

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND FUNCTIONS IN NIGERIAN MANUFACTURING ORGANIZATIONS: HOW RELEVANT TO OUTPUT

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Abstract

The study looked holistically at public relations and its functions in Nigerian manufacturing organizations to find out their relevance or otherwise to output. Relevant literature was reviewed to give a theoretical backing to the study. A survey research design was adopted as the study covered many manufacturing organizations. Population was 67 and also used as sample (census). 46 retrieved questionnaires were analyzed using 5-point scale- Pearson's product movement coalition. T-test statistic was also applied to test hypothesis after mean and standard deviation ratings. Analysis show that public relations offer unique functions to manufacturing organization and that manufacturing organization that do not use public relations may likely have problems with their output. It was recommended that manufacturing organization should embrace public relations and have positive relationship with Public Relations practitioners.

Keywords: *Public Relations, manufacturing organizations.*

INTRODUCTION

The notion of public relations as relationship management is gaining more momentum among scholars and public relations practitioners. While everyone seems to know the term public relations, not everyone understands what it means. Though manufacturing organizations understand that it is a great way to build on their marketing strategies and improve their reputation, very few know much about what PR involves, or why certain companies invest so much time and effort into staying on top of their strategies. Public relation according to Eziriun, Opara, Asiegbu and Horsfall (2006) concerns communication between any organization, commercial or non-commercial and various

publics, with whom it has contact. It is the practice of managing the spread of information between an individual or an organization (such as a business, government agency or a non-profit organization) and the public, (skandari,2004). In 1987 Association of public relations (PR) provides a definition of which is planned and continuous efforts to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organization and its target audience. Therefore, public relation is the practice of printed thinking, communication and spread of information between an organization and its public, Public Relations establish and maintain relationships with a manufacturing organization's target market or Publics. Manufacturing is the production of merchandise for use or sales using labor and machines, tools, chemical and biological processing or formulation. The term may refer to a range of human activity from handicraft to high tech, but is most commonly applied to industrial production, in which raw materials are transformed into finished goods on a large scale.

Statement of the Problem

Lack of public relations practitioners in organizations has made it very difficult for many organizations in recent times to attain set goals. Interestingly, customers loyalty has not been enhanced as a result of the organizations in ability to make effective use of public relations which determines the bases of existence of any organization (Grunis 1992). Organization have been facing different challenges as a result of their ability to pay more attention to public relations activities and also many organizations have not achieved success in their goals because less attention is given to public relations and lack of long – term communication with customers, which has not become a central part of them (Holmes 2012). It is not only to encourage the involvement from the public but also bringing about a better image for the organization. Effective public relations practitioner in a manufacturing organization can create and build up the image of an individual, organization or a nation. At the times of adverse publicity or when the organization is under crisis, it can remove the understanding and can create mutual understanding between manufacturers and its publics. This research tends to find the functions of public relations in Nigeria manufacturing organization and how relevant it is to output.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks specifically to:

1. Determine the unique functions public relations offer to manufacturing organizations.
2. Ascertain the likely problems manufacturing organization will face for failing to embrace public relations ideals.
3. Define whether public relations functions are in anyway relevant to output in Nigerian manufacturing organizations.
4. Identify the challenges public relations practitioners face in manufacturing organizations in the south-south zone of Nigeria

Research Question

1. What are the unique functions PR offer to manufacturing organizations?
2. What are the likely problems manufacturing organization will face for failing to embrace public relations ideals?

3. What are the public relations functions that are in anyway relevant to output in Nigerian manufacturing organizations.
4. What are the challenges practitioners face in manufacturing organization that can reduce output?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many scholars have contributed scholarly review of organizations' public relationships from other disciplines such as interpersonal communication, social, psychology and relationship (Ledinghan & Brunius 2000, Grunig & Huary 2000, Hon & Grunig 1999). The central notion of public relations as relationship management suggest that public relations should focus in developing long – term behavioral relationship between organization and key constituencies. Perceived public relations roles, which rely on activities designed to enhance organizational image, have been extended to a new paradigm, fostering long term relationships that lead to mutual benefits for both organizations and key publics.

