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Public Relation as an Essential Marketing Tool in Attracting and Retaining Membership in Non-governmental Organizations

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Abstract:

Public Relation has been identified as a critical element and factor in marketing. It remains a germane tool in the integrated marketing communication or marketing mix phenomenon in the promotion of goods and services and ideas. Until in recent times, Public Relation (PR) has remained in the corporate cell of most companies distinctly and separated from marketing communications thereby limiting the integrative demands for both Public Relations and Marketing to find a complete common ground to leverage from the unique but common objectives of the imperatives of their mission, activities and roles in a given organization. In recent years that 'Berlin wall' or border line has given way in practices in most organization leading to a more effective collaborative synergy particularly in the cooperate goals and management of today's organizations particularly in the areas of marketing promotion as the linkage of both PR and Marketing has become so imperative Succinctly due to the strategic role of Public Relation, the PR function is directly linked and reports to the Chief Executive of the organization within the context of the company's environment while Marketing remains a very integral part and activity of an organization.

Keywords: Public relation, essential tool in marketing, communication, goals

1. Introduction

Public Relations have been defined as a planned and conscious effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance with a satisfactory two-way communication.

According to Public Relation News of New York (1988:15) Public Relations is a management function which evaluates public attitudes identifies the policies and procedures of an organization and plan programmes for public understanding and acceptance.

The word management entails that Public Relation is at all times a management priority and functions. By evaluation it emphasizes that Public Relations is deliberate act pursued with a goal in mind.

The goal as a matter of fact is usually to ascertain the attitudes, feelings and opinion of people about given organization or institution.

According to George Cosmin TANASE in his published work 'Public Relations... An essential communication tool in Marketing and Media Environment' Public Relations is different from Marketing Communication in the strict sense of the word in a number of ways. For marketing communication tend to be commercial and short term, it noted that few marketers will jeopardize short term benefits for the sake of large term returns. He noted that although Public Relations executives recognize the importance of customer satisfaction and profits and in that sense support core Marketing Communication efforts, their main concern is the long-term good will towards and of the reputation of the company as a whole'.

It is important to note at this juncture that Public Relations tool and or techniques include press releases, partnering with the media, using social media effectively, communicating with the internal and external publics of the organization, corporate social responsibilities using such platforms or events such as Annual General meetings, Annual dinners, sponsorship of events, facility tours amongst others in complementing the general marketing goals and strategies.

2. Marketing Concept

The Marketing concept involves identifying the needs and wants of the customers which can be in form of goods, services or ideas that will satisfy them while making a profit. According to Cleverism, the five major marketing concepts by Martin Luenendance (September 23, 2019) as updated are:

- Identifying the market or target consumers
- Understanding the needs and wants of the consumer in the target market
- Creating products or services based on the consumer needs and wants
- Satisfying the needs of consumers better than competitors
- Accomplishing all of these while earning a profit

Sustaining the satisfaction of the customers of their needs and wants through constant interaction and well-established feedback mechanism in what is today known as Customer Relationship. This is another added key element that will enhance the sustainability of the company's /organization's operation and reliance in the marketing environment.

Marketing simply can be defined as activity, set of institution and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large earning profits for the services goods or value that is being provided to customers by the organization.

2.1. Non-Governmental Organization

Nonprofit organization or non-government organizations are organized for public or mutual benefits other than generating profit for owners or collaborators (Salmon 1999). They can take a variety of forms. NGO's provide various type of support such as training and technical assistance towards creating an environment in which developmental projects can be imitated and sustained.

The five main characteristics features of NGO's are:

- They are organized
- Private (Separate from government)
- Self-governing
- Nonprofit distributing and
- Voluntary

It is important to highlight that the nonprofit distributing characteristics means that – contrary to the common belief – nonprofit organization can generate profit but they cannot distribute it or share it to owners or directors. The profit can only be used to support and sustain the operation of the organization, (Anheler 2014). Generally speaking, nonprofit organization are exempted from taxonomy in the revenue generating target of the government.

In this paper presentation, focus and attention would be given to voluntary membership organization in the private sector, not for profit making organization, the business membership organization in attracting and retaining membership whose instrument and approach is advocacy role. Advocating for enabling business environment for right investment and optimal operation of members and indeed the business community.

2.2. Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Imperatives

It is important at this juncture, to throw a brief light on the Socio-Economic, Political, and Cultural Imperatives of non-government organization or nonprofit making organization that emerged simultaneously in different countries because of given political, economic and social conditions that were similar.

Both the world war and the industrial revolution have raised a number of problems and challenges which have led to the formation of association, to deal with them, and that is what actually led to the birth of NGO's in almost every continent of the world, starting in America and spreading around the world. Unemployment, Structural Adjustment, International debt, Inflation, Ideological Persecution, Political Repression, Natural Disaster, Urban Migration and Global Path towards a new world order has affected both the north and south of the planet.

