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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS ON CUSTOMERS SATISFACTION: ETHIOPIAN TELECOMMUNICATION CORPORATION IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceived impact of marketing public relation practice on customers' satisfaction in Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation. This study used pragmatic research paradigm to test the application of PESO public relation model on the practice of marketing public relation. The descriptive qualitative results of this study showed that Ethiopian telecommunication corporation used all the four marketing media activities (Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned) as part of its public relation efforts evaluated using PESO model. Based on the correlational analysis, this study showed the presence of positive and significant correlation between public relations activities and customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation. The multiple linear regression also showed that 65.5% of variance in customers' satisfaction is due to the corporation's public relation marketing activities.

INTRODUCTION

The ever-evolving needs of the business environment, which are driven by external influences like globalization and technological improvement, are growing more often. The attitudes of the many relevant publics are analyzed, evaluated, and measured by public relations. Establishing good ties is also one of the most important factors in creating positive interactions with one's stakeholders. The purpose of public relations (PR), according to Banik (2006), is to create a bridge of goodwill and understanding between an institution and its publics. PR efforts connect an organization's policies and actions. Actions in public relations are taken to spread and transfer all the information necessary to build a favorable reputation in the eyes of the general public. Positive programs are adopted for this aim by an effective and strong public relations department, and it is constantly emphasized to eliminate negative publicity that results from dubious tactics. Public relations (PRs) is a unique management function that assists in establishing and maintaining channels of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics. It also involves the management of problems or issues, assists management in staying informed about and responsive to public opinion, defines and emphasizes management's duty to serve the public interest, and assists management in staying current with and effectively utilizing change (Alison, 2001). Over the past ten years, the demand for Public Relations (PR) services has increased significantly. This is due to multinational corporations' greater competition in overseas markets (Petersen, 2010).

International banks, the Coca-Cola Company, and many other Western-based multinational corporations are expanding their operations into previously unexplored markets while fostering ties with their target audiences through PR. Practices of PR are becoming more globalized as a result of greater trade between nations and the need to raise awareness of, support, and promote government development efforts (Tindall, 2010). In the majority of cases, public relations play a key role in resolving disputes between corporations and groups. Like maintaining a company's reputation and marketing products and services, public relations is crucial to the achievement of a company's goals (Mbeke, 2011). Additionally, according to Bronn (2014), in Africa, investing in PR would help government institutions achieve each goal efficiently and effectively. Public relations, according to Van Heerden and Rensburg (2009), not only encourage public participation but also lead to improved government corporate operations. Public relations that are done well can contribute to the success of government development initiatives. In situations of adverse publicity or in case the government is under crisis on development projects, advanced public relations can get. Businesses that use PR well can gain from improved knowledge of themselves, their goods or services, higher employee morale, client loyalty, and shareholder pleasure, among other things (Kotler, 2002). As per Rosenberg (2013), a common misconception is that public relations is concerned with image-making in the sense of putting up a front or a cover-up. Corporate sustainability is constructed around the organizational structure that accepts public relations ideas and practices, and modern PR has grown to accommodate this. Customer satisfaction also gauges how effectively a company's goods and services meet or surpass client expectations. These expectations

frequently reflect a variety of features of the commercial operations of the organization, including the actual product, service, organization, and how the organization functions in a global setting. Based on the client's lifetime experiences with products and services, customer satisfaction measurements are an overall psychological assessment (Smith, 2007).

Problem Statement: Public as well as private organizations are recommended to use public relations as a key weapon if they are to promote good relationship with their customers. The government has implemented public relations to assist news outlets in covering significant events (Coombs, 2015). However, (Ogolla, 2011) notes that some of the difficulties in using public relations to promote governance include inadequate media utilization and little knowledge of the technique. Because the public relations role has been handled in an unprofessional manner, there is poor sensitization, distrust, and a bad view of government institutions among the general public, making it challenging to promote government programs (Omondi, 2012).

Especially, in public institutions, there is little appreciation of the role played by Public Relations tools in sensitizing the public on government projects (Kiambi, 2010). This is evidenced by the fact that public relations officers are not part of the top management teams that make decisions including policies and regulations that would need to be communicated to the public. This underscores the role of public relations in sensitizing the public on government projects, since there is limited participation in decision making process (Njuru, 2011).

