



The Effects Of Communication And Corporate Social Responsibility In Public Relations As A Corporate Strategy In Universities Enrolment For Postgraduate Students

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Abstract

This study was designed to examine the effects of communication and corporate social responsibility in public relations as a strategy to postgraduate enrollment in Kabarak University. This research employed a case study research design. The target population comprised of the 151 permanent employees in Kabarak University, Kenya. The researcher utilized 30% of the total population. This gives a sample of 45 respondents. The study adopted closed ended questionnaire. Data obtained from the study was coded and entered into the computer. They were subjected to the excel computer program for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies were used to summarize the data. The data was presented in tables, and bar graphs. The study found that public relations influence student enrollment to the University with effective strategies being through corporate social responsibility and intensive marketing of products. Communication was also found to significantly influencing enrolment. It was recommended that universities top management should incorporate a greater market orientation into their strategic planning and frequently revise marketing communication tools to determine their effectiveness in order to have a competitive advantage and gain a big market share. The study will be significant to the Managers and employees of various Universities, Government and other stakeholders, it will also add to the existing knowledge with regard to the effects of public relations in enrollment. Recommendation for further studies was also advised especially on contribution of school infrastructure and students perceptions on enrollment.

Keywords: Public relation, corporate strategy, Communication, Enrollment, Corporate social responsibility

1.1 Background to the Study

It's widely acknowledged that many service industries, until recently, enjoyed growth supported by government and professional associations' regulations and the absence of significant foreign competition. However, due to the globalization the environment in which they operate in is changing fast, bringing with it a sharp focus on increasing productivity and improving on customer satisfying performance (Etzel, 2007). But traditionally the professional services



providers such as doctors, engineers, and consultants avoided using the word marketing, but now are openly seeking better ways of understanding and segmenting their customers to ensure the delivery of quality services and strengthen their positions amidst a growing number of competitors. This has provided an opportunity to improve on customer satisfaction and retention. Public relation is about creating mutual understanding through providing knowledge between an organization or individual with primary objective of assisting the organization to deserve, acquire and retain good reputation. It is a form of communication with all the people with whom an organization has contact

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important to businesses over the last few years. In recent years the business strategy field has experienced the renaissance of CSR as a major topic of interest (Utting, 2005). CSR had already shown considerable interest in the 1960s and 70s, spawning a broad range of scholarly contributions (Cheit, 1964; Heald, 1970; Ackermann & Bauer, 1976; Carroll, 1979), and a veritable industry of social auditors and consultants. However, the topic all but vanished from most managers' minds in the 1980s (Dierkes&Antal, 1986; Vogel, 1986).

In Kenya, University education and training has become central to the country's long-term economic and social development strategy of coping with emerging global trends. Khaemba, and Okemo (2007) note, this is evident in the Ministry of Education's projection of an increase in the secondary to post-secondary education transition rate from the current 3% to 8% by 2020,. This is as a result of increased numbers of primary school graduates who benefited from the Free Primary Education Program, which saw the primary school enrolment figures surge upwards from 5.9 million in 2002 to 7.6 million by January 2007, a gross enrolment rate of 105% over the past five years (Infotrack East Africa, 2009).

1.2 Enrollment Data for Postgraduate Students

It is true that a lot of effort has been made to restructure the education system as revealed by many education commissions formed to look into ways and means of achieving national and training objectives. However, every year student wastage nationally is quite high. The exiting literature on universities has not addressed adequately in a focused manner the public relations factors related to enrolment in universities in Kenya.

Table 1.1 indicates the enrollment data for postgraduate students in the past four year's (2012-2015) .there is sufficient evidence to indicate that enrolment in the University has not only been inconsistent but also nose diving as shown below.