Primarily, the practice of public relations has been regarded as product publicity, media relations, and employee communications. Many organizations still view public relations as a means of generating favorable publicity (Burneth & loriarty 1998) defined public relations as the use and communication of information through a variety of media to influence public opinion. In some of the central concept of public relations is that it tells an organization story to publics to foster goodwill and understanding (Hunt 1984) in Kotler and Cox (1989:455) defined public relations as involving building good relations with the company's various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good "corporate image" and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories and events. They further stated that bad publicity is bad or worse than having no publicity Nwokoye (1981) sees public relations effort of the marketer as being concerned with building and maintaining good relations with special publics such as customers and public at large. He believes that such image building may use advertising as a tool. Public relations is a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. The public's concern communication between any organization, commercial or non – commercial and various publics, with whom it has contact (Jefkins Frank1986).

Public relations is wider than advert because it creates good image between the company and the public. It permeates every aspect of our life but most of the time we talk about corporate public relations. When you communicate, you are making contact, packaging is the silent salesman. Much larger and more complex activity than advertising applies to every facet of business and to most elements of marketing strategy. Public relations involve building good image in the eyes of the public, maintaining mutual understanding between the organization and its publics (Ezirim, Opara, Onyirika, Asiegbu & Horsfall 2006).

The public relations "transfer process model" was propounded by Frank Jefkins in 1988. Jefkins propounded that when the negative situation is converted into positive achievement through knowledge, the result predictably, is the primary objective of public relation practice – understanding. The model can be applied towards changing hostility among some organization target publics to sympathy so as to be in a better position to convert prejudice into acceptance, develop interest when there is apathy and then, be able to

communicate effectively to achieve knowledge where there is ignorance. This model is relevant in our study as we seek to turn manufacturers' apathy in engaging PR practitioners into interest and acceptance.

Importance of Public Relations

The term public relation was used for the first time in the United States post office railway union and in the first decade of the 20th century when Ivy Lee undertook to advise John Rockefeller on how to conduct his public relation. Rockefeller owned coal mines and the miners were on strike and the industry was experiencing turmoil as a result of shattering strikes, Lee was given the chance. He advised Rockefeller to visit the coal miners and talk to them. Rockefeller spent time listening to the complains of the miners, improved their conditions and became a hero. Thereafter Lee propounded some principles of "always tell the truth and produce accurate facts" (Russell, and Bishop 2009).

The American Physical Society sites the following as importance of public relations:

1. Public Relation is all about building relationships to advance, promote and benefit the reputation of you yourself, your department and institutions
2. Public Relation is about communicating your mandate to gain allies, advocate, supporters etc., in the community and the institution.
3. It aids in marketing the department for recruitment purposes and can lead to improve quality of student applicants.
4. It demonstrates to funding agencies that you are making a difference and actually have results
5. It can improve the reputation of an individual department.
6. It can also serve the greater physical community by convincing the public that quarks, quantum dots, and nanostructures are cool.
7. It can lead to strong community and industrial partnerships, and even financial support.

Functions of Public Relation

In 1982, the public relation society of America (PRSA) adopted the following definition of public relations that helps identify its purpose; "Public relation that helps identify its purpose; "Public relations helps an organization and its publics adopt mutually to each other" Public Relation Society of America (2009b). In its official statement goes on to clarify the functions of public relations as they include.

1. Public relation helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decision and functions more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions, it serves to bring private and public policies into harmony.
2. Serves a wide 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 many different audience or publics such as employee's members, customers, local communities, shareholders and other institutions and with society at large.
3. The management of institutions need to understand the attitudes and values of their publics in order to achieve institution goals. The goals themselves are shaped by the

external environment. The public relation practitioners act as a counselor to management and as a mediator, helping to translate private aims into reasonable policy and action.

As such Public relations field has grown to encompass relationship between an organization and its key public through its actions and its communication, like manufacturing organization, your specialty may not be powerful enough to increase awareness for your brand and earn interest in the products you produce. Therefore, there are tactics to better your manufacturing which is the involvement of a public relation. Public relations professionals can help manufacturing organizations in the following ways

- **Branding:** As a manufacturer, your products can either be very straight forward or, beyond complicated. Specialized, manufacturing PR professionals can help translate your technical specs into more digestible points of interest all while maintaining the vital information you want to showcase to potential buyers.

- **Face-to-Face Awareness:** A surefire way of reaching ideal candidates for your manufacturing company, whether they're future employees or future clients, is to exhibit at a trade show. Public relations specialists can assist you in finding the right show all while reaching out the attendees before, during and after the exhibit.

