



An analysis of the relevance of public relations in federal university Gusau and guarantee trust bank, Gusau

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Abstract

Public relations as a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain good lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics. Thus, this paper studies the relevance of public relations in Federal University Gusau and Guarantee Trust Bank, Gusau. It explores the relevance of public relations as tools to improve channels of communication, understanding and acceptance with their publics in order to develop their organizations. Data collected was coded and analyzed using thematic content analysis. The paper shows that public relations is an increasingly important brand building tools in both private and public sectors and its relevance in passing and advertising the activities of the institution and the bank respectively. This establishes a long-lasting relationship between the organizations and its publics and the host communities as a whole. The relevance of public relations was neglected in Federal University Gusau and Guarantee Trust Bank, Gusau. The main objective of this paper is to examine the Relevance of Public Relations in Public and Private Sectors. To attain such objective, it outlines some significant recommendations that will serve as a guide to Nigerian institutions, banks and other related organizations.

Keywords: Public, Relationship, Organization, Management and Gusau

Introduction

Public relations (PR) is a management tool designed to establish support among a firm's various internal and external publics (Thomas and Lane, 1990) ^[20]. It also includes activities that are built around a favourable company's image through publicity and community events (Zeithaml, *et al.* 2009) ^[22]. The major functions of public relations are to create and maintain excellent relations with the organization's internal and external stakeholders such as persons and private, governmental and societal entities in general. Public relations can have a strong impact on public awareness at a much lower cost than advertising (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006) ^[7]. The tools used in public relations are press releases, lobbying, product publicity, investors relations and development. The Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of corporate sustainability efforts can use lobbying to persuade public and government officials to favour a particular position or decision-making. In this case, it is promoting the organization's efforts in sustaining and developing the social and physical environment Metzler (2001) ^[13].

Modern public relations has evolved to embrace corporate sustainability; corporate sustainability is built around the organizational structure that embrace public relations theories and practices. Ecological, sociological and corporate or business elements must be properly promoted internally and externally by utilizing public relations efforts in order to provide the most updated information to stakeholders/employees and the public (Sterne, 2008) ^[18]. Organizations throughout the world need to understand the value of public relations in an effort to meet institutional goals and objectives. More specifically, the overall organizational strategic plan needs to incorporate public relations initiatives within the short or long term planning to avoid internal and external communication mishaps (Sterne, 2008) ^[18].

Metzler (2001)^[13] has fittingly describes as establishing and maintaining organizational legitimacy. An organization that has a sound public relations philosophy works unceasingly to build and maintain a good reputation on which present and future operations depend. Organizations that have survived for decades or centuries, have built good image based mainly on their bonding with their various public relations which public relations is all about. Parsons, (2008)^[17] reveals that public relations has achieved a secure place in the corporate structure. Large expenditure for public relations programmes are recognized as essential.

However, Ledingham (2003)^[7] pays more attention to public relations in his study by noting that the relational perspective holds that public relations balances the interest of organizations and publics through the management of organization public relations. The idea of relationship management has several advantages. It provides a process of determining the contribution of public relations initiative to organizational goals. Such goals often go beyond profitability to include social and political goals. Thus, convincingly, the relational perspective is an appropriate unit measurement of public relations impact in organization public relations Ledingham (2003)^[7].

Methodology

For the purpose of this research this paper employed both primary and secondary data collection of information. The primary involves collection of information via oral tradition while secondary ones include books, journals/articles and other relevance sources of information. The people hope to be interviewed are staff of Federal University Gusau and Guarantee Trust Bank respectively. The criterion in the interviews is that the interviewees required to be practitioners in the field of public relations and working in the public relations unit of Federal University Gusau and customer care of Guarantee Trust Bank so that their rich experience could be used to expand and explain the study. After the completion of the interviews, the generated data would be manually transcribed into documents to facilitate critical analysis in the discussions.

Relevance of public relations in public and private sectors

Public relations is defined as the continuing process by which business tries to win the goodwill and understanding of its customers, its employees and the public at large, inwardly through self-analysis and correction, outwardly through all means of expression, according to Kogan (1965)^[6]. Public relations is a management function practiced by a wide range of organizations: companies, governments, non-political parties, organized sports and the media. Their goal is to achieve positive relationships with various publics in order to effectively manage the organization's image and reputation. According to Offonry (1985)^[16], public relations activities in Nigeria revolve around eight pillars, these are: Corporate relations, Government relations, Community relations, Financial public relations, International public relations, Media relations, Employee communication and Marketing support. In the public and private sectors, the various segments of public relations practice according to Lattimore, *et al.* (2004)^[8] involves: media relations, employee relations, community relations, consumer relations and public affairs, etc.