Table 1.1: Enrollment Data for Postgraduate Students

YEAR	PROGRAMMES	JANUARY	MAY	SEPTEMBER	TOTAL
2012	MASTERS	33	31	23	87
	PhD	0	0	22	22
2013	MASTERS	24	18	28	70
	PhD	0	0	38	38



2014	MASTERS	28	27	18	73
	PhD	0	0	40	40
2015	MASTERS	24	11	-	35
	PhD	0	0	-	-
	TOTAL	109	87	169	365

(Kabarak University admissions office, 2015)

1.3 Problem statement

The increasing number of the Universities and the increasing number of the students who are going back to school for their post graduate education has increased the competition leading to a hyper competitive environment. There has been a general outcry about the decline in the number of student enrolment of postgraduate students in many Universities. Kabarak University can accommodate approximately 6000 students. However, in the past three years, the University has registered a persistently low enrolment as revealed in Kabarak University admissions office, 2015 records. (Kabarak University admission office, 2015)

This decline has greatly affected the University leading to a reduction in profits as well as income generated especially because of stiff competition from their counterparts. Enrolment in the university should be increased to an optimal for economies of scale to exist and that there should be efficient utilization of resources in the university. Some universities have degenerated beyond recognitions due to problems associated with under-enrolment. It is for reason that many Universities have come up with new strategies to reach out to many potential students. One strategy that has been lauded for its ability to boost numbers is the use of public relations department to help salvage the situation. Public relations play a significant role in influencing and marketing the organization, which can subsequently influence customer choice of University. To have a lasting impact, strategies need to be compatible with the structures and functions of Public Relations personnel in the University. There are certain public relations factors responsible for curbing low enrolment in universities. This study is designed to examine the effects of communication and corporate social responsibility as a corporate strategy to postgraduate enrolment in Kabarak University

1.4 Research objectives

The research was guided by the following objectives:

1. To find out the effects of communication in public relations to the publics as a corporate strategy on enrolment of postgraduate students in Kabarak University
2. To determine the effects of corporate social responsibility in public relations as a corporate strategy on the enrolment of postgraduate students in Kabarak University

1.5 Research questions

1. Does communication to publics affect the enrolment of postgraduate students' in public relations in Kabarak University?
2. How does corporate social responsibility effect the enrolment of postgraduate students in public relations as a corporate strategy on the in Kabarak University?



2.1 Literature review

Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined public relations as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics”. Essentially, managing public relations strategies is a central concern of public relations management. L. A. Grunig et al. (1998) concluded that public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness in the following two respects: (a) by helping to build stable and quality relationships over time; and (b) by managing conflict as well as by reducing the cost of conflict that results from regulation, pressure, and litigation.

CSR is a consistent pattern at the very least, of private firms doing more than they are willing to do under applicable laws and regulations guiding and governing the environment, worker safety and health and investments in the communities which they operate (Hay, Stavins, & Vietor. 2005). In the last decade directional signal signs point to increased corporate giving, increased corporate reporting on social responsibility initiatives, the establishment of a corporate social norm to do good, and an apparent transition from giving as an obligation to giving as a strategy (Kotler & Lee. 2011).

According to a report published by the ICCO (International Communications Consultancy Organisation), five out of 19 countries questioned for its biannual public relations industry survey, cite better recognition of the value of public relations as one of the main factors that can potentially affect a company’s growth. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by the UQAM Public Relations Chair showing that in comparison to other, more traditional forms of marketing, public relations is extremely effective. The Public Relations Chair has in fact developed several tools to measure the effectiveness of public relations, such as its management chart and its media analysis software, which can be used to monitor sales trends resulting from public communication strategies.

2.2 Theoretical review

Systems theory is useful in public relations because it gives us a way to think about relationships. Generally, systems theory looks at organizations as made up of interrelated parts, adapting and adjusting to changes in the political, economic, and social environments in which they operate. Organizations have recognizable boundaries, within which there must be a communication structure that guides the parts of the organization to achieve organizational goals. The leaders of the organization create and maintain these internal structures. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier state that the systems perspective emphasizes the interdependence of organizations with their environments, both internal and external to the organization.⁴ According to the systems perspective; organizations depend on resources from their environments, such as “raw materials, a source of employees, and clients or customers for the services or products they produce. The environment needs the organization for its products and services.” Organizations with open systems use public relations people to bring back information on how productive their relationships are with clients, customers, and other stakeholders. Organizations with closed systems do not seek new information (Grunig and Hunt. 1984).