A more scientific approach to development has led to a better identification of problem that cannot only be addressed by the structure and mechanism of the state or government alone. Issues such as women in development, environmental problems, human rights, private sector and attendant economic space and development, hence the sprouting up and expansion of the nonprofit organization in attempting to fill the yawning gap created by the inefficiency and corruption in Public Service by the state respectively in Sub-Sahara Africa.

3. Formation of Business Membership Voluntary Organization in Nigeria as a Case Study

The Formation of business membership voluntary organization such as the chamber of commerce and industry in Nigeria dated back to 1888 with the formation of Lagos chamber of Commerce and industry.

The Chamber of commerce and industry otherwise called the Organized Private Sector of the Nigeria economy has grown tremendously with the formation of different association throughout the country. As at today there are various city chambers of commerce in all the states in the federation of Nigeria each autonomous and independent in operation within their operating environments though under an umbrella known as Nigeria Association of chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) other voluntary business Association operating in Nigeria include.

- The manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) with branches in all the states in Nigeria
- The Nigerian Employers consultative Association (NECA)
- The Nigeria Association of Women in Business
- The Nigeria Association of small-scale industries (NASSI) amongst others.

These association as noted earlier are nonprofit oriented, nonpolitical, voluntary and nondiscriminatory organizations. They are organized in such a way that they cater for the interest of their members and nonmembers per say since they represent and act as the mouth-piece of the business community.

3.1. Services to Members

- Succinctly the chamber of commerce and industry render the following typical services.
- Collecting and disseminating information relevant to members for business decision making.
- Identification of profitable operations of commercial, industrial and other enterprises especially those arising from government policies or in the administration of such obstacles.

- Organization of marketing events to expand the economic space, trade and investment.
- Conferences and training, Industrial visits/ facility tours.
- Facilitating the flow of private business between nations.
- Generally advocating for enabling business environment amongst others.

3.2. Statement of the Problem

The backbone of the chamber of commerce and industry is its membership which is voluntary based on the United States of America model, and of the US chamber of commerce. Consequently, the chamber of commerce needs to work hard to attract and retain the fulcrum of its existence.

Despite being in existence for the past Fifty-Seven years except during the 3 years Nigerian- Biafra civil war, the Enugu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mines and Agriculture (ECCIMA), established in 1963 has only 5% of private sector operators in Enugu as Financial members.

In spite, of the popularity of its key program, the Enugu International Trade Fair and other activities of (ECCIMA), a vast majority are yet to register with the chamber and many of those who have joined as members do not retain membership for long.

Then the posing question as for this study/research work is what factors are responsible for this low membership attraction and retention in the Enugu Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture? And what role do Public Relations play in all these and what role can it actually play? This study therefore is essentially an attempt to answer those broad and general questions.

3.3. Statement of Research Objectives

- To find out if Public Relations plays or can play a role in attracting and retaining membership in ECCIMA.
- To find out if the Media Image of ECCIMA influences or can influence ECCIMA membership attraction and retention.
- To find out if the perceived relationship of ECCIMA with government has any influence on ECCIMA membership attraction and retention.
- To identify and offer solutions to problems and issues related to the above objectives.
- To make policy and practical recommendations based on the data generated.

3.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to document the need or absence of a need for Public Relations in attracting and retaining membership of NGOs by examining the extent to which Public Relations has or has not played such roles in a well-known Nigerian NGO, the Enugu Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture. (ECCIMA)

3.5. Research Questions

- Do Public Relations play a role in attracting membership for ECCIMA?
- Do Public Relations play a role in retaining membership of ECCIMA?
- Does Media Image of ECCIMA affect the attraction and retention of membership for the organization.
- Does Public Perception of ECCIMA's relationship with government affect ECCIMA membership attraction and retention in any way?
- What other related problems or issues can be identified on this issue for the benefit of practitioners, researchers and others.

4. Methodology

This study adopted the ex-post factor survey research design to find out the extent Public Relations Influences the attraction and retention of membership in non-governmental organization.

As it is attendant in ex-post factor survey studies, the changes in the independent variable have already taken place and the researcher must study them in retrospect for their possible effects on the observed dependent variables (Ary et al., 1979:291-292) consequently, this study is aimed at finding out to what extent Public Relations factors influence the attraction and retention of membership of a NGO, and in this case a popular NGO in Nigeria, the Enugu Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture.

4.1. Study Population

The population of interest in the study is made up of all the 350 registered members of the Enugu Chamber of Commerce, Industry Mines and Agriculture as contained in the register of members.

4.2. Sample Size /Selection Strategy

A sample size of 150 was appropriate for this study based on the Rule of the Thump approach as recommended by O.C. Nwana (1979), through the Random Number Table selection strategy.

5. Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was a 48 points structured questionnaire that had 45 close ended questions and 3-open ended questions.

5.1. Biographic Data Presentation/Analysis

Data on Sex, Age, Academic Qualification, Marital Status, Level of Income and Profession satisfy our need here. Questions 43, 44, 45, 46, 47 and 48 address these

Biographic Data. From the Master Table below, these data are jointly presented for comparativeness. Distribution of the Respondents on the Basis of Sex, Age, Academic Qualification, Marital Status, Level of Income and Profession

Biographic Classification	Biographic Characteristics	Absolute Frequency	Relative frequency
Sex	Male	82	80.4
	Did not Specify	8	7.8
	Female	12	11.6
	Total	102	100
Age Group	Between 25-35	32	31.4%
	Between 36-47	42	41.2%
	Between 48-59	14	13.7%
	60andAbove	6	5.9%
	Did not specify	8	7.8%
	Total	102	100%
Educational Qualifications	FSLC	8	2.0%
	WASC, GCE	44	7.8%
	HND OR 1 st Degree	26	43.1%
	M.A., M.Sc.	2	25.5%
	PH.D.	8	2.0%
	Others	44	7.8%
	Did not specify	12	11.8%
	Total	102	100%
Marital Status	Married	60	58.8%
	Unmarried	30	29.4%
	Did not specify	12	11.8%
	Total	102	100%
Income			25.5%
	Below N100,000.00	26	31.4%
	N100,000-300,000	32	9.8%
	N400,000- 700,000	10	5.9%
	800,000- Million	6	25.5%
	2 million and above	16	15.7%
	Did not Specify	12	11.5%
	Total	102	100%
Profession	Architect	4	3.9%
	Engineer	26	25.5%
	Medical Doctor	4	3.9%
	General Merchandise	16	15.7%
	Contractor	8	7.8%
	Academicians	10	9.8%
	Did not specify	34	33.3%
	Total	102	100.0%

Table 1: Biographic Data Presentation/Analysis

5.2. Other Data Presentation/Analyses

S/N	Response	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
1	Very Good	8	7.8%
2	Good	68	66.7%
3	Bad	18	17.6%
4	Don't Know	8	7.8%
	Total	102	100%

Table 2 Respondents Rating of the Overall Promotional Public Relations Efforts of Eccima

S/N	Response	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
1	Yes	58	56.9%
2	No	34	33.3%
3	Don't Know	10	9.8%
	Total	102	100.0%

Table 3: Respondents Opinion on the Influence of Public Relations on Their Decision to Continue Being Members of Eccima

S/N	Response	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
1	Very Good	16	15.7%
2	Good	60	58.8%
3	Bad	14	13.7%
4	Don't Know	12	11.7%
	Total	102	100.0%

Table 4: Respondents Rating of the General Media Image of Eccima

S/N	Response	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
1	Very Good	8	7.8%
2	Good	58	56.9%
3	Bad	24	23.5%
4	Very bad	4	3.9%
5	Don't Know	8	7.8%
	Total	102	100.0%

Table 5: Respondents Perception of Government's Relationship with Eccima and How It Affects Membership Attraction and Retention

S/N	Response	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
1	Good	54	52.9%
2	Bad	40	29.2%
3	Don't Know	8	7.8%
	Total	102	100.0%

Table 6: Respondents Rating of the Community Relations Efforts/Programmes of Eccima

S/N	Response	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
1	Good	36	35.3%
2	Bad	56	54.9%
3	Don't Know	10	9.8%
	Total	102	100.0%

Table 7: Respondents Rating of the International Public Relations Efforts/Programmes of Eccima

S/N	Response	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
1	Very Good	8	7.8%
2	Good	58	56.9%
3	Bad	14	13.7%
4	Very Bad	4	3.9%
5	Don't Know	18	17.6%
	Total	102	100.0%

Table 8: Respondents Rating of the Financial Relations Programmes of Eccima

6. Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

From the data collected and tested, it was discovered that Public Relations plays a significant role in the attraction of membership for Enugu Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (ECCIMA). ECCIMA being an NGO cannot operate without the active participation of its various members. Like all other non-governmental organizations, it must be concerned with its ability to attract members since this is the only way they can keep afloat and gather enough resources to keep the organization financially buoyant to meet its various obligations.

Another finding is that it was also discovered that Public Relations is very important in the retention of membership for ECCIMA. Since an NGO should be non-government in terms of origination, membership and funding, it is imperative that they retain their members. Since this is sine qua non in keeping the Ngo operational. ECCIMA as an NGO is not different and must recognize the place of Public Relations in its member retention endeavors. It must be stressed therefore that to justify its continued existence, ECCIMA must ensure that it has sufficient number of members on its register.

