implement their policies and programs successfully. Constant stakeholder engagement is one of the most critical communication strategies to use in implementing a relevant program or policy. This therefore buttressed the findings of (Boins & Christensen, 2008) which states that it is very important that organizations engage in communication with their publics so as to position themselves for changes which may occur within their environments. This also confirms the dialogic communication theory philosophy which states that the "focus of this study is not to dwell on communicative aspects of an organization using the internet, rather the face – to – face and other mediated alternatives in the light of the tenets within the dialogic communication theory spearheaded by Kent and Taylor (2002)

4.3.4 The use of Alternative channels

The findings revealed that participants have different communication preferences, so it is important to use variety of channels to reach them. These channels may include: public information vans, community information centres, public durbar, public fora, public education, WhatsApp platforms, entertainment related education such as drama and the internet could help improve information flow between VRA / NEDCO Company and its publics to enhance quality service delivery in the energy sector in the Techiman operational area of the country.

> *"I believe VRA / NEDCO can send bulk messages to consumers just like what the telecommunication companies do or they should create a WhatsApp platform. These days they announce all sorts of information that we need. VRA / NEDCO should contact the telecoms for assistance. For instance, if I get a message that they is going to be light off, I will also tell people around me and I believe a lot of people will hear it".*

(Participant in a Focus group, Tuobodom / Adantasi, 21st December, 2021)

The findings revealed that the Internet was one of the most preferred mediums for consumers, most especially the youth in the Techiman operational area because out of the twenty - two (22) participants, eight (8) of them were between the ages of 18 – 35 who want VRA /NEDCO to publish their information on the organization's website or the internet. This supports the finding made by other scholars that the internet has been identified as a useful tool to assess public organizations' openness and to improve their transparency and accountability (Druke, 2007; La Porte, Demchack, & De Jong, 2002). It is therefore, incumbent upon the organizations to take full benefit of the internet and the chances it brings in order to improve upon its communication with its stakeholders / publics, especially the youth, as evidenced by the findings of Gonzalez et al (2012), and corroborated by Callison (2003), that most organisations are now making use of the internet to ensure effective communication with their publics. They should continually modernise the information in the company's website.

Also, as noted by Lancaster (2005), that public organizations that use television as a medium of communication stand the chance of achieving a high level of impact on their customers or public due to its visual nature. The author observed that during a television program, individual's explanation regarding issues relating to their companies could be supported with either products or footage of the company's participation in a sponsored event. This, the author argued, has the ability to erase any erroneous impressions about such companies. Lancaster (2005) further mentions exhibition as one of the potential tools for creating the opportunity for public relations officers as well as marketing communicators to come into face-to-face contact with desired targeted audience or visitors. The author claimed that since visitors treat exhibitions as a shop window and an opportunity to gather technical information, the public relations officer would have the opportunity to explain and provide all the necessary information that can inspire confidence and trust in an organization by the customer or the targeted public and build relationship.

4.3.5 Active use of the company's website.

The research findings revealed that VRA / NEDCO as an organization has an inactive website, they were no useful information in the organization's website, the participants said that what was there was only about the company's history. This is based on the findings during a focus group discussion with participants in the two communities.

The extract below supports that.

> *"VRA / NEDCO should constantly update their organizations*
>
> *Website / contact lines to meet the demands of their cherish consumers"*
>
> *(A participant in a Focus group discussion, Tuobodom / Adantasi, December 21, 2021)*