In Ethiopia, there is a varied way of perceiving public relations endeavors made by companies. For instance, according to Geremew (2017), the issue of public relations practices in different countries including Ethiopia has been controversial within in the field of communication. The possible reason for this could be attributed to the lack of understanding of the role of public relations. At the same time, very few people know what public relation encompasses, what it aims to achieve and how it works. Some persons see public relations as propaganda, while some other persons understand public relations as a technique of embellishing ugly or even antisocial realities in some other part of the world.

However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there are no prior studies conducted in assessing the perceived role of public relation practices on the level of customers' satisfaction. Additionally, in the case of government owned corporations, it the perception of public relation activities are not studied so far. Despite the importance of the public relations, there is limited empirical evidence on the role of public relations in supporting the activities of government owned corporations like Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation, most of these variables are not studied by prior researches, hence the research gap. It is against this backdrop that the study seek to fill the existing research gap by conducting a study to establish the role of public relations tools in sensitizing Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation's customers' satisfaction.

Objectives of the Study: The general objective of this study is to assess the perceived effect of marketing public relation practice on customers' satisfaction in Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation. More specifically, this study tried to

- Examine the impact of earned media marketing activities on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation
- Find out the impact of paid media activities on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation
- To test the impact of shared media activities on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation
- To examine the effect of owned media marketing activities on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation

Conceptual Framework: The conceptual framework of this study is prepared based on PESO model. The PESO model classifies communication tactics into paid, earned, shared and owned forms of media (Dietrich, 2018) and is commonly used in communication research as well as by practitioners (Thabit, 2015). According to Macnamara et al. (2016), the paid media component of this model entails traditional advertising and other forms of purchased content. Earned media encompasses all editorial publications that an organisation gains through providing journalists with useful information such as in the form of media releases. Shared media are defined as all social media channels that are open for interactions of other users, such as in the form of comments. Owned media are publications that are developed and controlled by the organization, such as corporate magazines or websites.

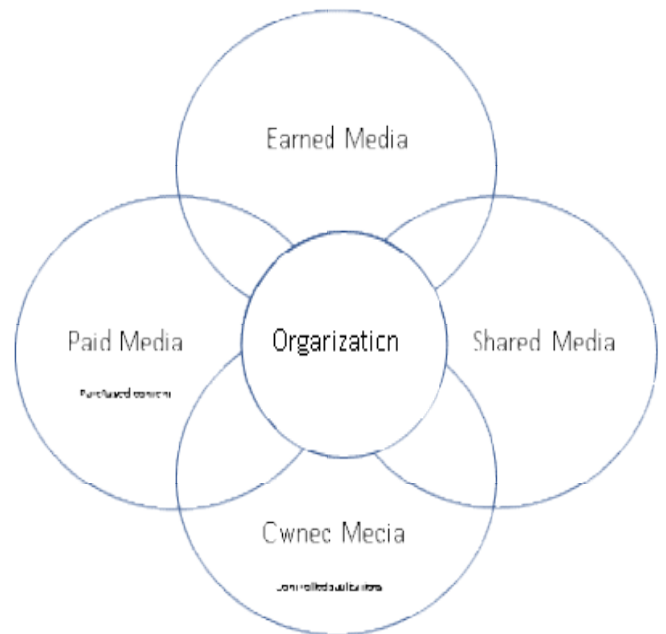


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework adapted from Dietrich (2018)

METHODS

The PESO public relation model's application to the practice of marketing public relations at Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation was tested using the constructivist research paradigm in this study. By exposing the intricacies of the "social fabric" of strategy-making in the marketing interaction with the practice of public relations in the case study organization, the strategy as practice research program challenges long-accepted notions of strategy. For instance, the constructivism philosophical paradigm holds that people build their own knowledge and understanding of the world by engaging with it firsthand and reflecting on it afterwards. Since a large portion of customer satisfaction is subjectively assessed by the customers themselves, this research paradigm is suited to investigate how public relations strategies are perceived using the PESO model. The study embraced both qualitative and quantitative research approach, where it can be use of a questionnaire provided primarily descriptive and qualified data. The qualitative approach was utilized for exploring concepts and experiences of customers using subjective expressions and evaluations in more detail. The research design for this study was sequential mixed method design. In this research design the researcher has used both qualitative and quantitative ones. Thus, quantitative data sets are reused along with some elements of qualitative data. The study embraced both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. In terms of quantitative approach, it can use of a questionnaire provided primarily descriptive and qualified data. Quantitative method is study involving analysis of data and information that are descriptive in nature and quantified. The sample size was determined by using the statistical formula by Yamane (1967).