Situational Theory; Grunig and Repper agreed that it was a good start to use the concept of stakeholders as a way of describing relationships. However, they concluded that not all people in stakeholder groups would be equally likely to communicate with an organization. They felt that public relations people could more effectively manage communications by identifying specific c



publics within stakeholder. These publics were subgroups that were more or less active in their communication behavior. An example of a stakeholder public would be active voters within the broader group of all registered voters. Candidates for political office focus their communication efforts on those voters who can be counted on to go to polls on election day. Grunig and Hunt proposed what they call a situational theory of publics to give us more specific information about publics' communication needs. Grunig and Hunt theorized that publics range from those who actively seek and process information about an organization or an issue of interest, to those publics who passively receive information. According to these researchers, three variables predict when publics will seek and process information about an issue: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. The key is that publics are situational. That is, as the situation, problem, opportunity, or issue changes, the public's, with which the organization must communicate, change.

Problem Recognition;Publics facing an issue must first be aware of it and recognize its potential to affect them. For example, parents of school-age children will be more aware of subpar school facilities than will taxpayers without children.

Constraint Recognition;This variable describes how publics perceive obstacles that may stand in the way of a solution. If they believe they have a real shot at influencing an issue, they will tend to seek and process information on that issue. Think again about parents with school-age children. They have more access to school decision makers because they have more contact with school principals, teachers, and administrators than do taxpayers without children.

Level of Involvement;this variable refers to how much an individual cares about an issue. Those who care a lot would likely be active communicators on an issue. Those who care little would likely be more passive in seeking and processing information. We anticipate that the level of involvement would be much higher for those parents who saw firsthand substandard school facilities than those who had not. Using these three variables, Grunig and Hunt described four responses that follow from being high or low in these dimensions. For example, those publics

2.3 Empirical review

Kotler and Lee (2011a) describe community well-being to include human conditions as well as environmental issues (Kotler & Lee, 2011a). A key element of this definition is the word discretion. It does not refer to business activities that are mandated by law or that is moral or ethical in nature and perhaps therefore expected; rather, it refers to a voluntary commitment a business makes in choosing and implementing these practices and making these contributions. They further explain that such a commitment must be demonstrated in order for a company to be described as socially responsible. This will be fulfilled through the adoption of new business practices and/or contributions, either monetary or nonmonetary (Kotler & Lee, 2011).

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and health and investments in the communities which they operate (Hay, Stavins, & Vietor. 2005). In the last decade directional signal signs point to increased corporate giving, increased corporate reporting on social responsibility initiatives, the establishment of a corporate social norm to do good, and an apparent transition from giving as an obligation to giving as a strategy (Kotler & Lee, 2011).

2.3.1 The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

Since the second half of the 20th century, a long debate on the issue of corporate social responsibility has been taking place. The concept has been growing significantly and today a good number of theories, approaches and terminologies on CSR exist (Garriga and Melé, 2004). Various definitions have been offered for CSR. Simply put, CSR requires the firms to commit to balancing and improving environmental and social impacts without derailing economic performance.

Although it originated in Western liberal democracies, the CSR movement has evolved into a global movement that includes multiple sectors such as businesses, governments, NGOs, and the general public. Recently, there has been increasing attention given to CSR in the corporate and public spheres, alongside the proliferation of academic and management literature (Bowd et al., 2003). As many as 90% of the Fortune 500 companies in the world now have explicit CSR initiatives (Luo et al., 2006).

CSR is a business approach that creates long-term value to society at large, as well as to shareholders, by embracing the opportunities and managing the risks associated with economic, environmental and social developments; and builds this into corporate purpose and strategy with transparency and accountability to stakeholders (Theaker. 2008).