Public Relations in Public Sector

Most organizations in Nigeria, including tertiary institutions have objectives for which they have devised several ways of achieving them. Every unit or department in an organization, work so hard to contribute its part to the achievement of the desired goal. Effective public relations practice in an organization helps to increase the goodwill of the organization and also leads to the attainment of the organizational goal. In recent years, many public tertiary institutions have been established in Nigeria. Most of these institutions have seen the need to set up public relations units to communicate better with their publics such as lecturers, students, alumni and affiliate institutions. As to how well these institutions practice public relations is one of the purpose of this study. Wimmer, and Dominick, (2011)^[21] state that every government, organizations, individuals and groups need to communicate with public to achieve their corporate goals and the only way that public will get to understand the policies, programmes, activities of an organization is through communication.

In government and public sectors, public relations specialists who may be called press secretaries, information officers, public affairs specialists, or communication specialists-keep the public informed about the activities of agencies and officials. For example, public affairs specialists in government information agencies keep the public informed on policies and issues relating to their area of responsibilities. Press secretaries will keep their minister's constituents aware of the representative's accomplishments. This is usually done through effective media relations. On the other hand, the information officers will conduct numerous interpersonal or face to face communications with the people or targeted groups (Grunig, *et al.* 2002)^[3].

Generally, the main relevance of public relations in public sector is to enhance an interactive, ethical and sustainable communication to win the understanding and support of the publics or their targeted groups. They must gauge public opinion, analyze and determine its impact on the government and advising them accordingly so as to enjoy the people continuous support. Government public relations practitioners jointly serve two masters their employers and the people. They must provide the complete, candid, continuous reporting of government information and accessible channels for publics input is clear that public relations practitioners in public sector must be very skillful in developing and sustaining good relationship between all their publics or stakeholders Luo, Yi (2005)^[11]. They must be able to identify their task within the parameters of a dynamic society and a rapidly globalizing world. This expectation is further propelled by the ever increasing communicative community that is affected by fast advancing and spreading information technologies. Also, they must be able to focus themselves to key relationships, systems of decision-making and accountability. Further, they must play the crucial role of encouraging stakeholders participation and simultaneously sustaining mutually beneficial and productive relationships with them all (Lindic, 2006)^[10].

Public Relations in Private Sector

In the banking industry, the nature of the products in the market is intangible, inseparable and homogenous. This calls for thorough explanation of the products or services to the

customers. The nature of the products makes it difficult to make a comparison between the banks and their offerings. Therefore, in banking, credibility and value are mainly gained from the organization's reputation. It is argued that reputation is the most valuable asset of a bank (Moss, 2001)^[15]. There is also the fiduciary element in financial services. The dealings of banks are based on trust, honesty and reliability when marketing services that are both intangible and hard to differentiate: establishing a trust relationship becomes very important. According to Merenda (2004)^[14], nothing will establish trust more than credibility. This is usually done by enhancing demand for the organization's services. The ultimate way to market a service is to promote it by advertising and then support the arguments by public relations to build credibility and trust. Another relevance of public relations in banks stem from the difficulty in winning back customers when lost. It is far easier to get new customers than to recall or bring back lost customers. Good public relations help in building good public image of the bank. Banks therefore need good public relations to inform and educate the public and help to counter adverse impact of the public on their operations. Forward looking banks do not sit back and watch some of the bases of their goodwill erode. They rather adopt appropriate measures, including good public relations to protect their interests (Daramola, and Nwanne, 2012)^[2].

Lynn (1999)^[12] argues that public relations activities can clearly increase economic value for banks because it creates trademark and brand awareness in the community. Hon (1998)^[4] points out that there is tremendous variability in organization's explanation of public relations goals and objectives, perhaps reflecting the diversity of organizations represented. Each organization divides its responsibilities differently, and not surprisingly, priorities tend to reflect the mission of the organization. Some practitioners mention communication goals that increase sales and revenue and also bring in new businesses. Others talk more about public relations role in enhancing the image of the organization and disseminating positive messages. Hon (1998)^[4] further states that public relations goals objectives have to be strategic. This means that public relations goals and objectives must be tied directly to organizational goals and objectives. The findings of Hutton, *et al.* (2001)^[5] is in line with Hon (1998)^[4] and identifies widely disparate views of the purposes of public relations and also confirms that the diversity of public relations strategy continues to be a major issue.

