

Who protects the protector?

- This is a critical question that came up during the last webinar on the threats to the Ombudsman.
- The response to that question was that beyond all the instruments and platforms available to protect the Ombudsman, the most potent protector is the people.
- However, for the people to protect the Ombudsman, they must know who the Ombudsman is and what he/she stands for.
- This for me is where communication and the relationship with the media comes in handy.

PRESS CONFERENCE AND PRESS INTERVIEWS

- One of the definitions of a press conference is that it is a structured interview that is given by an Ombudsman or any other personality or group of personalities to journalists in order to make an announcement, provide information, address urgent issues of public interest or respond to inquiries.
- It is both a processed and organized event, which ensures its orderliness.

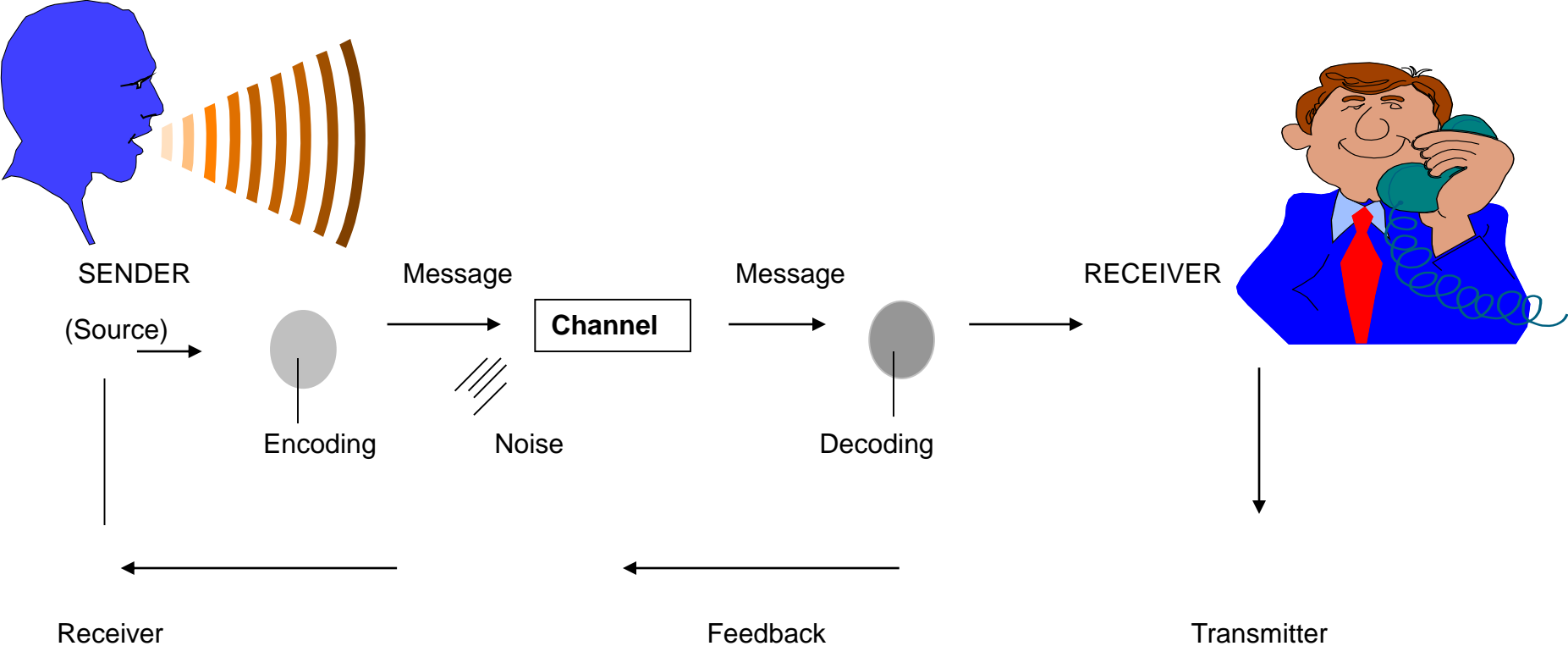
Press Conference

- This has to do with the physical assemblage of representatives of various media houses including but not limited to print, electronic, bloggers and social media experts with a view to addressing them on a given subject or a variety of subjects.
- It is a more formal way of relating with the press.
- One key element of the press briefing aspect of communication is fielding of questions by members of the press because this gives room for further clarification better understanding of the issues that are being discussed.

Relationship Between the Effectiveness of the Ombudsman and the Media.

- The effectiveness of an Ombudsman most times is measured by the amount of information available to the public regarding its activities, e.g
- How the public can access their services,
- Available channels of communication etc.
- In all of this, press conference and press interviews have stood out as some of the most effective strategies of communication available to the Ombudsman.