2.3.2 Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Enrolment

The effect of CSR has raised argument among scholars (Simpsons and Kohers, 2002). As previous literature has stated, the CSR effect of the relationship may be negative, neutral or positive. The viewpoint for positive correlation between CSP and CFP suggest that as a company's explicit costs are opposite of the hidden costs of stakeholders, therefore, this viewpoint is proposed from the perspective of avoiding cost to major stakeholders and considering their satisfaction (Cornell and Shapiro. 1987). In addition, this theory further infers that commitment to CSR would result to increased costs to competitiveness and decrease the hidden cost of stakeholders who are necessary for the survival of the company. Bowman and Haire. (2005). pointed out that some stakeholders' regard CSR as a symbolic management skill, namely, CSR is a symbol of reputation, and the company reputation was improved by actions to support the community, resulting in positive influence on sales.

Therefore, when a company increases its costs by improving CSP in order to increase competitive advantage, such CSR activities can enhance company reputation, thus, in the long run CFP can be improved, by sacrificing the short term CFP; The viewpoint for negative effect between CSR and CFP suggests that the fulfillment of CSR will bring competitive disadvantages to the company (Aupperle et al. 2005). As the consequence costs may request other methods or need to bear other costs. When carrying out CSR activities, increased costs will result in little



gain if measured in economic interests. When neglecting some stakeholder, such as employed or the employees or environment, result in a lower CSP for the enterprise, the CFP may be improved. Hence, Waddock and Graves (2007) indicated that this theory was based on the assumption of negative effect of CSR and CFP.

2.3.3 Communication as a corporate strategy

Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined public relations as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics”. Essentially, managing Public relations strategies is a central concern of public relations management L. A. Gruniget al. (1998) concluded that public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness in the following two respects: (a) by helping to build stable and quality relationships over time; and (b) by managing conflict as well as by reducing the cost of conflict that results from regulation, pressure, and litigation.

The Excellence Theory’s general theory proposed that the value of communication can be determined at four levels as follows. Programme level – effective organizations must empower public relations as a critical management function; Functional level – Public relations should be an integrated communication function and separate from other management functions including marketing; Organization level – effective organizations should base internal and external communication and relationship building on a two-way symmetrical model; Societal level – Organizations must recognize their impact on other organizations and publics. They cannot be effective unless they are socially responsible.

2.4 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presents the study blueprint that summarizes the study construct (Figure 1).

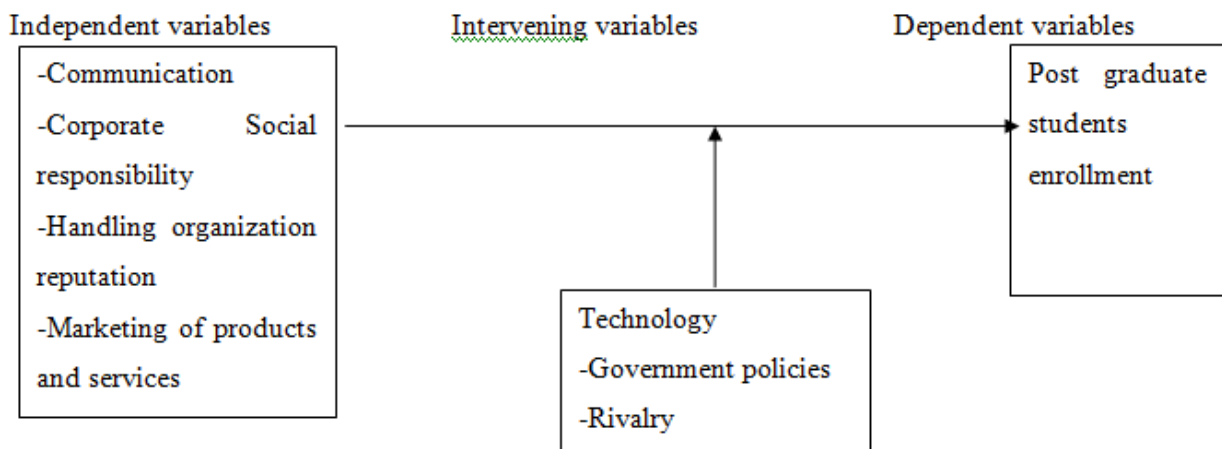


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

3.1 Research methodology

Research methodology focuses on the operational framework used for the study including research design, the population that was studied and the sampling strategy, the data collection process, the instruments used for gathering data, and how data should analyzed and presented.