The findings revealed that VRA / NEDCO Organization's website was not having latest information about the firm, the consumers most especially the youth therefore want the organization to constantly update the information in their website in order to keep their consumers abreast with the happenings in the organization. This therefore reinforce the findings of Lammers (2011) which states that organizational message communicates the core meaning of an organization to its internal and external audiences. In addition, the organizational message is understood as aligning an organization's activities and image with rules established in its environment. The findings confirm the system theory philosophy as explain by Nieman (2005), it provides a model for seeing interrelationships, rather than focusing on individual factors. He further argues that a primary aim of the system theory is to integrate accumulated knowledge into a clear and realistic framework. This suggests the need for communication to bring about understanding and cooperation between an organization and its publics to enhance quality service delivery. Kent and Taylor (2002) recognized that organizations can use their web sites as a platform to engage their publics.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, data gathered on communication between VRA / NEDCO and its external publics were presented and analysed. The scope of the chapter, therefore, included the various channels through which the communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics is done, whether participants and respondents have their most desired mediums, and whether or not participants and respondents have difficulties accessing information from the organization. The study also established that the principle of mutuality, the principle of propinquity, the principle of empathy and the principle of commitment, as control mechanisms to facilitate dialogic communication between public organizations and their publics to enhance quality and efficient service delivery was absent. In order to establish participants' views on how they see VRA / NEDCO communication with its external publics, participants' ratings of the services of the organization and how often they wanted to hear from the organization, among other issues, were also presented and analysed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter provides the summary of the findings and spell out not only the limitations of the study but also, measures that can be put in place to help improve upon communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics to enhance quality service delivery

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

In terms of the channels VRA / NEDCO used in communicating with its external publics, VRA / NEDCO limited said it had been using different channels including: the traditional media (radio, television, and newspapers), outreach, fliers/newsletters, internet, and even persons associated with the organization to convey information and other policy initiatives to the he public. The company again preaches that the content of the messages they usually send to the customers is about operational challenges, erratic power supply, low voltage and tariff adjustment. The organization went further to preach that it has a robust feedback system in which their publics express their concerns to the company 'without any stress' notably, office line and contacts of individual staff. However, most of the participants and the general public did not share that opinion, according to the consumers, communication from VRA / NEDCO is often absent or very late. Consumers receive no routine update of information from VRA / NEDCO, with the exception of when the company wants to embark on routine maintenance or disconnection exercise which in any event comes late rather than prior to the said exercise.

Although VRA / NEDCO has a feedback system, complaints lodged by consumers often do not receive quick response from the organization.

The findings, therefore, emphasise the fact that VRA / NEDCO was not using the preferred communication channels to help the publics to access information and get prompt feedback on the organization's work. The study also finds that the Company had been practising a close system, it does not consult its external publics to access information on its work through radio, television, office line among others, with much ease. In addition, it emerges that the Company did not provides prompt feedback to persons who file complaints with it, making most participants give the Company's services low ratings. This, therefore, affirms the view held by most scholars discussed earlier that when institutions do not communicate with their publics, it leads to lack of trust, ambiguity and uncertainty in the minds of their publics, and this culminates in the (organisations) losing the support and confidence of the publics.

Assessment based on Grunig and Hunt's models of public relations, found that, three out of the four models of public relations were minimally used in VRA / NEDCO communication with its publics. The three models of public relations are press agentry two-way asymmetrical model and two- way symmetry. However found specifically between the communications processes between VRA / NEDCO and the PURC. VRA / NEDCO consults the PURC on tariff proposals and they also address complaints receive from PURC. Such consultations take the form of negotiations for the benefit of all involved.

VRA / NEDCO is bound by law to consult the PURC on tariff issues and to address complainants' issues, For improvement in information flow, the study found that consumers preferred the use of community radio stations, Local Television networks, and bulk text messages, what Sapp platforms, public education, community engagement, the company's website, internet and public forums as against the company's regular use of the commercial media (radio, television and print media).

Another important finding which the research brings to the public domain is the fact that majority of the participants believed that it was very difficult to access information from VRA / NEDCO, thereby making it as an institution which does not practice an open system. This, therefore, goes against Littlejohn's (1996) assertion that open systems allow information to flow both within and without, unlike closed systems which do not allow much information to move in or out of the environment.

It can, consequently, be debated that since VRA / NEDCO was not open to the public, it has not become more accountable, vindicated its existence, and that formed an essential component of its independence and efficiency, and also brought about measures to assess the impact of the Company's work, as Gonzalez, Lopez and Garcia (2008) put forward.

