



## COMMUNICATION AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN GHANA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CIVIC EDUCATION AND ITS EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the communication practices of Ghana's National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE). It specifically analysed the policy framework guiding NCCE's external communication, the communication approaches and the implications of the approaches used in the Commission's external communication activities. The study was guided by three theories: Barnlund's transactional model of communication (1970), Media Richness Theory (1984) and Paulo Freire's dialogic model (1993/70) and a qualitative-led case study design with data from semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The study discovered that although communication is indispensable to the effective performance of NCCE's civic education functions, the Commission operates without a codified communication policy. Instead, the Commission's community and media engagement activities thrive on established conventions and ad hoc measures. The crucial implication is that the Commission could be failing in its communication-driven civic education function, requiring the need to develop a proactive communication policy to guide the Commission's civic education activities.

**Keywords:** Ghana's NCCE, Civic education, Civic duties, Organisational communication, External communication practices

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper investigated the strategic and crucial relevance of effective communication in the social impact of state institutions in Ghana. According to Babatunde (2015), communication is particularly germane to the success of state-funded organisations with a social and/or political development orientation. Scholars generally agree that effective communication within and between such organisations and stakeholders serves to enhance collaboration, smooth operations, good image, empowerment and other positive social outcomes (Akomeah, 2015; Bucata and Rizescu, 2017; Canel and Vilma, 2018). Research is conclusive that organisations that lack effective communication have a little chance of succeeding (Akomeah 2015; Campbell, et al., 2020; Mutuku and Mathooko, 2014). Thus, issues relating to organisational communication, particularly in state institutions, compel academic inquiry.

This study focused on the external communication of the National Commission for Civic Education of Ghana (NCCE). The overarching goal is to discover how NCCE interacts with its external stakeholders and the extent to which the Commission deploys effective communication strategies in that regard. The literature is replete with external communication and its dynamics (Kopaneva, 2020; Lehtinen and Aaltonen, 2020; Suh, 2018). According to Oliver (2008), external communication provides an avenue for an organisation to bond with other organisations, groups or individuals and publics. Stuart et al. (2007) also noted that creating and sustaining productive relationship with external publics of an organisation is crucial because it contributes to the achievement of mutually beneficial goals for both the organisation and its publics.

The NCCE is a state-funded institution established and mandated by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana to educate, sensitise and create awareness among Ghanaians on their civic rights and responsibilities and to uphold the nation's democracy and constitutional rule. Chapter 19 of the Constitution (ACT 452) enjoins the institution to offer support to the development of a shared relationship and dialogue between the institution and its publics. The NCCE therefore, occupies a critical place in the governance structure of Ghana's democracy.

Yet, while communication is vital to the education mission of NCCE, it appears very little research has been done on NCCE and its engagements with the people. The few studies on the Commission have focused on its general political roles. For example, Akplu (1986) and others discussed the crucial role the institution plays in inducing adherence to laws, patriotism and informed decisions for national development. Other works have suggested that people's exposure to civic education contributes to their civic awareness and political participation (Adu-Gyamfi and Yartey, 2015; Niworo, et al., 2016). Boampong (2017) investigated audience's opinions about NCCE's activities, whilst others have focused on the Commission's civic awareness activities in schools (Abudu and Fuseini, 2014). This leaves a crucial research gap about how the organisation strategically communicates with its external stakeholders, and the effectiveness and implications of its activities. Addressing this gap could provide an understanding of the extent to which the NCCE is reaching and helping the people, especially

ordinary ones, with socio-political information to enhance effective political participation in the country.

Consequently, riding on a view that communication and education are inextricably linked (Mileti, et al., 2004), this study seeks to address three questions: What communication framework guides NCCE's external communication? What specific communication approaches does NCCE employ in engaging with its external audience? What are the implications of the communication approaches used by NCCE in its external communication activities? Dealing with these questions necessarily implicates organisational and public communications regarding the Commission as an organisation with goals to achieve. The study should ultimately reveal the extent to which the communication architecture of NCCE disposes it to achieve its constitutional mandate.

### **STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND SUBVENTED ORGANISATIONS IN GHANA**

Since this study concerns the communication of a subvented organisation, it is appropriate to situate the discussion within the context of the use of strategic communication in achieving organisational goals in such organisations. Strategic communication here implies a "purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission" (Hallahan et al. 2007: 3). Thorson (2013) adds that strategic communication concerns communicative activities planned and geared towards achieving an organisation's goals. Existing literature supports the view that communicating strategically in a business is a major contributor to the overall success of the organisation (Manning, 2010; Theaker, 2004). Thus, it is important for organisations, whether profit-oriented or not, to be deliberate and intentional in their communication endeavours (Argenti, et al., 2005; Grunig, 2006; Hallahan, et al., 2007).