Based on the assumption of 95% confidence level and $P = .05$ and the estimated population size in Addis Ababa (customers of the corporation) are the above 10,000. Therefore; the sample size would be 385 customers of the company. Regarding the sampling technique to select this selected sample of respondent for ethio-telecom customers is convenience sampling. The researcher used non-probability sampling especially convenience sampling because it would have been difficult to access each population unit and difficult to get their address hence the study may not use probability sampling technique. In addition, convenience-sampling technique was applied because in this case the respondents were supposed to be accessible to the researcher when doing this research. In the this study, having understood the need to triangulate and complement the collected data from both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, self-administered questionnaire (what the study participants say, they think, feel and act), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) were employed as instruments for data collection.

Method of data analysis and Interpretation: A survey is a method of collecting data in which people are asked to answer a number of questions (usually in the form of a questionnaire). The main advantages of questionnaires are that they can be administered to groups of people simultaneously, and they are less costly and less time-consuming than other measuring instruments. For this study, survey research method were used in terms of a questionnaire through which to collect the information needed for this study. The researcher employed different statistical techniques to analyze the data to be collected using statistical data analyzing software, specifically SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 26. Descriptive statistics correlational analysis, and multiple linear regression were utilized.

RESULTS

To discuss the effect of marketing public relation practice on customer's satisfaction in the case of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation survey was handed out to the respondents. In this section, the researcher described respondents profile in terms of age, gender, educational level, and experience of customers in the organization. These responses were analyzed using frequencies and percentage distributions below.

Descriptive Analysis: This formula is adapted from (Vichea, 2005), with 5 point scales, the interval for breaking the range in measuring each variable is calculated by $5 - 1/5 = 0.8$. It means items with scores fall between the ranges of: 4.20 – 5.00 are considered as strongly agreed; 3.40 – 4.09 as agreed; 2.60 – 3.39 as Neutral; 1.08 – 2.59 as disagree and 1.00 – 1.79 strongly disagree. Interview results are also presented along with the results of the questionnaire. Data from questionnaires were processed by SPSS program in terms of frequency, mean, and standard deviation (Descriptive statistics).

Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA): Earned media marketing activities (EMMA) are mostly concerned about the attention that is organically generated for your brand's content that the company did not create or pay for. For instance, when someone mentions the brand or posts a photo or video to social media that the company didn't create or pay for. According to the results of the descriptive statistics depicted in the above table 4.3, all of the items fall in the agreement range (mean > 3.39). This result implies that Earned Media Marketing Activities of Ethiopian telecommunication corporation has helped customers know more about its products and services. Additionally, the above descriptive statistics also showed that print media were highly informative for customers as well as trade publication depiction of Ethiopian telecommunication corporation was based on reality, Finally, public relation experts appearing in various media on behalf of Ethiopian telecommunication corporation convey the company's position to its customers as well as using earned media (radio, TV, Newspaper etc) is effective in providing marketing information.

Many secondary sources also express the major advantages of utilizing the opportunities provided by earned media. Ethio telecom also uses such alternative media to inform the latest affairs of the company. Earned media is extremely successful for accelerating a company's growth and boosting revenue (Owman, 2006). It can be found on a variety of platforms, including as print, online, broadcast, and even in private contacts. The results depicted in the above table 4.4., showed that all of the items fall in the agreement range (mean > 3.39). This indicates in terms of the practice of paid media marketing activities of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation had a relatively higher level of practice, since in terms of paid media for a PR program has helped to illustrate its products for customers, accessible marketing, disseminating informative advertisement, and the utilization of social media ads such as Facebook and other platforms.

Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA): The results of Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation presented in the above table 4.5, exhibited that all the items fall in the agreement range (mean > 3.39). This result implies that with regards to shared media marketing activities of the corporation, such as the usage of unpaid social media as an effective marketing tool, public announcements and posts made online using social media to promote the product and accurate representation of the company's products and services. Additionally, the result also revealed that the company releases timely information on its social media accounts, provides accurate representation of its marketing information about its product and service on social media as well as it strives to make accessible its marketing information of social media platforms.

Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA): The results of the above descriptive statistics showed that all the items fall in the agreement range (mean > 3.4). This result implies Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation Owned Media Marketing Activities are helping the company to release its product types and prices on the media it owns to the potential customers in the broader market of the country. Additionally, the results also showed that the company's magazines and newspaper are effective in terms of enlightening customers about its product information. Based on the results of the interview as well as FGD, owned media by the corporation such as TV programs as well as magazines provide on timely information about the major products and services offered by the company.

Correlation Results: Based on the correlational results of this study presented in the above table have showed the presence of positive and significant correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable (customers' satisfaction). More specifically, Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA) ($r = .557$), Paid Media Marketing Activities (PMMA) ($r = .356$), Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) ($r = .715$) and Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA) ($r = .652$), have been found to be correlated positively and significantly with Customers' Satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation.

Multiple Regression Result: The link between the variables is estimated using the regression analysis that follows. It makes it possible to ascertain the degree to which variables are correlated with one another as well as the independent variables' ability to predict the dependent variable. Regression, in essence, enables researchers to determine the extent to which changes in one independent variable while holding other independent variables constant result in changes in the values of the dependent variable. Regression analysis is a statistical method for identifying the variables that actually have an impact.

The regression model statistics: The above model also showed that the model is significant in predicting customers' satisfaction and it is interpreted as 65.5% of variance in customers' satisfaction is due to public relation marketing activities

Table 4.3. Summary of Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA)

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Publicity activities of Ethio telecom has helped customers to know more about its products and services	367	4.2752	.86714
Media relations activities performed by Ethio Telecom in print media are highly informative.	367	4.1935	.88284
Trade publication depiction of Ethio Telecom is closer to its reality	367	4.3052	.91410
Public relation experts appearing in various media effectively convey the company's position to its customers.	367	4.2125	.99097
Pubic relation activities conducted by Ethio telecom using earned media (radio, TV, Newspaper etc) is effective in providing marketing information.	367	4.2561	.85239

Source: Own Survey, 2022

Table 4.4. Summary of Paid Media Marketing Activities (PMMA)

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ethio Telecom's paid media for a PR program has helped to illustrate its products for customers.	367	4.2316	.88601
Social media advertising activities of Ethio Telecom are very accessible	367	4.0763	.94647
Various sponsored contents distributed by Ethio Telecom are very informative	367	4.1444	.97137
Online marketing efforts of Ethio Telecom is on target to reach as many customers as possible	367	4.0082	1.04669
Facebook ads, LinkedIn video ads and other paid social media approaches of Ethio Telecom is with acceptable range for customers	367	4.0817	.97166

Table 4.5. Summary of Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ethio Telecom's usage of unpaid social media platform is acting as an effective marketing tool.	367	3.8120	1.06359
The contents presented in unpaid social media accounts of the company reflects its main marketing activities.	367	3.5831	1.01251
The company releases timely information on its social media accounts.	367	3.4632	1.21832
The company provides accurate representation of its marketing information about its product and service on social media.	367	3.4605	1.17949
The company strives to make accessible its marketing information of social media platforms.	367	3.4278	1.23456

Table 4.6. Summary of Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA)

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ethio Telecom release its product types and prices on the media it owns.	367	3.4905	1.16144
Ethio telecom's magazines and newspaper are effective in terms of enlightening customers about its product information.	367	4.0191	.97911
Ethio Telecom possess a powerful media such as magazines to inform existing as well as potential customers	367	4.0245	.92148

Table 4.7. Correlational Coefficients

	CS	EMMA	PMMA	SMMA	OMMA
EMMA	.557**	1			
PMMA	.356**	.338**	1		
SMMA	.715**	.327**	.361**	1	
OMMA	.652**	.426**	.391**	.631**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.809 ^a	.655	.651	.47483		
a. Predictors: (Constant), OMMA, PMMA, EMMA, SMMA						
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	154.821	4	38.705	171.670	.000 ^b
	Residual	81.618	362	.225		
	Total	236.439	366			
a. Dependent Variable: Customers' satisfaction						
b. Predictors: (Constant), OMMA, PMMA, EMMA, SMMA						