3.2 Research design

This research employed a case study research design. case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships The study utilized this design because it helped the researcher get information regarding effects of public relations on student enrolment.

3.3 Target and study population

The target population comprised of the 151 permanent employees in Kabarak University who are largely involved in public relations as in table 3.1 Kenya. The study considered only the permanent employees as they provided informative details regarding the enrollment of postgraduate students at Kabarak University which comprises of Masters and PhD students. There are 151 permanently employed employees in these Departments as shown in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Target Population and Sample size

Name of Department	Number employees	sample
STEA	15	4
SSET	12	4
Law	15	4
Business	27	8
Postgraduate	6	2
Admissions	13	4
Management	16	5
Public relations and marketing	10	3
Quality assurance	5	1
Finance and accounting	10	3
student affairs	12	4
Ict office &online	10	3
Total	151	45

(Kabarak University, Human Resources records, 2015)

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The sample size consisted of selected employees permanently employed in the twelve departments. In order to pick the employees for the study, stratified proportionate sampling procedure was used to pick the respondents. In the departments, the total number of employees was 151. The researcher will utilize 30% of the total population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). This gives a sample of 45 respondents.



The formula, $n=N \times 30/100$
 n = sample size while N =is the target population.

3.5 Data collection technique

This study adopted closed ended questionnaires to gather in-depth information from the respondents. The justification of using the questionnaire allow the respondents adequate time to think about their responses, being focused and guided by the questions (Curvin & Slatter, 1996).

3.6 Pilot Study

Reliability was established by pre-testing the instrument before conducting the study and defective items on the instruments was corrected. A pre-test was conducted on 10 respondents from St. Paul’s University, main Campus. This allowed any modification in the questionnaire before the same was distributed to the respondents.

3.7 Data analysis and presentation

Prior to visiting the Departments under investigation, the researcher planned for the most appropriate timings of the respondents in order to fill the questionnaire. This ensured that, their work and schedule was not affected. After administering the questionnaires, the respondents were given at least two days to respond. The researcher then visited the departments under the study for collection

4.1 Research findings

Respondents were reached with a 88.9 % return rate as indicated in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Expected responses	45	100
Received responses	40	88.9%

Source: Research Data (2015)

4.5 Background information of the participants

The participants comprised of 40 employees from Kabarak University Main Campus

4.6 Influence of Public Relations Influence Student Enrolment

The employees were asked whether they thought public relations influence student enrolment. A majority (73%) said YES as shown in the Figure 2

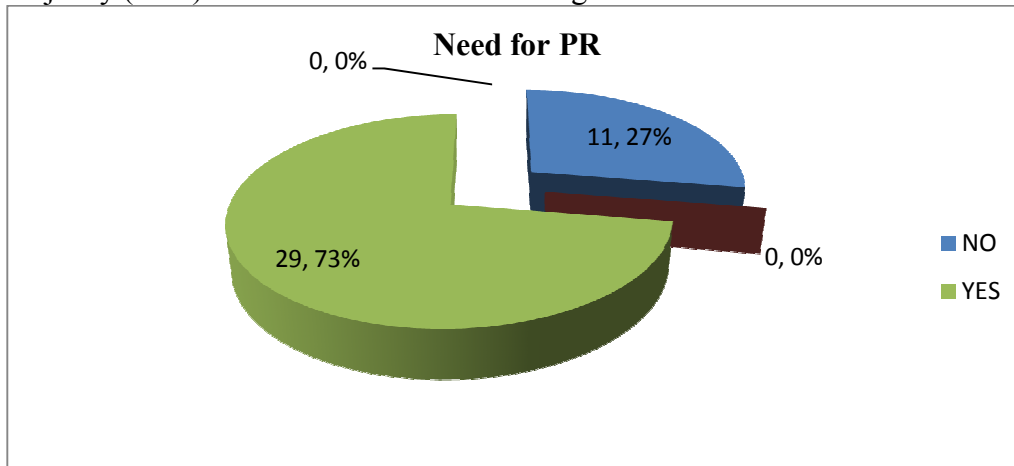


Figure 2 Public Relations Influence on Student Enrolment

4.6.1 Effective Ways Public Relations Can Use To Increase Student Enrolment

The research sought to establish the effective ways do you think public relations can use to increase the student enrolment and the findings are as shown in the Figure 3