Consequently, we argue that strategic communication is important especially for subvented organisations such as the NCCE. Subvented organisations may be understood in this study as organisations whose operations are financially and logistically supported by the government of a country or state. Literature (FINEP, 2006; Goh, 2011; Sustainable Development Network Programme, 2011) indicates that the purpose for government's financial support vary from place to place. In Brazil, government supports organisations to enable cost sharing to diminish risks and widen the range of innovative activities of institutions (FINEP 2006). While in Singapore, it is to provide investment of state resources in supporting diverse institutions (Goh, 2011). In Malawi, organisations are funded to produce and deliver goods and services on behalf of government (Sustainable Development Network Programme, 2011). Unlike profit-oriented organisations that are driven by image-building and profit considerations, subvented organisations are driven by their mandate and ethical responsibility to the state and its people. Thus, subvented organisations occupy an important place in the socio-political space of especially societies undergoing democratisation, implying that they require strategic communication to achieve their mandate.

In Ghana, subvented organisations are funded by the Government through taxes (Dartey-Baah, et al., 2011). They are collectively referred to as the *Public Sector* or state sector, their main objective being to assist in the implementation of government policies and to perform other public service functions (Dartey-Baah, et al., 2011: 62). Other such organisations in Ghana include the Electoral Commission, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the Minerals Commission, the Forestry Commission, the Fisheries Commission, the National Council for Higher Education, and the National Media Commission. Literature indicates a dearth of studies on the communication patterns of subvented organisations in Ghana, apart from Akomeah (2015), Ansong (2013) and Kwateng, Osei and Abban (2014), whose studies indicate that communication within subvented organisation in Ghana is generally poor.

### **COMMUNICATION, CIVIC EDUCATION AND SOCIO-POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES**

This study is shaped by a view that communication is intricately linked to education (Mileti, et al., 2004). Communication is not only central to education; it is also vital in any public learning process. The purpose of communication, as cogently expressed by Igoy and Saymo (2004), is to provide discernment, knowledge and build productive relationships. Al-Shuaibi (2014) argued that education implies providing meaningful and understandable information to people leading to knowledge that may empower people to live worthy lives. Thus, it may be argued that education cannot occur outside of language and communication. And the effectiveness of education may also depend on the effectiveness of communication during the learning process. Therefore, a good relationship is needed between communication and education to enhance the civic education functions of NCCE.

Concerning civic education, Dahl (2002) posited that it fosters democratic attitudes, skills and knowledge for people to engage and work on important public issues and make democracy a way of life. To Dahl (2002) and Branson (1998), civic education is an important component of education that prepares citizens for life in the public realm. According to the authors, it enlightens citizens in the analysis of major rules and regulations of society, governance, democracy, public and private institutions for them to find ways to resolve social problems. Rietbergen-McCracken (2008: 1) also averred that civic education provides information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes.

A significant body of literature has linked civic education to political participation (Browne, 2013; Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Levine and Lopez, 2004; Verba et al., 1995). According to Huntington and Nelson (1976: 3), political participation is an “activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making.” Lamprianou (2013) also viewed political participation as public involvement in decision making while Galston (2001) posited that civic knowledge promotes citizens’ participation in political and civic issues as a general trust of public life. Political participation is effective when citizens are well informed about the socio-political affairs of their society. However, one of the critical characteristics of transitional

societies, such as Ghana, is that many inhabitants are ignorant of social and governance issues because of ‘illiteracy’ and lack of empowerment, which explains why NCCE is crucial in the society.

Many studies have suggested that people’s exposure to civic education contributes to enhancing their civic awareness and participation in local and national affairs in Ghana (Abudu and Fuseini, 2014; Adu-Gyamfi and Yartey, 2015; Niworo, et al., 2016). Adu-Gyamfi and Yartey (2015) for example, found that the NCCE contributed to citizens’ peaceful participation in the 2012 General Elections in Ghana. Likewise, Abudu and Fuseini (2016) investigated civic awareness and engagement in Ghana and found that citizenship education correlated with the level of civic awareness and citizens’ engagement in civic activities. Niworo, Gasu and Achanso (2016) also discovered that higher levels of civic education by the NCCE positively related to political participation in the Sissala West District of the Upper East Region of Ghana regarding willingness to vote, join political party, engage in political debates, contest elections, participate in community service and demand accountability from duty bearers. These studies thus concluded that civic education increases knowledge about civic matters as well as in civic participation. This implies that for the NCCE to effectively create space and opportunity for political participation, it must have in place a robust communication system that employs effective communication strategies in its communication activities.