Table 4.11. Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.225	.164		1.373	.171
	EMMA	.319	.036	.309	8.855	.000
	PMMA	-.007	.036	-.007	-.199	.842
	SMMA	.405	.034	.476	11.771	.000
	OMMA	.211	.040	.223	5.262	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Customers' satisfaction						

(Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA), Paid Media Marketing Activities (PMMA), Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) and Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA) (p value < 0.05). Whereas the remaining variability in customers' satisfaction was unexplained and it can be explained by adding other variables that is not included in this model. Therefore, p-value test table shows that model is working well. According to table above coefficient table, Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA), Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) and Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA) have a positive and significant effect on Customers' satisfaction while Paid Media Marketing Activities (PMMA) didn't have a significant effect on customers' satisfaction.

H₁: Earned media marketing have positive and significant effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation

Based on the regression model coefficient results, Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA) have significant and positive effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation with Beta value = 0.319, P value < 0.05 . Therefore, we accept this hypothesis.

H₂: paid media activities have positive and significant effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation

On the other hand, according to regression model coefficient results, Paid Media Marketing Activities (PMMA) did not have a significant effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation with Beta value = -.007, P value > 0.05 . Therefore, we reject this hypothesis

H₃: shared media activities have positive and significant effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation

As it is illustrated on the above table, the regression model coefficient results, Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) have significant and positive effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation with Beta value = 0.405, P value < 0.05 . Therefore, we accept this hypothesis

H₄: owned media marketing activities have positive and significant effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation

As it is demonstrated on the above table, the regression model coefficient results, Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA) have significant and positive effect on customers' satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation with Beta value = 0.211, P value < 0.05 . Therefore, we accept this hypothesis

Conclusion and recommendations

The objective of this study is to assess perceived impact of marketing public relation practice on customers' satisfaction in Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation, Ethiopia. On the bases of the analysis given in the previous chapter, the following conclusion is drawn. The study has revealed that Earned Media Marketing Activities, paid media marketing activities, Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA), as well as Owned Media Marketing Activities of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation has helped customers know more about its products and services. Additionally, the above descriptive statistics also showed that print media were highly informative for customers as well as trade publication depiction of Ethiopian telecommunication corporation was based on reality, Finally, public relation experts appearing in various media on behalf of Ethiopian telecommunication corporation convey the company's position to its customers as well as using earned media (radio, TV, Newspaper etc.) is effective in providing marketing information.

Based on the correlational analysis of this study, there is a positive and significant correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable (customers' satisfaction). More specifically, Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA) ($r = .557$), Paid Media Marketing Activities (PMMA) ($r = .356$), Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) ($r = .715$) and Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA) ($r = .652$), have been found to be correlated positively and significantly with Customers' Satisfaction of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation. The multiple linear regression also showed that 65.5% of variance in customers' satisfaction is due to public relation marketing activities (Earned Media Marketing Activities (EMMA), Paid Media Marketing Activities (PMMA), Shared Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) and Owned Media Marketing Activities (OMMA) (p value < 0.05).

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher forwards the following recommendations.

- Since Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation Earned Media Marketing Activities are assisting the company to create awareness about its products and services, the corporation is highly recommended to boost its earned media impact through training and sufficient orientation given to public relation and marketing experts who will appear in various media on behalf of Ethiopian telecommunication corporation to convey the company's position to its customers
- Since practice of PR program has helped the corporation to demonstrate its products for customers, accessible marketing, disseminating informative advertisement, and the utilization of social media ads such as Facebook and other platforms is highly recommended to target customers' needs and their product knowledge.
- Regarding the usage of social media for marketing purpose, frequency of users visit as well as trust of the platform should be assessed before deploying a form of advertisement. Additionally, assurance of reliability and other credibility issues have a paramount importance when utilizing social media platforms. In this age of over information age, there are various fake outlets which try to counter fit the original information or advertisement released on social media platforms.
- Lastly, Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation is highly recommended to take into account integrating and strengthening the contents of social media websites of its own, which are a real invitation for them to develop partnerships and therefore promote its product and services in the virtual market of the country.

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