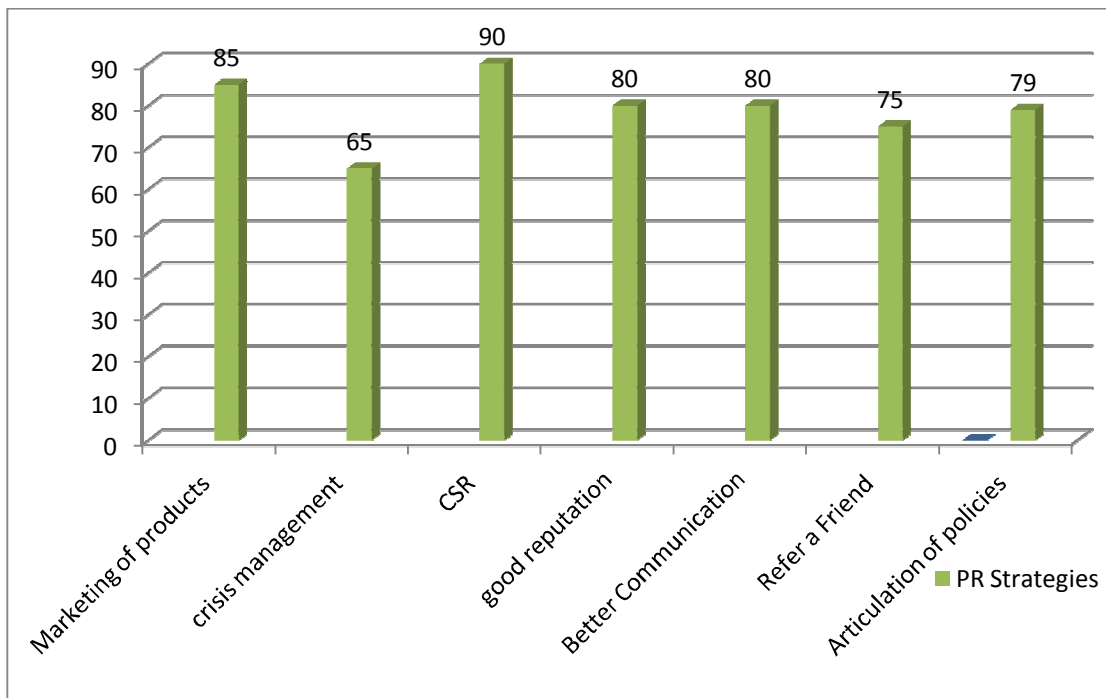


Figure 3 Strategies

The findings in Figure 4.5 above revealed that the most effective strategies to improve public relation in the university is through corporate social responsibility as indicated by 90% and better communication at 80%



5.1 Summary, conclusions and recommendations

5.2 Summary

Majority of the employees had worked in Kabarak for 6-10years at 37%. A majority (73%) of the employees agreed that public relations Influencestudent enrolment. Another majority (63%) also agreed that there has been decline of postgraduate students' enrolment in Kabarak University in the past three years. The most effective strategies to improve public relation in the university is through corporate social responsibility as indicated by 90% of the respondentsand Communication to publics at 47%

Conclusion

The study concludes that communication has an effect on student enrolment. The most available source of information for the university was brochures It is farther concluded that the issuance of giving scholarship to poor Family and awards to well performed student's ideal way of doing community participation and social responsibility and contributes a lot in student's enrolment.

Recommendations

Traditional methods of communication are too slow for this generation universities need to shift their culture from the print to the web in order to reach these students in the way they like to communicate.

To brand Managers: Since CSR dimensions affect product extension differently, hence brand managers can use CSR dimensions based on pressing need at the moment in order to achieve the intended objectives in the institution

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