### **NCCE: AN OVERVIEW AND ITS MANDATE**

Article 233 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (1992: 148-149) prescribes the following, among others as functions of the NCCE:

- To create and sustain within the society the awareness of the principles and objectives of the Constitution as the fundamental law of the people of Ghana;
- To educate and encourage the public to defend the Constitution at all times, against all forms of abuse and violation; and
- To formulate, implement and oversee programmes intended to inculcate in the citizens of Ghana awareness of their civic responsibilities and an appreciation of their rights and obligations as free people.

The Commission’s role is synonymous with institutions such as the Civic Education Network Trust (CIVNET) of Zimbabwe, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, National Council for Civic Education in Gambia and so on. These institutions are to promote and sustain democracy and instil in the citizenry the awareness of their rights and obligations through civic education.

Currently, NCCE has district, municipal, metropolitan and regional offices in all two hundred and seventy-five (275) constituencies of Ghana with a total number of 1,342 staff (NCCE, 2019). NCCE is managed by a Chairman, two Deputy Chairpersons and four Commission Members at the head office in Accra. The head office has five main departments that supervise activities and programmes in all NCCE offices nationwide. These include

Programmes, Finance and Account, Human Resource and Administration, Communications and Corporate Affairs and Research (with a Gender and Equality desk) departments. The two departments responsible for the entire communication function of the institution are the Programmes and the Communication and Corporate Affairs Departments. While the Programmes department organises and carries out educational activities, the Communication and Corporate Affairs Departments oversees the overall communication of the Commission.

## **THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

The analysis is guided by three theories: Media richness theory (1984), Barnlund's transactional communication model (1970) and Freire's dialogic model (1993/70). Firstly, the media richness theory developed by Daft and Lengel (1984) (and later with Trevino) suggests that communication channels vary in their effectiveness to resolve ambiguity, negotiate various interpretations and facilitate understanding (see Ishii, et al., 2019: 124). The theory is concerned with determining the most appropriate communication medium for dealing with uncertainty and equivocality (Daft and Lengel, 1984). According to Daft and Lengel (1984, 1986), uncertainty represents the lack of information which can be reduced by providing needed information, whereas equivocality represents confusion or a lack of understanding that can be reduced by the richness or quality of information (Daft, et al., 1987). The theory acknowledges the 'richness' of a medium based on some key indicators such as:

- a. Immediate feedback, that is, the immediacy of a response to information being communicated.
- b. Multiple cues, that is, the ability of a medium to send multiple signals (physical presence, voice inflection, body gestures, words, et cetera simultaneously to a number of people when a message is being communicated.
- c. Language variety, that is, the use of language variety and symbols in a general communication.

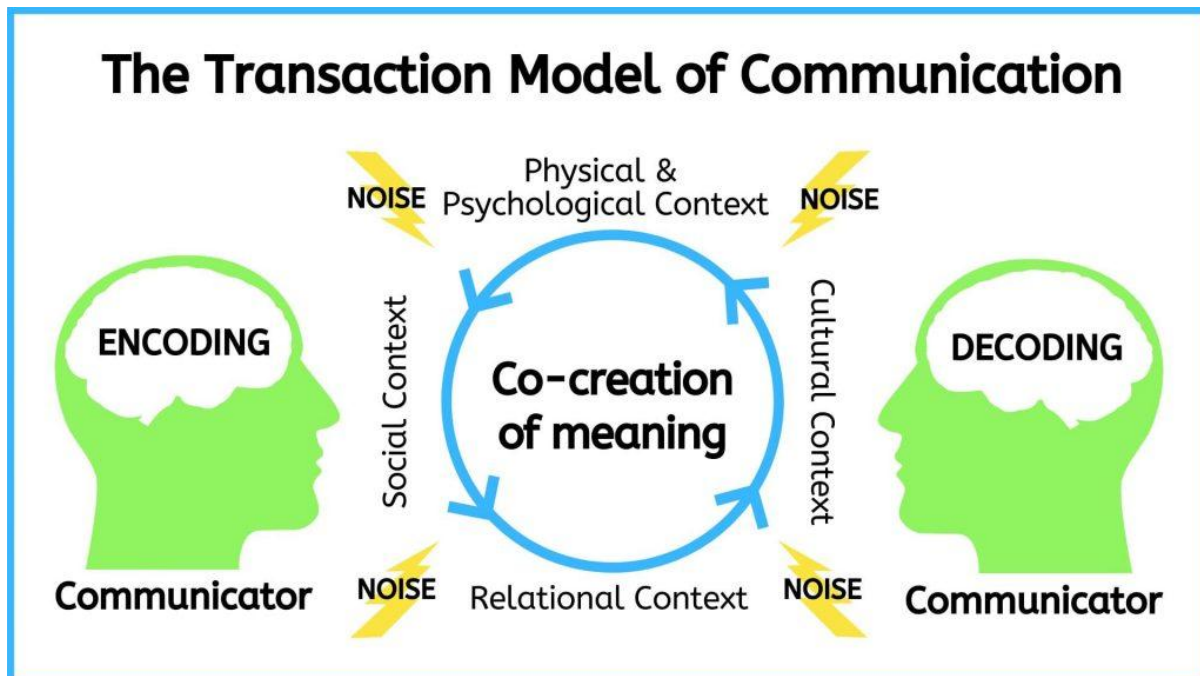
The Media richness theory appropriately guided this study because of its strength in assessing the suitability of the various communication channels employed by NCCE. The theory therefore, blended with Barnlund's (1970) Transactional Model of Communication to serve as a useful guide that helped to interrogate the study's research questions.