The Communication Model



Ombudsman and the press

- As the trust and confidence grows, the likelihood of more referrals and enquiries from the public to the Ombudsman will increase.
- As the public show more interest in the activities of the Ombudsman, people in positions of authority will begin to behave properly knowing fully well that they will be held accountable.
- The media also provides the necessary channel for feedback from the public to the Ombudsman.

Objectives

- The main objective for organising press conferences and press interviews is to control the flow of information.
- This is possible because the pressmen are looking up to you to brief them on the reason why they are invited.
- This means that whatever you tell them is what they will work with.

Planning a press conference

- Logistics . Sitting arrangements, comfortable arrangements.
- Invitation : who attends
- Presenter: who speaks.
- Speakers should be prepared with short, clear answers to expected questions.
- **Timing** -- It is a scheduled event.
- **Significance** -- It's affecting a lot of people, especially the target audience
- **Proximity** -- It's happening locally or to people with whom the audience relates

Benefits of press conference to the activities of the Ombudsman

- It is a one stop shop where different media houses assemble to receive information on one or various issues all at the same time.
- The media houses will in turn disseminate the received information through their various media channels thereby creating a multiplier effect.
- The Ombudsman will leverage on the credibility of the media channels to enhance its own credibility and acceptance by the public.
- Trust is also enhanced.

Benefits.

- Healthy relationship with the press is a cost effective public relations strategy that creates an opportunity for the Ombudsman to market itself and connect with the public through the press.
- The media can also serve as a channel for feedback from members of the public that can enable the Ombudsman to adjust its processes in line with the expectations of the public.
- Media exposure especially in positive terms surely leads to building a strong and reliable brand by the Ombudsman.

Still on the benefits

- Press conferences gives the Ombudsman the power to control the flow of information.
- Strengthens the relationship with the press.
- Hard questions that will produce hard facts are asked in a rather controlled environment.
- It provides an opportunity for the Ombudsman to restate it`s mandate and relevance to the public using the press as a channel

Challenges of press conference

- It requires preparation and planning as well as logistics which sometimes comes with cost.
- Sponsored journalists could attend the press conference to misrepresent the information from the Ombudsman.
- Except where accreditation is required, it is sometimes difficult to control and monitor those in attendance.
- This gives it a semblance of a public event.
- It is also challenging to monitor what is being reported as journalists present their stories to the public based on their perspectives.

PRESS INTERVIEWS

- Press interviews involves lesser number of people.
- The discussions are better structured.
- Sometimes questionnaires are sent out ahead of time.
- Specific issues are targeted in the discussion.
- Involves only invited media houses at a time as against press conference that involves many media outlets at the same time.
- Mostly an indoor activity.

Benefits and possible challenges

- It creates a serene platform for clarification of issues.
- Information dissemination.
- Announcements.
- Introduction of new policies.
- Changes in policies.
- Information management is better controlled.
- Agreement is reached on what is to be published.
- Draft publication is sent for vetting and approval before publication.
- One major challenge is that the publication is presented from the interviewees point of view.
- The wide range of opinion and perspectives are eliminated .

Covid-19, Social media and the role of the Ombudsman

- The new normal: social and physical distancing, face masking and other covid-19 protocols, all call for adjustment of processes.
- Social media visibility via Face book, Instagram, Twitter handles etc are key to the continued relevance of the Ombudsman.
- Maintaining an information rich and constantly updated website is necessary for the successful operation of the Ombudsman especially in these trying times of the Corona pandemic.
- Organising web conferences through platforms like zoom is also another way to minimise physical interactions.
- It is also structured as it is only those with login details that will access the meeting venue.

Benefits of the social media

- The Ombudsman can archive so much in terms of reaching wider audience by putting in little effort.
- Achieving large social media followership can be an asset to the Ombudsman in the area of information dissemination, feedback, referrals from the public and a platform for constant engagement.
- Social media can also reduce the rate of physical interaction between the office of the Ombudsman and the public especially in this period of Corona pandemic.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLIANT OMBUDSMAN IS EFFICIENT

- It is difficult to be an effective ombudsman without being visible.
- Your work gains credibility with exposure.
- This increases the ombudsman's power of moral suasion, which is the greatest power we possess.
- Both the media and the Ombudsman act as watch dogs for members of the public.

Challenges

- Extra care must be given to the verification and the authenticity of information before the send button is clicked.
- This call for double checking of documents before sending out the information.

Conclusion

- The relationship between the ombudsman and the press should be a symbiotic one with each party benefiting from the other.
- It is a relationship that should be properly managed because the public remains the focal point of this relationship.
- The credibility pull from one party rubs off positively on the other party.
- Simply put, both the Ombudsman and the press need each other.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING



- CHIDY LASBREY MARTINS
- Vice President Marketing and Membership Drive,
- Institute of Chartered Mediators and Conciliators (ICMC),
- Nigeria.
- Email: Lensdeal1963@gmail.com