Discussions of the findings

The data collected from the interviewees indicated that Federal University Gusau and Guarantee Trust Bank use public relations in establishing and maintaining good cordial relationship with their publics (internal and external). For example, Federal University Gusau as public institution use public relations to establish and maintain good relationship with her publics. The institution does this through issuance of press release and conducting press conferences. It door is always open for enquiries from the host communities and general public as it is only when public conference is built that people will tend to regard and take of value whatever is presented to them (interviewed with Hauwa'u, 2021). While in Guarantee Trust Bank, use public relations in establishing and maintaining mutual lines of relationship between the bank and its esteemed customers. One of the ways in which the bank does this is by being open to its customers.

Therefore, the bank has five ways through which it listens to her customer's enquiries and provide quick responses to them. The bank staff are always available to response such enquiries almost 24 hours or mostly during working hours. It is a policy of the bank that customers have right to ask and be answered any of his/her enquiries at any point in time. With such it ensured smooth relationship between her and its valued customers. Not only that, the bank has instilled confidence in them that the bank is reliable financial institution that is ready to respond to the needs of its esteemed customers (interviewed with Ibrahim, 2021).

However, data collected indicates that Federal University Gusau and Guarantee uses different public relations tools in performing their public relations functions. This is evident from the information collected in the fieldwork. The first this Federal University Gusau do was establishing good relationship with media houses. These media organizations provide the institution publicity needs. It conducts press conferences, issue press releases and grant interviews in order to inform the publics about its programmes, achievements and challenges. The institution has a publication: news bulletin that is published bi-annually by the Information Unit of the University. This publication also proved to be an effective public relations tools for the institution (interviewed with Nuhu, 2021). With regard to special event, Federal University Gusau organizes annual Ramadan Lecture where Islamic scholars are invited to deliver educative lectures on the importance of Ramadan fast and other relevance topics should also be discussed. The institution does this, to cement its relationship with her host communities. It has proven to be an effective tool that assists the institution in having peaceful relationship with the publics (interviewed with Hauwa'u, 2021).

Notwithstanding, Guarantee Trust Bank use different public relations tools in an effort to establish and maintain cordial relationship with its esteemed customers. The bank has active website where customers lodge complains and the bank provide quick response in that regard. It also has contact centres and customer chats. These are some of the tools the bank usually organizes a get together party during which it invite her customers and the bank offer them best and affordable food and present some prizes/gifts to them. People may wonder how effective and efficient this has been helping the bank retain its loyalties (interviewed with Aisha, 2021).

This paper critically understood that public relations has proven to be effective and relevance in establishing and maintaining good and cordial relationships with publics in both Federal University Gusau and Guarantee Trust Bank as well as their publics.

Conclusion

This paper clearly shows that is good for an organization and society to conducts public relations practice. With institution waiting to stay in business as long as possible, learning how to effectively and correctly deal with the public is important for its longevity. Public relations is therefore, an indispensable activity in both public and private sectors for them to inform and educate the publics as well as counter adverse impact of the publics on their operations. The paper also found that Federal University Gusau and Guarantee Trust Bank are familiar with public relations philosophy with most of them articulating their own philosophies. Although public relations is not yet a management function in Nigerian banks, as this and several other reviewed studies have shown,

most of them appreciate the contributions of public relations to their organizational success. The management of Federal University Gusau recognizes the relevance of public relations in facilitating its success especially by providing necessary assistance when it comes to the issue of publications which undertaking by the unit. The bank rather adopts appropriate measures including public relations to protect its interest. Public relations is an increasingly important brand building tool. One of the reasons is that advertising does not build brands but public relations does.

Recommendations

This paper made the following recommendations in order to improve and strength relevance of public relations to the growth and development of the institution and the bank respectively:

- There is a need for installation or establishment of an effective speedy and reliable service delivery system by the institution and the bank as well.
- There should be an improved budget for public relations unit in the institution and bank for effective delivery of its services.
- Also, there should be consistent training and retraining of staff in the public relations unit of the institution and the bank accordingly.
- The information and public relations unit in the University and bank serves as nerve centres of the organizations; therefore, it is recommended that the units should be well serviced with modern and up to date equipment and information facilities.
- Generally, Universities and banks in Nigeria should endeavour to better appreciate public relations by elevating its status to that of Management function where public would operate from the boardrooms of organization. This will strengthen PR officers of the organizations and make them perform better.
- Institutions, including financial should give emphasis on professionalism when it comes to recruitment of image makers. Only applicants with membership of Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) should be employ.

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