Secondly, Barnlund's (1970) Transactional Model of Communication portrays a cyclical communication process of interdependent elements in which communicators produce 'social realities within social, relational and cultural contexts' (Toronto Metropolitan University, n.d.: no pagination).<sup>1</sup> The other elements of the model are message, channel, feedback, interference (noise) and field of experience. The underlying principle of this model is that interpersonal

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/communicationnursing/chapter/transaction-model-of-communication/#:~:text=The%20Transaction%20Model%20of%20communication%20describes%20communicatio n%20as%20a%20process,Create%20relationships>

communication takes place when purposeful messages are exchanged in a reciprocal manner. The suggestion is that successful communication occurs when both sender and receiver comprising two individuals or an individual and a group, simultaneously send and/or receive a message as reflected in the model below:



**Figure 1: A Reproduction of Barnlund’s (1970) Transactional Model of Communication (An Adaptation by the Toronto Metropolitan University (n.d.; No pagination)**

The communication process as depicted by the model is as follows: communicators are represented by the sender (encoder) and a receiver (decoder), who exchanges messages simultaneously to create meaning through various channels and contexts. It must be understood that the sender and receiver are, however, not in static positions; both communicators perform encoding and decoding roles simultaneously as the case might be. This model explains that people do not just communicate to send or receive information: they do so to “create relationships, form cultural alliances, shape self-concept and engage with others in dialogue to create communities” (Toronto Metropolitan University, n.d.: no pagination). The communication process itself is always prone to interference or noise at all the points of the cycle as implied by the waves. The implication is that communication can easily fail, and failure may not always be at the point of the receiver. This model aptly illustrates the kind of communicative activities between NCCE and its publics, represented as “communicators”, who are constantly engaged in sending and receiving messages concurrently through various means.

Thirdly and finally, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, theorised a problem-posing educational model based on dialogical and participatory approaches in teaching and learning. In this approach, the participants (the teacher and learners) engage in interactive activities making them both learners and teachers. Freire presented the 'problem-posing' approach as processes leading to change. Although this theory concerns mainstream education and appears idealistic, it has relevance for the analysis of this study because it is arguably best suited to Africa and other developing societies of the world. It is about critical consciousness, which information could stimulate and lead to the emancipation of thought, behavioural change, participation in social affairs and development (Freire, 1993).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative approach using a case study design (Creswell 2009; Yin 2011, 2009). This is because the study concerns exploring and understanding the communication system and practices of NCCE from the views and perspectives of key people connected to or with knowledge about the institution and its mandate. The specific data collection methods were in-depth interviews of purposively sampled key staff of NCCE, an expert in democracy and governance issues, an academic as well as documents analysis. The NCCE staff included Management and personnel from the Corporate and Communication Affairs Department, Human Resource Department and the Programmes Department. The academic was an expert in governance and organisational communication. The details of the 8 participants are presented below with their approval:



**Table 1: Research Participants and their Details**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>AFFILIATION/ INSTITUTION</b>	<b>POSITION</b>	<b>JOB DESCRIPTION</b>
Participant A	NCCE	Director of Programmes	implementing, monitoring and evaluating all NCCE outreach programmes and activities.
Participant B	NCCE	Director of Communication and Corporate Affairs	directing and supervising communication activities of NCCE
Participant C	NCCE	Communication and Corporate Affairs staff	developing concepts and strategies at the communication unit of the CCA
Participant D	NCCE	Communication and Corporate Affairs staff	developing concepts and strategies at the communication unit of the CCA
Participant E	NCCE	Director of Administration	supervising the day-to-day operation of NCCE
Participant F	NCCE	District Director (Rtd) / Immediate Past Dean of District Directors	enhancing staff and district directors' ability to deliver on their work schedules
Participant G	Electoral Commission of Ghana/ National Media Commission	District Director	generally responsible for the organisation of district elections.
Participant H	University lecturer	Faculty member at Ghana Institute of Journalism and Senior Lecturer in communication and media studies	teaching and researching in communication, media and governance

The interviews occurred between January and March 2020. With the aid of an interview guide, participants were asked questions concerning the place of communication in NCCE's civic education work, whether NCCE had a communication policy, the various communication/education strategies the Commission employed, among others.

To support the interview data, some key documents of NCCE were also analysed to reinforce the findings and conclusions. The documents included the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, NCCE's website, NCCE's social media pages, and annual reports as well as its programmes guides. The Commission's social media pages (YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) and website were monitored during the data collection period to keep the research abreast of NCCE's online communication activities (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). The documents were reviewed or evaluated (Bowen, 2009) to produce meanings, achieve understanding and build empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007 as cited in Bowen, 2009). Scholars such as Yin (2014) and Denzin (1970) have advocated that qualitative research should involve multiple (at least two) sources of evidence for convergence and corroboration using different data sources and/or methods. Thus, the use of document analysis in combination with the interview data invigorated the study through triangulation (see Heale and Forbes, 2017).

Thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79) was used. The two sets of data were mixed in the analysis and reporting. To ensure the credibility of the data and their analysis, the study applied triangulation and rich and thick descriptions as validation strategies (Creswell 2014).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This paper proposed to discover NCCE's communication structure and practices in relation to its mandate in Ghana. The analysis occurred from the perspective of external organisational communication and public communication. Public communication here refers to large-scale and diversified communication consisting of both informational and persuasive messages that strategically target various audiences in public spaces through a systematic and organised framework of communication activities, channels and interpersonal networks to meet set objectives (Atkin and Rice, 2012). This means that public communication goes beyond mass communication to include interpersonal communication. It applies to regular communication as well as campaigns held at specific times. Targeted audiences and/or stakeholders include government agencies, local and foreign organisations, media and/or citizens.

The subsequent analysis and discussion would flow in line with the study's research questions. First, the place of communication in the work of the Commission would be discussed followed by NCCE's communication structure and operations and the Commission's external communication activities. The implications of the communication structure and activities would occur throughout the discussion.

## Communication and Civic Education in Ghana

The data indicate that communication is instrumental in NCCE's work. Participant D was emphatic that: *Without communication we can't work. Communication is what we do.* According to Participant A, a management staff of the organisation:

*The work of NCCE is basically to communicate. Getting the people to know their rights and responsibilities and then promoting democracy in general. So as a mandate of the NCCE the channel to do it is through communication, so communication is very important to NCCE* (Participant A, Management Staff, See Table 1).

Thus, the Commission appears to be aware of the indispensable role of communication in achieving its institutional objective of providing civic education to inhabitants of Ghana. Bennett (2000) observed that communication influences socio-political relations and shapes citizens' attitude towards politics, governance and society itself. In the past years, the Commission has been engaging in public education activities to whip up people's peaceful participation in district level elections (National Commission for Civic Education, 2019) and general elections (National Commission for Civic Education, 2012). Importantly, the success of these and other efforts depends on how effectively the Commission planned and strategically executed its communication. The issue also remains about how seriously the Commission takes its communication in its education endeavours. The subsequent analysis should throw light on these issues.

## NCCE'S Communication Framework

The study used two themes from the data to generate discussion on the Commission's communication framework: *proactive communication framework* and *conventional communication framework*. Drawing from Camillo and Camillo (2016), the theme, *proactive communication framework*, here refers to official and/or a legal policy document approved by the NCCE Management and Board of Directors to prescribe strategic communication activities and practices for the effective work of the institution. And *conventional communication framework* refers to periodically created communication instructions produced by the Commission to guide its organisational communication activities in the absence of a proactive communication framework.