- **Credibility:** The last thing you want out of the messaging for you manufacturing company is dilution. Given the highly specialized niche of the industry, a hokey campaign will cause more harm than good but, specialized outreach using technical white papers, press releases and expert exposes can boost your company's credibility among the industry. Management theory has defined organizational effectiveness in a number of ways. Each management stressed meeting goals as measures of effectiveness. This approach proved to be rather simplistic and did not recognize the interconnectedness of organizations with their environment. A system model approach was developed as a reaction to the limitations of the goal attainment perspective. This approach recognized the value of strategic constituents to the success of any organization depends deeply on how public relations is practiced within the organization.

Public Relations in Today's Manufacturing Organizations

Today's world is a world of communication and in every second, millions of information units are exchanged in the world. Since development of human life improves, thus increase need to information and communication every day, and having up to date information for people is more important, and people with more information will be more successful.

Public relations in organization in terms of work quality means assisting organization management in achievably organizational goals, believe to be transparency in affairs and accountability, respect citizens right, identify duties and responsibility of government, the right control of people and evaluate programs and practices of the organization and having specific strategies and programs. The objective of public relations I organizations is promoting mutual understanding with audiences and with confidence and strong reasoning and logic, meanwhile safeguarding organizations interest, and protecting them from the publics. They recognize needs, desires and attitude of organizations audience and transfer to the angers of organization, providing technical consultations to organization. Policy makers which can play a significant share in policy formulation (Botan 2006).

Challenges of Public Relations in Manufacturing Organizations

Asemah (2017) listed the following as challenges of public relations in manufacturing organization.

Budget: corollary to being a management function is having a budget line strictly dedicated to public relations. In most organizations, the budget still sits elsewhere leaving the function at the mercy or whims and caprices of the budget owners. As a matter of fact, most organization see public relations as cost Centre and not revenue centre understandably, that's because public relations don't generate funds directly. Public relations struggles to bring in customer, but the impact of what they do, not only retain the customers but also encourage new vales. This is what most public relations practitioners have failed to demonstrate to their employers or client. Multiple channels: Gone are the days when televisions, radios and newspapers were enough to reach your audience. Now that we are in the digital world and with so many social media, it is difficult to know the right media to reach larger audience, since more the older ones are still in the analog age and the younger generation is in the digital age where they prefer to buy megabits than the traditional newspaper. People in the business world are becoming too busy and they have limited time.

Content creation and Story-telling: These are two important elements of Public Relation, which seem to have climbed out of the back burner, perhaps with a gentle nudge from the burgeoning advent of social media. The communication aspect of Public Relations is purposive, that is, communication with a purpose. There might be no communication without a purpose, but the true defining characteristic of this form is the clear objectification, which is pursued logically and then measured, at the end of the day. Story-telling simply means bringing the functionality of your product or service or even idea to the consumer in a tangible, demonstrative manner. For instance, a video or article on how a customer has used and benefitted from Airtel's Smart Tribe detailing the functionalities and benefits is a good story to tell and should be told often by PR practitioner managing Airtel Nigeria. In other words, the PR practitioner, and not the media, should lead and drive the narrative of every sensible organization.

There are, however, some lamentable limitations, which are militating against the creation of good quality content and effective use of story-telling as PR tools. One, lamentably, is the paucity of skills, good writing skills on the part of the practitioners, and the other is a lack of interest in reading by customers as against the keen interest in deals, promos and freebies.

Public Relations Strategies that can Help Output In Manufacturing Organizations

The strategies of public relations that can be used to assist output in manufacturing organizations according to Asemah (2011) are:

Research: Research is a fact-finding exercise which the public relations practitioners, undertakes. Research provides information with which public relations decisions are taken and programmed are planned, it helps in understanding the terrain upon which to operate and how to tread cautiously and carefully in a bid to sustain goodwill for an organization.

Community relation: An organization can be very successful if it cares for the environment where it operates. Every organization is supposed to make life easy for the

people living in the community if operates. A company is a vital part of a community and such has obligations to that community through various kinds of supports, including, equipment to large school or hospitals crisis management. The practitioner must make conscious efforts to manage crisis through effective communication. They do this by managing the flow of information between the organization and the what to do and how to do it.

