

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim with this research, as defined in paragraph 1.2, is to contribute towards improving of research used in South Africa – by government in general and by GCIS specifically – in order to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information. In this chapter the researcher reaches conclusions relating to the secondary research objectives (see page 2). The researcher furthermore makes recommendations that may contribute towards improving the research used in South Africa to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information. Lastly, the researcher suggests a few areas for further research within the area of this dissertation.

6.2 CONCLUSION

6.2.1 The application of sound theoretical principles

It is critically important that research is conducted in a responsible and scientifically correct way. As much as research can enhance effective government communications and contribute to cost-efficiency, it will be a waste of time and money to conduct research if its reliability and validity are under question. Researchers in government communication need to have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the basic characteristics and types of communication research; they need to be aware of the challenges that face

communication researchers and realise that research needs to be carried out as a systematic process involving the application of various relevant steps to ensure the success and quality of the research project.

The researcher is of the opinion that the majority of government communicators in South Africa do not have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the various aspects mentioned in the above-mentioned paragraph and discussed briefly in chapter 2. Together with inappropriate budget allocation and time constraints, it is sometimes extremely problematic for the knowledgeable communication researcher to assist government communicators towards achieving valid and reliable research results that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of government communications and information dissemination.

6.2.2 The use of research in government communication and information dissemination in South Africa

Available information indicates some sensitivity by government communicators in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s for the importance to obtain information about people's needs and to obtain feedback from target groups. However, the first scientific research to enhance the effectiveness of the South African government's communication initiatives was only conducted in 1973.

With the establishment of the Directorate Research Coordination at the Bureau for Information, the South African government started making use of communication research to a growing extent. However, the researcher is of the opinion that the Bureau's research initiatives were originally primarily in support of the government's political interests and communication needs and not aimed at improving government information in the interest of the people. Since 1987, however, some research projects were aimed at determining the public's needs in terms of government communication and enhancing the effectiveness of some

initiatives to disseminate government information. From 1989 the Bureau assisted other government departments to conduct communication research, and its research also supported government communication and information dissemination in this regard to the public during the process of political transformation and democratisation in the country.

The request for research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information increased during the period of SACS's existence (1991-1998). A growing number of research projects were conducted at the request of other government departments and to enhance the effectiveness of government communication campaigns. Most research projects conducted by SACS from 1991 onwards were conducted to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information regarding the process of negotiations and democratisation in the country and in support of communication by the SACS regional offices to promote inter-community relations.

Since the launch of GCIS in 1998, the importance of using research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information has been emphasised more than ever before. The results of relevant communication research projects are used in the development of government's corporate communication initiatives. The corporate strategies of GCIS provide the strategic framework within which research is conducted. Research support is provided to other government role-players and inter-departmental initiatives in order to enhance effective communication and information dissemination.

There are various shortcomings in government communication research in South Africa at present. The research is often not conducted or used appropriately to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and information

dissemination initiatives. Furthermore, the results from communication research conducted by government are not used to the optimum due to a lack of coordination and sharing. Communication research is mostly not conducted throughout a campaign and it seems as if government is not allocating appropriate funding for communication research.

6.2.3 The use of research in government communication and information dissemination in other countries

In recent decades an ever-increasing number of governments all over the world are making use of research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information. This includes governments in both developed and developing countries.

The researcher came to the conclusion that researchers in government communications in South Africa can learn some lessons from other countries in terms of the use of research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information – see paragraph 5.5.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

What can be done in South Africa to improve the use of research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information? On the basis of the aforementioned conclusions and the information contained in the previous chapters – in terms of the secondary research objectives – the researcher is of the opinion that the following recommendations could be considered:

- The value of research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information needs to be conveyed and explained not only to government communicators, but also to senior management in other government departments
- As a matter of principle, all government communications initiatives should be based on relevant research. This includes research regarding communication campaigns, products, services and so forth.
- Research needs to be conducted throughout the process of any communication campaign, project or product and not as a once-off exercise. Research throughout the process is critically important to enhance effectiveness. This research can include needs analysis, developmental research, research to refine the creative and communication strategy, benchmark research, tracking research and evaluation to assess impact.
- Research needs to be conducted to assess the needs of people in terms of government information (on what topics do they want to receive information from government), as well as the way or medium they would prefer government to use to provide them with the information (e.g. radio, personal).
- In order to enhance the effectiveness of government communication, research also needs to be conducted to assess the communication environment. This will include research to assess public perceptions regarding the performance of government, to determine priority issues they would like government to attend to, and to ascertain whether government's overall communication is perceived as sufficient (or insufficient), as objective (or subjective) and so forth.
- Researchers in government communication need to conduct relevant research not only amongst the broader or general population, but specifically attend to the information deprived and on specific groups

towards whom a communication initiative or product might be aimed at (e.g. the youth, women or elderly).

