

THE EFFECTS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN DELIVERY OF FORESTRY SERVICES AT KENYA FOREST SERVICE HEADQUARTERS

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CITATION: Nyenjeri, J. K., Kinyua, F. & Wawire, N. (2014). The Effects of Public Relations in Delivery of Forestry Services at Kenya Forest Service Headquarters. *European Journal of Business Management*, 1 (11), 217-230.

ABSTRACT

Public Relation is a planned effort to maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. In recent years, PR has been one of the prominent issues that companies have been addressing. Yet, few studies have investigated public relations effects on the delivery of forestry services. Using KFS, this study examined how PR affects service delivery. The results suggest that PR has a role to play in building product awareness, creating interest, providing information and reinforcing the brand. The specific objectives of the study were; to examine how PR influences building product awareness at Kenya Forest Service, to investigate how PR creates interests for Kenya Forestry services and products, to assess the effects of PR in providing information of forestry services and to determine the effects of PR in brand reinforcement at Kenya Forest Service. Data was collected from a sample of 70 respondents through a survey. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents for the study. Interview schedule was developed and used to collect data from Heads of Departments and a set of questionnaire administered to the rest of the participants. Statistical Packages of Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel were used to analyze the coded data. The information was presented in figures and interpreted based on descriptive statistics. The study concluded that indeed PR plays an important role in building product awareness, creating interest, providing information and reinforcing the brand. The study recommends that KFS should utilize PR more efficiently to create more awareness to its staff, customers, stakeholders and the public.

Keywords: *Effects of Public Relations in Delivery of Forestry Services*

Introduction

The formal practice of what is now commonly referred to as “public relations” dates back to the

early 20th century. In the relatively brief period leading up to date, public relation has been defined in many different ways often evolving alongside its changing roles and technological advances. In 2011/12, PRSA led an international effort to modernize the definition of public relations and replace a definition adopted in 1982 by the PRSA National Assembly. PRSA initiated a crowd sourcing campaign and public vote that produced the following definition: “Public relations are a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” Public relations serve a variety of institutions in society such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, schools, colleges and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with different audiences or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders, other institutions and society at large. In an ideal organization, each employee works harmoniously with work associates, all focused on achieving organizational goals as opposed to achieving self-interest. However, not all organizations are ideal and some employees may use negative tactics to achieve an advantage. Forests are an important source of livelihoods, environmental services, and contribute to economic growth through support to various economic sectors in Kenya. These sectors include agriculture, energy and tourism. In November of 2005 the Government of Kenya enacted a new Forest Law referred to as the Forests Act 2005. The Act established the Kenya Forest Service and contains many innovations of forest management including a strong emphasis on partnerships, engagement of local communities and promotion of private investment in the forest sector. The Act also outlines the functions of KFS which include formulation of policies and guidelines for management, conservation and utilization of all types of forests in the country and promotion of forestry education and training. The service is expected to be knowledgeable in

public communication to improve its public image since the society had bad perception on the predecessor organization, the Forest Department.

The image of an organization is important to its employees, managers, its customers and suppliers (Lyson, 2000). Local public institutions and specifically the Parastatals have earned a negative reputation due to the failure to implement effective PR. In Kenya, the number of companies registering for the Company Of the Year Award (COYA) with the Kenya Institute of Management is increasing, an indicator that organizations are opening up to public scrutiny. In addition, Public Relations Society of Kenya which is a professional body for all public relations practitioners has been undertaking training in communication and ethics and there is heightened awareness of implementation of PR as a profession. With the liberalization of both the print and electronic media, organizations are also exposed to the public scrutiny. The society is concerned with the individual and organizational behavior, with respect to establishment of effective and professional PR standards.

Statement of the Problem

The forester's job has transformed from managing forests to applying a wide range of skills to respond to the needs of forestry stakeholders and contextualize the demand for forest products and services. One of the skills is embracing public relations in an organization in day-day affairs. Agencies with lack of public relations have been put under fire for poor management, work life conflict, loss of resources, lack of customers and high labor turnover. In recent years, public relation has been one of the prominent issues that companies have embraced in their organisations. Yet, few studies have investigated public relations efforts on the delivery of forestry services. Worldwide, there is a scarcity of forestry resources; this may be attributed to

the failure to adequately respond to rapidly changing social, economic and political environment. In view of this, there is need to re-orient forestry service to address the emerging issues. One of the ways to carry out this is to boost research, communication ethics, marketing and advertisement and integrate them with natural resources management. Using KFS Headquarter as a sample, this study is geared towards understanding how public relations affect the delivery of forestry services.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The main objective of this study was to establish the effects of Public Relations in delivery of forestry services at Kenya Forest Service Headquarters.