## Proactive Communication Framework

The data showed that the Commission did not have any formal communication policy document as operationalized above. It appears that since its inception in 1993, the Commission has not developed and used any such document as indicated by a participant:

*I don't think we do. I know we have a transport policy and an administrative policy but for communication, we don't have* (Participant F: see Table 1 above).

Participant E also added that:

*...we don't have a documented communication policy that when you come, I can get you a copy (see Table 1 above).*

This finding is remarkable because of the importance of strategically directed communication to the effectiveness of NCCE. Hargie (2016) and Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018) have stressed the importance of a progressive communication policy to the overall success of any organisation. Policies provide a uniform frame of reference for activities; they provide standardisation and a legal framework for responsibilities, modus operandi, reporting lines, sanctions for flouting directives, etcetera. Thus, the realisation that there was no such a document at the NCCE raises questions about the overall effectiveness of NCCE. It suggests that NCCE could potentially be failing in effectively performing its communication-oriented education functions. This result seems to affirm Boampong (2017) and Niworo, Gasu and Achanso's (2016) finding from an audience perspective that the NCCE is challenged in its communication practices. A report by the African Development Bank (2009) indicated that the Bank operated without communication policies, for which reason the Bank often experienced communication inefficiencies. NCCE's situation could be similar to the ADB's case. Thus, the absence of a communication policy exposes the organisation to haphazard communication or 'noise' as theorised by Barnlund's (1970) Transactional Model which could hinder the effectiveness of NCCE's external communication. As argued by Ansong (2013), organisations that have a clearly stated policy possess a standard roadmap that directs their entire communication, informing present and future staff of their visions and goals. The vice versa could be the case for organisations without such a direction.

The Commission's lack of an operational communication policy since its inception in 1993 is curious and thought-provoking. The explanation that NCCE was working to develop a communication policy at the time of this research is arguably long overdue.

*With the communication policy, we are trying to put one together. It'll capture our activities and our traditional way of face-to-face interaction. It'll cover our media, it'll cover our traditional media and online and other things and it'll entail how staff communicate our activities (Participant D: see Table 1 above).*

It suggests that NCCE has not taken its communication seriously. Interestingly, studies that have discovered the ineffectiveness of NCCE's work (Abudu and Fuseini, 2014; Bawa, 2011; and Boampong, 2017) appear not to have connected the problem to the Commission's communication system.

### **Conventional Communication Framework**

The data showed that lacking a proactive communication framework, NCCE periodically creates conventional communication guides as and when necessary to guide its communication

activities. This implies that NCCE operates a reactive communication framework as indicated by Participant F:

*...we do engage with our stakeholders and often use concept notes and programme guides from the head office which spell out how to go about our programmes as and when the need arises (Participant F, see Table 1 above).*

Participant D also added:

*So, we use the programmes guide to draw the work plan and how to undertake programmes. Sometimes too, we give them concept notes which will guide them to do the work. So, we don't have a documented communication policy but in principle, this is how it works (Participant D, see Table 1 above).*

Thus, the Commission employed 'concept notes' as and when an issue for communication cropped up. While this may not be the best approach, it seemed to be workable because it at least provided for some instructions for communication tasks, even if it is in an ad hoc manner. The extent to which this approach is effective could be surmised in the discussion about the specific communication activities of the Commission.

### **Corporate and Communication Affairs Department and Staff Issues**

All communication activities of the Commission within the conventional communication framework are supposed to be coordinated by the Corporate and Communication Affairs (CCA) Department, which is located at the Headquarters in Accra. The important and sensitive role CCA Department plays in the organisation raises questions about why the organisation situates a CCA department only at the head office and none at the district and regional offices where staff engage directly with citizens. This arrangement implies that encoding, decoding and execution of public education messages are left at the discretion of the staff at the district and regional offices without the direct supervision and control of the CCA Department. Meanwhile, the CCA Department houses the communication experts of the Commission. Such a situation could create illusions in communication. Shaw (2011) observed that having an illusion that a message has achieved its purpose is the greatest problem of communication. Barnlund's (1970) Communication Model suggests that the absence of a communication office and communication officer(s) at the regional and district offices presents a fertile ground for potential 'noise' to weaken the effectiveness of the public education interactions.

### **External Communication Activities of NCCE**

External communication is key to the success or otherwise of the Commission. As we have argued, the NCCE's mandate implies effective interactions with its external stakeholders. This makes the analysis of the organisation's external communication vital to the study's overall findings and conclusion. Thus, "direct community engagement" and "media engagement" were used as themes in the analysis to address the Commission's external communication.