Newsom, Turk and Kruckberg (1996:4) in Van Heerden (2004) describe the function of and/or role of PR practice by using the following ten principles:

1. PR deals with reality, not false fronts. Conscientiously planned programmed that put the public interest in the forefront are the basis of sound PR policy;
2. PR is a service-oriented profession in which public interest, not personal reward, should be the primary consideration;
3. PR practitioners must go to the public to seek support for programmes and policies;
4. public interest is the central criterion by which programmes and policies should be selected;
5. PR practitioners reach many publics through the mass media, which are the public channels of communication; the integrity of these channels must be preserved;
6. PR practitioners act as intermediaries between organizations and their publics and they must be effective communicators – conveying information back and forth until understanding is reached;
7. PR practitioners expedite two-way communication and are responsible for the extensive use of scientific public opinion research to understand what their publics are saying and to reach them effectively;
8. PR practitioners must employ the social sciences psychology, sociology, social psychology, public opinion, communications study and semantics;
9. PR practitioners must adapt the work of other related disciplines, including learning theory and other psychology theories, sociology, political science, economics and history. Thus, the PR field requires multidisciplinary applications.
10. PR practitioners are also obligated to explain issues to the public before these problems become crises; and PR practitioners should be measured by only one standard: ethical performance

Digital and Social Media: Digital and social media provide storytelling with a combination of four peculiarities: integration, accessibility, connectivity and interactivity (Herbst, 2004a). The two most important for Global Relationship Management are Connectivity and Interactivity.

Connectivity means that the building blocks of devices, technologies, applications, media assets, etc. are connected with one another and communicate. Connectivity with and within the digital realm has increased dramatically in recent years. Three examples: Media Convergence is the consolidation of traditionally distinct disciplines like print, tv, radio, digital (Jenkins, 2006); devices and Technologies: people mail with their phones, go online with their televisions and listen to radio online. Mobile end devices like smartphones and tablets open up new user scenarios and multi-screen experiences via apps and digital

utilities like Location Based Services; social Networks and Sharing Platforms enable new forms of communication where every individual can access, forward, rate, comment and themselves create content. Marie-Laure Ryan talks about networking computers in physical space in order to bring users together in virtual environments.

Interactivity is closely tied to integration and connectivity. Many authors see interactivity as the essential difference to traditional storytelling: “interactivity is repeatedly cited as the feature of digital media that most clearly distinguishes it from older, non-digital genres.” (Ryan 2004, 2006; Aarseth 1997; Alexander 2011). Interactivity can either be described as selective, from clicking on a link, or productive, from participation in a story plot with dialogue or gesture (Ryan 2004: 339). Accordingly, PR in digital media entails a very active user in contrast to classical PR, which consists of an active narrator and a passive audience. Users in digital media aren’t required to wait until something happens, rather they can make something happen. The digital PR user can influence the relationship directly: users can reach into the communication and help shape it. The question is as follows: does the user select a story (human interacts with machine) or tell a story as user-generated content? (human interacts with content). Organized and collective consumer movements against a company are a part of the risk of interactivity. The examples in recent years of how interactive critical discussions have gravely damaged corporate images are many.

Budgets: Some public relations activities can be done at a relatively low cost; others may come with a bigger price tag. Public relations budget must keep pace with the firm’s brand-perception aspirations, revamping PR budget to make more room for public relations activities can help boost the image and brand of a firm. The size of a firm’s public relations budget matters. Whether you are starting from scratch or you need to make the case for your brand to invest a large portion of its budget for public relations activities, revamping your budget could be the place to start. While media coverage and press conferences often come to mind, as its definition suggests, public relations activities often make up a significant portion of a brand’s marketing plan – and budget: press kits, audio or video releases, public-facing communications, company brochures, newsletters, press releases, media-invitational events, stunts and gimmicks, speaking engagements, philanthropy (community and charitable endeavors, fundraising), corporate sponsorships, lobbying, etc.

Data and Measurement: One of the banes of PR practice globally is the proclivity to compare its work and effect with marketing. That is clearly defeatist, firstly, and downright laziness, secondly. Public Relations must do away with comparing its output with advertising column inches. In fact, it must move from output to outcome. Several research methodologies are available to serious-minded professional to demonstrate outcome and impact. Additionally, Public Relations practitioners should start making informed commentary and intellectual interventions through lectures, presentations and publications to deepen the knowledge base and provide ready resources for reference by professionals and intending practitioners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was adopted for the study through email and telephone interview with managers and public relations of manufacturing organizations. The population of the study is 67 which comprised of 55 managers of registered manufacturing organization and 12 public relations practitioners in south – south zone of Nigeria. The entire population is sampled (census). The major instrument for data collection was the structured questionnaire with 30 items structured on 5 – point rating scale of strongly agreed, agreed, undecided, strongly disagreed and disagreed, which was graded of 5,4,3,2, and 1 respectively. The reliability of the instrument was established using test-retest method. The persons product moment correlation was employed to calculate the correlation coefficient which was 0.89 showing that the instrument was reliable.