Specific Objectives

- i. To examine how PR influences building of product awareness at Kenya Forest Service.
- ii. To investigate how PR creates interests for Kenya Forestry services and products.
- iii. To assess the effects of PR in providing information of forestry services.
- iv. To determine the effects of PR in brand reinforcement at Kenya Forest Services .

Literature Review

Kruckeberg (1993) has been critiqued by scholars Parkinson (2001); Wright (1993) for falling short of ideas espoused in the codes or even in being internally contradictory. Practitioners often state that codes of ethics are still too vague to be used in their own careers or that they do not give enough specific guidance to be anything other than rudimentary (Bowen, Heath, Lee, Painter, Agraz & Mckie, 2006).

Research found that some practitioners say they see a code of ethics once and then do not refer to it or read again (Bowen, 2002). Most codes of ethics provide no enforcement monitoring or recourse for their infringement leaving them impotent other than the occasional revocation of association membership. These problems with codes of ethics are not new and they are not limited to the field of public relations. Some Scholars (Kruckeberg, 2000) of public relations argue that if practitioners are ethical then no enforcement is needed for the codes of ethics. Other scholars (Bowen, 2004; Parkinson, 2001) go further and argue that a simple ethics statement is all that necessary because good intention is a more stringent guideline than a code of ethics. This debate mirrors the rationale of Plato as quoted in parsons (2004): “good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws” (p.67). Inadequate regeneration and mismanagement are threatening the supply of vital products and services.

Public Relations

Public relations describes the various methods a company uses to disseminate messages about its products, services, overall image to its customers, employees, stockholders, suppliers or other interested members of the public.. The aim of public relations is to make the public think favorably about the company and its services. Commonly used tools of public relations include news releases, press conferences, speaking engagements and community service programs. Public relations involve two-way communication between an organization and its publics. It requires listening to the constituencies on which an organization depends as well as analyzing and understanding the attitudes and behaviors of those audiences. Only then can an organization undertake an effective public relations campaign. Public relations include promotional activities that work to create a strong public image of company. PR activities include helping the public to

understand not only the background and mission of a company but also any product or services that are offered. If done right, public relations can reach a large audience without the expensive cost of traditional advertising and marketing.

Ethical Communication

Bowen (2007) explains that the field of ethics also called moral philosophy involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. In the public relations discipline, ethics includes values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication (Grunig &Huint 1984). Hills had a very developed philosophy of corporate responsibility and issues management and recent analysis found that ethics pervaded both his work as executive counsel and his books about public relations (Hill, 1958, 1963). A key element in any communication activity is the values of an organization. Values are the principles and ideas that people or organizations strongly believe in and consider important. When people are in doubt about decisions, they frequently rely on deep seated values to help them make the right choice. In organizations, relying on shared values makes setting goals easier in the face of competing ideas, desires and objectives of individual employees.

When an organization communicates internally, it shapes the values of its employees. When it communicates externally, it influences the perception of the external public. Practicing ethical communication is not an easy way to live. Being ethical in the workplace or at home, or with anyone can be a struggle. Often it can be easier to say nothing at all than the truth. In our society gossip is a daily occurrence and some people even make their living from it. When practicing ethical communication, it means that you will disregard communication that degrades individuals

and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, violence and through the expression of intolerance and hatred. Practitioners of ethical communication support individuals sharing information, opinions and feelings when facing significant choices at the same respecting the privacy and confidentiality of individuals.

Advertisement

According to the book *creative strategies in advertising*, advertising is nothing more than an attempt to change a person's behaviour by changing his beliefs. It provides the most persuasive possible selling messages to the right prospects for a product or service. Although advertising is closely related to public relations, it is also concerned with promoting and gaining public acceptance for the company's products. The goal of advertising is generating sales while the goal of public relations is generating good will. The effect of good public relations is to lessen the gap between how an organization sees itself and how others outside the organization perceive it.

Advertisement keeps the customer informed about new products and new developments in an organization. They help to provide them with information regarding the newly launched products. Advertising takes care of customers. It helps in holding on to the loyal customer, decreasing the number of lost customers and enlisting new customers. Thus the overall effect of advertising is increase in the number of customers that will gradually become loyal to the product.

Marketing

Marketing is the process of teaching consumers why they should choose your product or service over your competitors; if you are not doing that you are not marketing. It is about finding the right method and developing the right message to use to educate and influence your consumers.

Companies make the mistake of thinking that marketing is just “one” thing, but marketing is everything that the consumer encounters when it comes to your business from advertising to what they hear to the customer service that customers receive to the follow-up care that you provide. Marketing is creating the decision within the consumer whether or not to choose your goods and services initially or for repeat business. Earnings and therefore to a reliance on external capital (Davidson & Dutia, 2001).