### **Direct Community Engagement and its Implications**

In this study, direct community engagement refers to the face-to-face activities that take place between the organisation and its publics during public education exercises. This happens when civic education officers move into communities to interact with the people. This occurs in town hall meetings, marketplaces, churches, mosques, schools, among others. The data revealed that direct community engagements play a very important role in communicating civic education issues. According to Participant A:

*That one is very effective as I've already explained because of feedback and then we will be able to explain when they ask questions (Participant A, see Table 1 above).*

Direct community engagement also helps the organisation to reach Ghanaians who are in remote parts of the country and do not have the opportunity of catching civic messages through mediated channels. A participant indicated that:

*...all those hamlets, communities, there's no way your social media can reach them. They don't even listen to radio. But they are Ghanaians. They also have to be educated on their civic rights and responsibilities (Participant D: see Table 1 above).*

The ability of direct community engagement to bring about access, better understanding and meaningful exchanges resonates with Freire's (1993) participatory educational approach through dialogue and the media richness theory's emphasis on using appropriate channels.

The data also indicated that almost all staff at NCCE could take part in the direct community engagement as communicators, that is, as civic educators by default. For instance, Participant B stated that:

*...so, if I go to certain communities and I can't express myself in the local language that the people understand and I have a driver who can speak the language and the people can identify with him, don't you think it'll be more effective when the driver has the requisite information about the topic that we want to tell the people and he tells them instead? (Participant B, see Table 1 above)*

Arguably, it is one thing having information and another being technically competent to communicate the information effectively in public. The quote above implies that the participant did not realise that the driver may have the information but may lack the technical communicative competence to deliver the information as a professional communicator would have done. Closely related to the above is the realisation that NCCE did not consider professional qualification and training in communication important in engagements with people. According to Participant B:

*And, communication is very effective when it is done in the local language and you shouldn't have a high degree in communication or speak proper English to do communication. The nature of the work we are doing, you don't really have to have that (Participant B, see Table 1 above).*

This goes to show why the Commission has only one communication department stationed at the headquarters in Accra and may explain NCCE's communication challenges as discovered by Boampong (2017).

In terms of staff placement, data indicated that there are often language challenges between the organisation and some of its publics. Due to a lack of adequate staff, the organisation had to post staff to areas where they may not be able to speak the language of the indigenes. According to Participant E:

*We are recruiting 35 people and you need someone at Yooyo. The office is virtually depleted so sometimes we are forced to send people there who can't speak the language. We do have some circumstances that certain skills are needed somewhere and even at some places at that point you can't even get those people who can speak their languages. We have to make do with what we have (Participant E, see Table 1 above).*

Thus, indigenes are made to serve as translators to interpret civic messages during public education exercises, a potentially problematic situation since the NCCE staff could not tell if the translators were sending the intended messages to the audience as intended. A participant expressed it this way:

*With the education on radio the elite groups (i.e., educated ones) in those communities take it up. It's unfortunate that listeners and staff may not be able to tell if what the elite groups are translating is the truth or not (Participant B: see Table 1 above).*

This finding suggests language barriers in some of the Commission's activities. As argued by Barnlund's Model, this could impede the effectiveness of communication in such situations during direct community engagement or radio discussions.

### **Media Engagement and its Implications**

The interview and document data also demonstrate that NCCE communicates with its publics through media engagements. In this study, media engagement refers to mediated communication via radio, newspaper, television, community address system, open broadcast and the Internet. Media engagement was found to be a necessary avenue to reach much larger audience, compared to direct community engagements. Direct community engagement can be limiting because only those present at an event benefited directly from the exercise. Although those who participate in the engagement may later share with others who did not attend, one cannot vouch for the accuracy of such re-transmitted messages. Thus, media engagements complemented community engagements. According to a participant:

*...even though we believe that direct communication gets us feedback there and then and the understanding clear for the people, mass transmission is also very useful. So, television, radio, social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) NCCE is there on all these platforms (Participant B: see Table 1 above).*

According to Cutlip et al. (2006), selecting a channel based on an understanding of its positive characteristics helps to produce desired results. Data showed that each mediated channel provides some specific opportunity to reach its target. In addition to traditional media, NCCE was present and active on Facebook and Twitter and running a website, all of which are managed by officers at the CCA.

