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Strategic Public Relations and Performance of Large Motor Vehicle Dealers in Kenya: A Critical Literature Review

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Abstract

Purpose: Public relations ensure that the organization attains and manages accord as well as positive behaviors among the stakeholders of the company. Public relations are responsible for building and maintaining a hospitable organizational environment. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the influence of strategic public relations on performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Methodology: The paper used a desk study review methodology where relevant empirical literature was reviewed to identify main themes and to extract knowledge gaps.

Findings: Strategic public relations comprise of a two-way communication between the firm and its publics and necessitate listening to the constituencies on which the company depends along with analyzing as well as understanding the behaviors and attitudes of the audiences. The study concluded that stakeholder involvement public relations strategy was likely to have significant effect on performance of Large Motor Vehicle dealers in Nairobi.

Unique Contribution to Theory and Practice: The study recommends that the Large Motor Vehicle dealers should create a framework that guides the access to information to ensure they optimize and benefit the most from their knowledge management made possible through openness public relations strategy. The management of Large Motor Vehicle dealers should also carry assessment on the value of different stakeholders on their operations to formulate the extent of their involvement in decision making processes.

Keywords: *strategic public relations, performance, large motor vehicle dealers*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Organizational performance is the result of an organization as measured against its intended goals and can be defined both financially and non-financially. According to Kaplan and Norton (1996) the Balanced scorecard is one of the recognized and established tools used in measuring the financial and non-financial performance by assessing the performance of a firm from four different perspectives namely: learning and growth, internal processes, customer and financial. Public relations' strategic management function has been recognized as facilitating the formulation of organizations strategies to enhance firm performance of the large motor vehicle dealers which in the long run enables the firm to accomplish overall goals and improved performance in the market and then supports those goals in a coordinated and consistent way (Plowman, 2010).

The position and influence of large corporation is growing, both in the local and international sphere, and with that growth, the demand of responsibility for the social and environmental effects has come into sharp focus. Over the last few decades, the perception of public relations has been changing. In the 1950s, the focus was on businesses' responsibilities to society and the good deeds that the business firms deed to the society but there has been a paradigm shift on this position over the years. In the 2000s, it has become an important strategic issue. There is a growing interest in public relation exercise, not only as a social responsibility exercise, but rather as a strategic issue for a firm (Forsberg, 2008).

Firm performance refers to how well an enterprise achieves their objectives (Hooley, & Greenley, 2015). Firm performance can be assessed by a firm's efficiency and effectiveness of goal achievement (Noe et al., 2016). Hancott (2015) indicates that firm performance is measured using indicators such as profit growth rate, net or total assets growth rate, return on sales, shareholder return, growth in market share, number of new products, return on net assets, etc. In addition, Tippins and Sohi (2013) propose firm performance is measured on four dimensions: relative profitability, return on investment, customer retention, and total sales growth. Griffins (2006) on the other hand describe organizational performance as the organization's ability to acquire and utilize its scarce resources as expeditiously as possible in the pursuit of its firm performance.

According to Alam et al. (2012) firm performance is a multidimensional construct that consists of four elements which include; customer-focused performance, including customer satisfaction, and product or service performance; financial and market performance, including revenue, profits, market position, cash-to-cash cycle time, and earnings per share; human resource performance, including employee satisfaction; and organizational effectiveness, including time to market, level of innovation, and production and supply chain flexibility. Measures of financial performance include return on assets (ROA), return on equity (ROE), earnings per share and any market value ration that is generally accepted. Generally, the financial performance of banks and other financial institutions has been measured using a combination of financial ratios analysis, benchmarking, measuring performance against budget or a mix of these methodologies (Ahmad et al, 2012).

Public relations ensure that the organization attains and manages accord as well as positive behaviors among the stakeholders of the company (Broom and Tucker, 2008). Public relations are responsible for building and maintaining a hospitable organizational environment. All-inclusive different PR specialists have propelled the centrality of relationship administration to advertising practice (Ledingham & Bruning, 2010). This is on account of relationship administration changes

the focal point of advertising from a yield-based movement, for example, media discharges, to an administration work that utilizes correspondence deliberately to meet the association's destinations and underscores assembling, supporting and keeping up hierarchical open connections. Organization creation or working techniques can impact a scope of partner - shopper) feelings, in that when learning of an organization working qualities are not effectively gotten to by purchasers, when activists play an essential data dispersal part, and when partner activities can modify the working choices of the firm (Feddersen & Gilligan, 2011). This infers that relationship administration may give a socially-based asset to a firm that is uncommon and not effortlessly imitated by contenders.