Data Analysis/Findings

PR Builds product Awareness

The study sought to find out if PR does build product awareness in an effort to improve delivery of forestry services. This was done by use of a Pie Chart. The study indicated that 89% of the respondents agreed that indeed PR has an important role to play in an organization by building brand awareness while 11% disagreed on the statement. This shows that PR should be utilized by KFS at all levels in order to enhance delivery of services. Today, the role of public relations is much broader and includes: Building awareness and a favorable image for a company or client within stories and articles found in relevant media outlets; Closely monitoring numerous media channels for public comments about a company and its products; Managing crisis that threaten company or product image.

Focus of Current PR Plan on Consumer Awareness

The researcher sought find out if indeed the organization’s PR strategy at KFS focuses on consumer awareness. The respondents answered in a five level Likert scale. The results were presented using a column chart. The results indicated that the highest number of respondents of 63 % agreed that current PR plan focuses on consumer awareness. 4 % of the respondents strongly agreed, 9% of the respondents disagreed, another 9% strongly disagreed and 15% of the

respondents were undecided. Public relations and marketing work closely together when it comes to promoting a new or existing product or service. It plays an important role in new product introductions by creating awareness, differentiating the product from other similar products and even changing consumer behaviour.

Media Tools Used in PR Campaigns

The respondents were asked to give the media vehicles PR has used in its effort to build brand awareness. The results were presented using a column chart. The results show that 31% of the respondents identified television as a media vehicle that has been used by KFS in building brand awareness, 22% identified radio as a media vehicle used, 6% identified newspaper, 28% identified magazines and 13% identified internet. This study shows that PR department uses newspaper and internet less frequently. The department should embrace all media vehicles at equal measure to achieve the desired results. According to Sebastian (2006) public relations involves cultivation of favourable relations for the organization and its products with its key publics through the use of variety of communication channels and tools .

Qualities Informed by PR to Clients in Delivery of Services

The respondents were asked to respond in a yes and no answer whether they think that the current advertising plan captures the best qualities of services. The results were presented by a bar chart. The results show that 74 % agreed while 26% disagreed. To a greater extent, it can be concluded that advertising plan by PR informs customers about the qualities and values of the services delivered by KFS. The PR Department at KFS plays a significant role in ensuring that the customers get quality services and satisfaction. The roles include; Awareness creation and improving knowledge among key stakeholders on the roles and mandate of the KFS in the forestry sector.

Information Means

The respondents were asked to give the means of communication which PR has used in its effort to inform customers. The results were presented using a column chart. The results shown that 20% of the respondents identified television as a media vehicle that that has been used by KFS in informing customers, 20% identified radio as a means used, 6% identified newspaper, 19% identified magazines 4% identified internet and 31% Said that the Information Centre at KFS has greatly improved information dissemination. This study shows that PR department uses newspaper and internet less frequently. The department should embrace all media vehicles at equal measure. According to Jeffkins 1998, parallel to the rise of public relation over the past two hundred years has been the development of means of communication before the advent of newer techniques such as television, videos and satellite broadcasting.

Knowledge about KFS

The respondents were asked to tick as it applied to them, knowledge about KFS. The results were presented by use of a column chart. The results indicate that 66% know very well KFS, 24% said that they know KFS pretty well, 4% said that they know KFS a little, 4% said that they only know KFS by name. While 2% said that they have never heard of KFS. This is an indication that indeed communication ethics enhances effective marketing. In the commercial world or the private sector, marketing is only one function of the business where as public relations can be applied to every part of marketing strategy such as branding, packaging, research, pricing, selling and distribution. All these however bear the degree of communication and goodwill (Jeffkins, 1992).

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concluded that PR to a greater extent is the backbone of an organization and that its activities affect the performance and delivery of services. which in the end reduces firm' profitability; and that there is need for a tradeoff between receivables and holding inventory if the firm is to attain the required profits. The findings show PR does build product awareness, provide information of services of an organization, reinforce brand of an organization and create interest of services of an organization thus PR positively impacts on the delivery of services. It is therefore paramount to actively engage these activities at equal measure in an organization if we need to realize the set goals and promote the organization values.

In line with the findings, the researcher made the following recommendations:- Building brand awareness: KFS should create more awareness to its staff, customers and stakeholders on the role of PR in an organization. This is due to the fact that many people still do not know the role of KFS. Providing information: KFS should embrace media vehicles like internet and newspapers as they are increasingly becoming popular especially with changing trends in communication. Giving information about the best qualities and values of services: KFS should ensure that the advertising plan captures the best qualities and values of its services. This is because a segment of the respondents thought that KFS has not captured the best qualities and values of services. Reinforcing the brand: KFS should support; marketing, advertising, research and communication ethics to enhance a positive relationship and continue promoting the image of an organization.

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