- Communication research by government needs to be conducted on the basis of sound theoretic principles, as a systematic and properly planned process – in a scientific way, providing objective, valid and reliable results.
- The research methodology should be determined on the basis of the research question or objectives. A combination of methods can sometimes contribute to a better answer to the research question or objectives.
- Research reports need to be prepared in order to help the client to make informed decisions on the basis of the results. Results need to be analysed and interpreted objectively.
- Consideration needs to be given to the possibility of coordinating or registering (not to control) all government communication and information research from one point in government – e.g. GCIS or Statistics South Africa. Such a practice will not only contribute to the elimination of duplication, but can also contribute to improve quality and sharing of relevant research results.
- The possibility of bulk-buying of all government communication and information research needs to be explored and facilitated. This may result in substantial cost-savings and enhance the affordability of research services.
- Public Service procurement procedures need to be reconsidered to enable timeous response to requests for research. The establishment of a panel of research companies, and reconsideration of existing delegations may be useful in this regard.
- Cabinet, government communicators, senior management in government departments and other role-players need to be briefed on relevant

research results on a regular basis. An annual conference on government communication research should also be considered.

- Researchers in government communication need to develop guidelines that can be used by government communicators on how to brief a research consultant, how to prepare a research proposal and so forth.
- Training of government communicators needs to include the basic principles of research and create understanding that research can enhance the quality of their work.
- Researchers in government communication need to develop a strategy to help departments to obtain appropriate funding to enable them to conduct communication research.
- A register of research companies and organisations that can be approached to conduct communication and information research for government needs to be compiled, updated regularly and made available to government communicators.
- A catalogue of research conducted in government communication needs to be developed in a searchable database format and updated regularly.
- Question and Answer sessions should be considered where researchers interested in submitting quotations or tendering for government communication research may clarify the research objectives with clients prior to preparing and submitting their proposals.
- Effective communication between the research suppliers and government clients is of major importance. Researchers need to understand the government communications environment. Consideration should be given to briefings for research suppliers on relevant issues on at least an annual basis – e.g. on government's Programme of Action (priorities), the national government communication strategy and relevant research results.
- The different role-players in government communication need to explore opportunities of working together when conducting research on certain

critical issues – e.g. the International Marketing Council (IMC), Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Investment South Africa (TISA), Tourism South Africa and GCIS on initiatives to market South Africa internationally; the Department of Health, Medical Research Council (MRC), Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Statistics South Africa and GCIS on HIV/AIDS.

- Government communication researchers need to become more constructively involved in professional organisations like the Southern African Marketing Research Association (SAMRA), the Research Users' Forum (RUF) of SAMRA, the African Society for Advertising and Communications and even the European Society for Marketing Research (ESOMAR) and the World Association of Public and Opinion Research (WAPOR).
- The possibility of a SAMRA convention or an ESOMAR or WAPOR conference on government communication and information research should be explored.
- Government communication researchers in South Africa need to reach out to government communication researchers in other countries – specifically those in Australia, Canada and the UK – to learn from their experience and to share insight.

6.4 FURTHER RESEARCH RECOMMENDED

In this research, the study was demarcated to research conducted by the GCIS and its predecessors – SACS, the Bureau for Information and others mentioned in paragraph 3.2 – to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information. The research also provided a brief theoretic overview of research in communication, and recorded information

regarding government communication and information dissemination in other countries with specific reference to the use of research to enhance effectiveness.

Potential areas for further research regarding this broader theme include the following:

- An audit of communication research conducted by government departments in South Africa, including themes, methodologies and target groups for research.
- An evaluation of communication research conducted by government departments in South Africa, including specifically an evaluation of the research process from a theoretical and professional perspective.
- Research regarding the utilisation and application of research results, including an investigation regarding the sharing of research results amongst government communicators and the management of relevant research results as a corporate asset for government.