Public relations ensure that the public thinks positively about the firm as well as its services. The most commonly used public relations tools include press conferences, community service programs, news release, and speaking engagements (Nyenjeri, Kinyua, & Wawire, 2014). Strategic public relations comprise of a two-way communication between the firm and its publics and necessitate listening to the constituencies on which the company depends along with analyzing as well as understanding the behaviors and attitudes of the audiences. The strategic public relations dimensions of interest in this study were openness public relations strategy, stakeholder public relations strategy, investment public relations strategy, and commitment public relations strategy.

The Motor Vehicle Companies in Kenya encompasses the supply of vehicles and offering of after sale services coupled with availability of essential spare parts. Kenya's relatively better infrastructure makes the country a better hub for the assembling of motor vehicles in Eastern Africa. However, the approach adopted by Kenya in the Motor industry is lopsided, which means that regional countries like Ethiopia are more likely to surpass Kenya because they are more progressive in terms of industrialization (Kimani, 2014). Kenya's Motor Sector has experienced significant changes since the coming of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 1990s that upheld for advancement, which supplanted arrangements sought after before on, for example, "Import Substitution". The opening up of the Kenyan economy got a few players in the Motor Sector ill-equipped to confront rivalry. Moreover, the Kenyan economy had been performing grimly, enlisting negative 0.2 development rate in 2000. This execution of the economy had lessened the acquiring energy of the normal Kenyan, making the vehicles, and especially new vehicles more expensive (International Energy Agency, 2012). Kenya's car showcase is overwhelmed by a few extensive Motor Vehicle organizations which incorporate General Motors East Africa Limited (GMEA Ltd), Toyota (East Africa), Cooper Motors Corporation (CMC), Simba Colt and DT Dobie, among others.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The increasing levels of competition and need to increase firm performance has made large motor vehicle dealers in both the local and international industries to adopt different strategies to remain competitive, increase performance, increase market share, increase profits, increase sales and profitability. Some have opted to actively include and involve stakeholders in every facet of their operations because of the realization that business entities operate in an open system, such that they affect and get affected by the society at large (Enquist, Johnson & Skálén, 2009). Hence, the importance of public relation function in a firm, to spearhead the communication between it and the outside stakeholders, has been recognized as facilitating the accomplishment of a firm overall

goal such as to increase market share, increase profits, increase sales and profitability, and then supports those goals in a coordinated and consistent way.

The Motor Vehicle Companies in Kenya have played a major role in the contribution to job creation and economic development. The sector employs many workers particularly in its assembly and service sections. However, despite the involvement of the Motor Vehicle companies in various developmental activities, concerns have been raised over their performance in the recent years. The established dealers face intense competition from imported second-hand vehicles despite the Kenya Motor Industry Association lobbying hard to reverse this trend (KMI, 2016). The contribution of the motor industry to the GDP has declined from 21% in 2013 to 12% in 2017. The sector has also witnessed closure of large dealers and their relocation to other countries underpinning the uncertain firm performance in the interim. With the current dynamic business environment, these firms' survival is anchored on developing a unique set of capabilities and competences and application of modern technology.

Several studies have been undertaken concerning the communication between a firm and its stakeholders. Wilson (2014) analyzed the connection amongst organizations and group from the point of view of corporate social duty (CSR) among the Belgium 13 firms, contending that open impression of an association's CSR responsibility was integral to the arrangement of partner discernments. In an investigation of the dairy business in the Netherlands, Mathis (2007) distinguishes a professional dynamic way to deal with CSR execution as basic to building up a powerful association with open experts. A study by Rehman et al. (2010) on using public relations to strengthen relationships with different stakeholders showed that relationships ensure corporations have minimum conflicts with stakeholders and maximum loyalty from all stakeholders

Therefore, there was a knowledge gap and this formed the basis of this study on influence of strategic public relations on performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to establish the influence of strategic public relations on performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Kenya.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings may be of great importance to the policy makers in Kenya. They include the Ministry of Trade and Industrialization, Kenya Revenue Authority, Kenya Bureau of Standard as they formulate policies on motor vehicle import and dealership laws. The business association bodies such as Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) may gain insightful guidance on how an organizations public relations activity may influence organizational performance by effectively incorporation of the findings in their decision making. From the research findings, the policy makers may be able to develop targeted policies that leverage on the firms PR. In addition, they may be able to engage the government from the recommendations of the study on how to shore up the PR function in the motor vehicle firms in Kenya. The resultant intervention measures were aimed to improving the overall performance of the manufacturing firms.