The research question was analysed using mean and standard deviation response rating. Any item with a mean score less than 3.00 is rejected. The hypothesis is analysed using t-test.

Research Question 1

What are the unique functions public relations offer to manufacturing organization

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	MEAN	S D	DECISIONS
1	Ability to use media effectively	4.45	0.50	Agreed
2	Ability to gain favorably publicity	4.55	0.50	Agreed
3	Ability to showcase products to potential buyers	4.65	0.46	Agreed
4	Ability to communicate strategically	4.86	0.42	Agreed
5	Ability to manage public information	4.92	0.42	Agreed
6	Crisis / issues management	4.90	0.40	Agreed
7	Have corporate communication reputation	3.88	0.85	Agreed
8	Ability to promote the benefit of the organization	4.82	0.83	Agreed
9	Ability to propose quality of products	4.75	0.43	Agreed
10	Corporate branding	3.60	0.59	Agreed
11	Possess charisma	3.80	0.55	Agreed
12	Possessing initiative and enthusiasm	4.35	0.42	Agreed
	Grand Mean/S D	4.47	0.53	Agreed

Table 1 above revealed that all the respondent accepted that public relations offer unique functions to manufacturing organization.

Research Question 2

What are the likely problems manufacturing organization will have failing to embrace public relations

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DECISIONS
1	Going after the wrong audience	4.40	0.49	Agreed
2	Unpopular product	4.64	0.49	Agreed
3	Wrong message from media	2.70	0.58	Disagreed
4	Getting interesting message wrongly	3.83	0.78	Agreed
5	Financial difficulty	4.91	0.29	Agreed
6	Sales reduction	4.97	0.17	Agreed
7	Brand unfamiliarity	4.93	0.24	Agreed
8	Sabotage	4.84	0.36	Agreed
9	Product failure	4.91	0.61	Agreed
10	Managerial incompetency	2.56	0.85	Disagreed
11	Insufficient information	4.40	0.45	Agreed
12	Organization will suffer setback	4.31	0.49	Agreed
	Grand mean/SD	4.56	0.64	Agreed

Table 2 above revealed that out of twelve (12) items of the questionnaire item only with mean score of 2.56 and standard deviation of 0.58 disagreed. The total grand mean of 4.29

and S.D of 4.48 indicates that manufacturing organizations will likely have problems in failure to embrace public relations.

Research Question 3

What are the challenges faced by public relations practitioners in manufacturing organization that can reduce output?

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	MEAN	S D	DECISIONS
1	Lack of fund / budget	4.2	0.60	Agreed
2	Lack of autonomy to act as a department	4.4	0.49	Agreed
3	Lack of adequate and effective media communication	3.9	0.83	Agreed
4	Lack of recognition from management	4.2	0.60	Agreed
5	Poor appreciation of the profession	4.2	0.60	Agreed
6	Lack of personal logistics means	4.3	0.52	Agreed
	Grand mean / SD	4.7	0.46	Agreed

Table three above indicate that all items are above the mean of 2.50 and are therefore accepted that the challenges faced by public relations practitioners in manufacturing organization can reduce output if not looked out.

Result of the Test of Hypotheses

There is no significant different in the mean response of managers and public relations practitioners in the of problems manufacturing organization will face for failing to embrace public relations ideas

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Level of sig	t-cal	t-crit	remark
Male	25	0.08	0.16	65	0.05	29.6	2.00	Non-significant
Female	42	0.33	0.33					

Discussions of Findings

The findings from the hypothesis that there is no significance difference in the response of managers and public relations practitioners in the likely problems manufacturing organizations will face if they do not embrace public relations in their products. Therefore, one can agree that a positive association should exist between an organization and public relations activities for attainment of organizational goals.

Conclusion

Public relation is one of the most effective means an organization has to achieve its set goals with a pleased public and face any challenge or crisis emption. It is therefore imperative to encourage and facilitate them to perform even better in other to continue to build a positive Image of the publics to achieve organizational objectives.

Recommendation

The following recommendation are recommended. These recommendations if well added to and implemented will have a positive bearing on the performance of the company, boost the image of the organization and its publics.

- (1). The organization can program an electronic mailing system, which would send special messages like birthday wishes, anniversary and other days like public recognized days
- (2). By contributing to corporate social responsibility which will make their public to be pleased with them.
- (3). Have a good communication strategy as nothing is as good a listening to their publics and treating them like Kings and Queens.

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