Public Relations as a tool of marketing process has been identified as meeting this ECCIMA's objective of retaining its various members.

Another major finding was that the media or corporate image of ECCIMA influences the attraction and retention of its various members. From the data that was analyzed it was discovered that for ECCIMA to continue to achieve this, it must pay due attention to the-Promotion of its media or corporate image. It should be noted here that the main objective of a programme of corporate image promotion within ECCIMA is to make sure that members have enough confidence on ECCIMA to meet the various obligations of the Chamber. Also, a good corporate image gives every member a sense of belonging and removes the quagmire of sabotage.

Another advantage of a good media or corporate image is that the more active the Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the more it will be recognized by government and other inter-related and international bodies. If the members are not given a sense of belonging and decide on their own to sabotage the various good efforts of ECCIMA then ECCIMA will be the worse off for it. But through a planned and consistent media image programme, their confidence in ECCIMA is boosted then as a team ECCIMA can achieve all its set goals and objectives.

Another finding was that government's relationship with ECCIMA affects membership attraction and retention. From the analysed data it was seen that ECCIMA's relationship with the government is very crucial to its members. Although it is a non-governmental organization, it is not totally independent of government. This is because there are still many services those governments can perform for ECCIMA to achieve its corporate objectives. Some of these services are those that ECCIMA cannot provide all on its own. Government can come to the aid of ECCIMA in the provision of various infrastructures that are necessary for the day-to-day running of the Chamber. To achieve this there is need for a line of communication between the government and the private sector. This has been identified as a major source of conflict between the government and the private sector. If a line of communication is created, it should be kept open and thus this creates room for government and ECCIMA to liaise amongst them and also gives government the added leverage to come to the aid of ECCIMA in times of crisis.

Another finding was that relating to the Community Relations Efforts of ECCIMA. It was discovered that ECCIMA has a good relationship with its various publics and this has gone a long way in making sure that it achieves its various goals and objectives.

Also, it was discovered that the International Public Relations efforts/ programmes of ECCIMA has been very good and this has paved the way for the cordial relationship that ECCIMA enjoys as a non-governmental organization with the international community and the financial community that it relates with.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, we make the following recommendations which we strongly feel if implemented, will place ECCIMA on a very sound footing for the effective and efficient realization of its missions.

- The Chamber of Commerce is the umbrella organization of private sector operators and membership is voluntary. Despite over 5 decades of existence of Enugu Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (ECCIMA) it has been noticed that only less than 5% of private sector operators in Enugu are financial members of ECCIMA. Thus, it is recommended that the Council should carry out an intensive Public Relations campaign to let the Private Sector operators in Enugu know the various advantages of being financial members of ECCIMA. They should be made to see for themselves the necessity of paying their dues on and as at when due. They should be made to know that this is the only way they can have a strong base from which they can sort out their various individual problems they encounter in the day-to-day operation of their different companies.
- Since the most common problem of Chamber of Commerce secretariat is how to woo prospective members and to retain such membership, it is hereby recommended that a Committee be set up with the sole aim of helping the secretariat in its membership drive efforts. This Committee should design a package that will motivate the secretariat and the existing members. The Committee must recognize the place and role of Marketing in achieving this goal. It should supply all the techniques that will make the Chamber reach out very well to all prospective members.
- It is also recommended that the Council members, who are entrusted with the policy directions in tandem with the secretariat of the Chamber, should at all times try to sustain the general image of competence, ability and fairness in its dealings with the general public.

- More Seminars, Conferences and Workshops should be organized because most members main objective in joining the Chamber is to improve their business fortunes. The realization of this goal can be enhanced through the organization of Seminars. Conferences and Workshops. The provision of these services helps to sustain the interest of members and also helps in tapping the various experiences of each member for the general benefit of the Chamber (ECCIMA). This will also provide a leveraging platform in marketing for membership and sustaining existing one's interest.

7. Conclusion

This study has dealt extensively on the role of Public Relations in attracting and retaining membership in Nigerian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and in particular the Enugu Chamber of Commerce of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (ECCIMA). The study found that ECCIMA like other non-governmental organizations has the problem of recruiting and retaining old members. Public Relations has been seen to help in this regard.

It is worthy to note that private sector operators have found the need for increased Public Relations Strategies in meeting their various goals and objectives, especially to cope with the attendant healthy competition of products and services in the economy. It would be worthy to note here that non-government organizations can use the same Public Relations tools or strategies used by government for image management and membership mobilization.

But ECCIMA Council members should know that in Public Relations practice, if the corporate image of any organization is dead and rotten, there is not much Public Relations Can do to revive it, notwithstanding efforts in the marketing strategies as it would affect the attraction of new members and retention of old members. This will cause erosion in the membership strength of the organization.

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