5.2 Conclusion

The research found out that it is very important for organizations to build dialogic relationships with their publics / stakeholders. Chaman, Miller and Mitchell (2012) explain that electricity is an important commodity, and decisions regarding electricity utility services can be controversial and politically motivated and may be received by publics / consumers with mixed feelings. Nonetheless, the authors are of the view that, the ability of management of a public utility organizations to dialogue and operate an open administration with its customers / consumers could help resolve some of the misunderstanding that may arise. Good communication, as understood by Chaman et al (2012) is critical for public utility organizations, given the varied expectations of their consumers.

Responses gathered by the study indicated that VRA / NEDCO usually used the traditional mass media to disseminate information to its publics. The study also found out that dissemination of the information through the commercial media (Radio and Television) was inadequate as consumers/ publics always complain of not receiving information from the organization at the right time.

With respect to feedback, the study gathered that VRA / NEDCO had contact telephone numbers on their electricity bills as well as personal contacts some staff within the organization for their consumers to use in reaching them. The study however found that VRA / NEDCO Company level of responding to consumers' concerns does not seem to be satisfactory to the consumers.

In evaluating the presence of dialogic communication principles, the study found that, among the two publics studied, that is the VRA/ NEDCO Company's consumers in Twimia / Koase and Tuobodom / Adantasi communities, two principles of the dialogic communication theory and the system theory were present in the communication that occurred between VRA / NEDCO Company limited and the consumers, thus the principle of propinquity and the principle of risk. Suggestions of the principles of relational risk, were present in the communication between the PURC and VRA / NEDCO Company Limited.

The study revealed that communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics does not seems encouraging from the point of view of the consumers. many reforms and initiatives introduced by VRA /NEDCO Company limited, was as a result of their top

– bottom approach in communication and their inability to dialogue with their publics / customers or for them not able to use the participatory communication approach, they are usually faced with fierce opposition by the stakeholders / their publics. The researcher attribute opposition to reforms and initiatives in the electricity sector to lack of dialogic communication, lack of public education, lack of stakeholders engagement and lack of understanding on the part of stakeholders as well as lack of participatory communication (Grieser, Khatib & Dahlan 2007; Chaman, Miller & Mitchel 2012; Fuest & Haffner, 2005).

This study could be concluded that VRA/ NEDCO faces public agitations probably because of its failure to apply the principles of dialogic communication with its publics in its programmes and activities. The study therefore outlined the recommendations below to help the management of the company to step up 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 VRA / NEDCO Company Limited and its publics, most especially the ordinary consumers of electricity:

Community/stakeholder engagement: It is recommended that VRA / NEDCO Company Limited should frequently organize forums to enable them have meaningful face-to-face interactions with their stakeholders / publics. This is based on the findings during a focus group discussion about the channels of communication VRA / NEDCO uses to communicate with its publics. Constant dialogue with them can help create mutual understanding and reduce antagonism between the company and its stakeholders / publics.

Community-based VRA / NEDCO customer information centres: It is recommended that Management of VRA / NEDCO Company Limited should consider the establishment of community-based VRA /NEDCO customer information centres. This is based on the findings during a focus group discussion in the two communities about the channels of communication VRA / NEDCO uses to communicate with it publics. Such boards can serve as first points of call to community members and can also help to collate consumers' concerns for the company and the vice versa.

Alternative Channels: It is again recommended that VRA / NEDCO should consider using alternative channels such as community radio stations, bulk text messaging, community What Sapp platforms, internet, public engagement, company's website and public information vans to reach out to its publics. This is based on the findings in a focus group discussion at the Tuobodom / Adantasi community about the alternative channels VRA / NEDCO can use to communicate with it publics.

VRA / NEDCO Company limited should do more education on their office contact telephone lines found on the receipt and the company should also have a toll-free contact to enable the public easy access to the company.

Active usage of the company's web site: It is recommended that VRA / NEDCO should make the company\s website active. The study revealed that even though VRA / NEDCO Company has a web site, the useful information there was only about the company's history. This is based on the findings during a focus group discussion with participants in the two communities. Kent and Taylor (2002) recognized that organizations can use their web sites as a platform to engage their publics. This study therefore recommends that the company should begin using its web site actively. If the web site is well structured 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) are of the view that, for any approach to dialogue to be effective, it requires commitment on the part of the company/ organization; the organization must accept that there is value in openness and relationship building.