*We also have a website and social media pages. However, these are only managed at the head office by CCA (Participant G: see Table 1 above).*

The use of social media helps NCCE to engage with its audience as expressed by a participant:

*We get response from the comment section on our social media. Social media has helped a lot. There is always feedback unless the person doesn't want to give feedback because the avenues are available for them to give feedback (Participant D: see Table 1 above).*

It was however observed that NCCE's social media activities appear insignificant. For instance, even though interview data showed that NCCE had taken the initiative of exploring opportunities that modern-day technology presents, document (data) collected from the organisation's social media pages revealed that engagements on NCCE's social media pages were not as impressive as interview data indicated. For instance, the YouTube page had only 43 subscribers, with the highest viewed video receiving 38 views (Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/6Ven-0qybJ0>). For Instagram, posts were receiving one or two comments on the over 1001 posts presented (Retrieved from <https://instagram.com/ncceqh1?igshid=jqtlf7mqgw0a>). The Twitter page was no better from the YouTube and Instagram cases with almost no engagement, (Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/ncceqh?s=09>). Thus, it was not surprising that, Participant H, who was a communication expert, advised the Commission to find creative ways to boost publics' engagements on its social media:

*There are better opportunities; they just have to be creative. What they need to do is to adapt the new technologies to their needs. It's not like you think, social media is there, and it'll perform magic. The trick is you'll use social media in a way that helps. They have to take advantage of social media in a way that engages the audience (Participant H: see Table 1 above).*

NCCE's use of radio and television provides the opportunity for listeners to call into shows to share their opinions and/or seek clarifications on the topics which were discussed, thereby, creating important opportunities for immediate feedback:

*Well, apart from social media we use radio and television because there are some of the programs that when we go, they allow phone in from listeners and viewers. (Participant C: see Table 1 above).*

The Transactional and Freire's models suggest that effective interpersonal communication and (public) education occurs when purposeful messages are exchanged in a reciprocal, circular manner through appropriate media.



### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

Before concluding this study, we make haste to acknowledge some shortcomings of the study. The findings of this research should not be construed as wholly representing the communication system and activities of all subvented organisations in Ghana because of the different establishments, mandate and orientation of such organisations. Also, the interview data used for this research were sourced from NCCE staff, whose number may not be representative of the whole staff of the organisation across the country. This limitation, though, should not unduly undermine the findings and conclusion since much of the information sought was specialised and the results could have been almost the same if more participants were included. Additionally, since the study has raised questions about the effectiveness of the communication system and practices of NCCE, it would have benefited from including audiences in the study. Although Boampong's (2017) study depended on NCCE's external publics, further studies around this study's topic from different approaches and perspectives are required for a definitive statement on the issues.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study concerns aspects of the communication system of the NCCE and the implications thereof with the focus on the Commission's external communication practices. The analysis indicates that NCCE has been developing and applying innovative, modern and practical conventional communication practices that have kept the Commission relevant in the democratic space of the country. Durbars, debates, town hall meetings, schools, etcetera are used by the Commission to spread its civic messages to segmented audiences. This could be appealing and productive if properly harnessed. Effectively complementing the direct community engagements with the use of mass communication channels including radio, newspaper, television and the Internet/social media should continue to serve the institution well.

Yet, some of the study's findings portend some dire repercussions. A remarkable discovery that the Commission lacked a communication policy strongly suggests that NCCE could possibly be failing in performing its communication-oriented education functions. Additionally, the discovery that NCCE regards all its staff, including drivers, accountants, etc. as civic educators, as well as civic educators who could not share a common language with communities that they must interact with all have consequences for the work. The realisation that the Commission seemed to be satisfied with their communication practices in the face of the challenges discovered in the study indicates that the Commission could be oblivious of its communication weaknesses. It is therefore, not surprising that Boampong (2017) and Niworo, Gasu & Achanso (2016) discovered that NCCE was challenged in its communication practices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, we proposed that it would be crucially beneficial for NCCE to develop, codify and implement a proactive communication policy to guide its activities, much like the African Development Bank, which found it pertinent to develop and implement an explicit communication policy to realise its organisational goals (African Development Bank, 2009). The following recommendations are also made, accordingly:

- The finding that NCCE has only one Communication and Corporate Affairs (CCA) Department located at its head office in Accra implies that the CCA could be alienated from activities of staff in the regions and districts. It is therefore, recommended that NCCE provides for communication departments or at least a professionally trained communication officer, in all its regional and district offices to help enrich and standardise the quality of civic education activities undertaken in the country.
- The finding that every NCCE staff, from driver to director, is classified and acts as a civic educator is obviously problematic. The Commission should avoid this and rather strengthen its programmes officers in terms of their number and ability to undertake the Commission's practical public education exercises.
- Finally, the study showed that NCCE was not sufficiently engaging its online audience. It is therefore, recommended that the Commission finds creative ways to make its social media pages active, engaging and attractive to its set target.

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