Pohl and Van Deventer (2001), cited in Kent and Taylor, (2002) also suggested that organizations should train persons in charge of the communication function to acquire skills necessary for building a strong interpersonal relationship and problem – solving skills between VRA / NEDCO and its publics.

The study believes that adherence to these recommendations would help VRA / NEDCO Limited to inculcate Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations of relevance theory and dialogic communication theory into its communication and dealings with its publics.

5.4 Limitation of the Study

As a qualitative study, findings of this research could not be generalized to cover other public utility organizations. The study was conducted using only two categories of VRA / NEDCO's publics thus the PURC and the ordinary consumer although the company has a wide range of publics. The study focused on Techiman operational area of VRA / NEDCO, it could not cover the entire five operational areas of VRA / NEDCO in the northern and middle belt of Ghana. The study was time consuming and capital intensive because the researcher had to travel from one place to the other to conduct the research.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

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

Future research could also look at how the other operational areas of VRA / NEDCO in the northern and middle belt of Ghana communicate with their publics.

A further study should be conducted on how Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) communicate with its publics.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE VRA / NEDCO COMPANY LIMITED

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Please Sir, my name is EDMOND CHEWANI BAWAH. I am an MPHIL student at the University of Education, Winneba. School of Communication and Media Studies. As part of the requirements for my course of study, I am conducting a research on the topic "***COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PUBLIC UTILITY ORGANIZATIONS IN GHANA AND THEIR PUBLICS, : A CASE STUDY OF VRA / NEDCO IN TECHIMAN.***" The research is about the communication processes of the organization and the extent to which its publics are informed about the organization's policies, operations and quality service delivery.

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 VRA / NEDCO's publics? (Confirm whether your study area forms part of these).
- How does VRA / NEDCO 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 an organization?
- What issues do the publics you serve mostly communicate to you about?
- Does VRA / NEDCO have a policy/plan on communication?
- When you engage in communication, what are your objectives?
- At what point in its operation does VRA / NEDCO communicate with its publics?

- How often does VRA / NEDCO communicate with its publics?
- Does VRA / NEDCO 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 VRA / NEDCO.
  - Educational background.
  - Age

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC UTILITIES REGULATORY COMMISSION

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Please Sir / Madam, my name is EDMOND CHEWANI BAWAH. I am an MPHIL student from the University of Education, Winneba. School of Communication and Media Studies. As part of the requirements for my course of study, I am conducting a research on the topic "***COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PUBLIC UTILITY ORGANIZATIONS IN GHANA ANDTHEIR PUBLICS, : A CASE STUDY OF VRA / NEDCO IN TECHIMAN.***" The research is about the communication processes of the organization and the extent to which its publics are informed about the organization's policies, operations and quality service delivery.

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 VRA / NEDCO Company Limited. I would be glad to have a short discussion with you on the topic.

Thank you.

- In your view how does VRA / NEDCO Company Limited communicate with its publics; for instance your organization 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 VRA /NEDCO?
- How does VRA /NEDCO Company Limited respond to issues raised by your Organization?
- How often does VRA /NEDCO give you information about their operations or new initiatives?
- Does PURC face any challenges in communicating your concerns to VRA / NEDCO?
- Do you receive complaints from consumers of VRA / NEDCO with regards to the organization's communication with its publics?
- Any recommendations about how to improve communication between VRA / NEDCO and its publics to enhance quality service delivery?
- 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

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PUBLICS (FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Please Sir / Madam, my name is EDMOND CHEWANI BAWAH. I am an MPHIL student from the University of Education, Winneba .School of Communication and media Studies. As part of the requirements for my course of study, I am conducting a research on the topic "***COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PUBLIC UTILITY ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR PUBLICS, A TOOL TO ENHANCING QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY: A CASE STUDY OF VRA / NEDCO 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 VRA / NEDCO in terms of meter reading, light bills etc.?
- Do you receive information concerning policies, operations and activities of VRA/ NEDCO 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 VRA / NEDCO 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 to improve quality service delivery?