The study will further be beneficial to the management of the large motor vehicle dealers in Kenya in improving their firm performance. This research clearly depicted how the Motor vehicle companies should adapt PR for financial and non-financial benefits. The study quantified on the type of PR activities and their benefits to the performance in the Motor vehicle companies in Kenya. This research added content to Stakeholder theory, public relations theory and other theories relevant to the public relations theory. The research may be beneficial to the government of Kenya in policy formulation towards promotion of PR for the other sectors for a better economy.

The study may further benefit the future scholars as it provides data that can be used in their future research efforts. This research attempted to fill the knowledge gap existing on how public relations are of strategic value on the performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Kenya. It also demonstrated the level of adoption of PR in these motor vehicle companies and how beneficial it was to them. With no similar research having been carried out in the Motor vehicle companies in Kenya on PR and Performance, this study may provide relevant information on the subject matter. The findings of this research could be used by other researches for further studies.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

As indicated by Kilbourn (2006), the hypothetical point of view in inquire about mirrors the analyst's hypothetical introduction, which is essential to translating the information in subjective, regardless of whether it is express or verifiably expressed. As it were, hypothetical point of view assumes a part as the channel for centering and restricting the information to be gathered. This examination will be tied down on open relationship administration hypothesis, partner hypothesis and asset reliance hypothesis.

2.1.1 Relationship Management Theory

Relationship management theory was advanced by Elton (1920) who by combining exchange theory and dialectical perspectives, agreed with earlier works by Baxter that a relationship is an ongoing process and that the relationships development is affected by the state of the previous process. An organizations relationship and involvement with the public starts when an organization realizes its interdependence with other units in the institutional environment appreciates the role that each of the stakeholders play in an effective operation of the firm. Hence the types of relationship that an organization wishes to develop with its public determine the use of the cultivation strategies though the types of the relationship that ensue might be different from the original expectations that the organization expected (Feddersen & Gilligan, 2011).

Hung (2005), noted that associations – open relationship emerge when associations and their key open are reliant and that this reliance brings about outcomes in each other that associations need to oversee. In this line, the relationship administration hypothesis clarifies that common advantage happens when organization– open connections are viably overseen, and depicts how a symmetrical relationship rises through the administration engaged, after some time, on basic interests and shared objectives. The hypothesis determines quantifiable results, for example, common advantage for associating and contribution associations and publics. This position has been

bolstered by examine concerning relationship administration in contrasting settings completed by specialists, for example, (Bruning & Ledingham, 2011). As was featured by Broomet et al., (2012) criteria, the relationship hypothesis distinguishes the demonstration (successful administration) that creates an outcome (shared comprehension and advantage) under indicated conditions (an attention on shared objectives and normal interests after some time). In any case, McWilliams et al., (2012) state that partners discover the way toward deciding if an enterprise's exercises meet their benchmarks for social obligation to be especially troublesome. As a result of hilter kilter data and impression of data predisposition, approving the degree to which the association's announcing and exposure precisely reflect CSR exercises may cause partner doubt and this hampers the condition of connection between the business firm and the partners.

The theory is relevant to this study since it advocates that a relationship between company management and its stakeholders is an ongoing process and is affected by the state of the previous process. The relationship management theory anchored the first and fourth objectives of the study; to establish the effects of openness public relations strategy on the performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi, Kenya and to assess the effect of commitment public relations strategy on the performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi, Kenya.

2.1.2 Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory is exceptional by Freeman, (1984). The hypothesis recommends that the motivation behind a business is to make however much esteem and venture as could reasonably be expected for partners past the investors. With a specific end goal to succeed and be reasonable after some time, chiefs must keep the interests of clients, providers, workers, groups and investors adjusted and going a similar way. Thusly, chiefs are not only liable to investors. Notwithstanding investors or investor, they additionally need to consider any gathering or person who can influence or is influenced by the accomplishment of the association's destinations. The center thought of partner hypothesis is that associations that deal with their partner connections viably will survive longer and perform superior to associations that don't.

The findings place that organizations have both express and certain agreements with different constituents and are in charge of respecting all agreements. Partner hypothesis, features the need to serve every one of the partners paying little mind to the measure of their legitimate advantages in an association and along these lines manages the associations with the partners both regarding the procedure and the result (Gilbert & Rasche, 2008). Thus, as opposed to beginning with a business and watching out into the world to perceive what moral commitments are there, partner hypothesis begins on the planet. It records and depicts those people and gatherings will's identity influenced by (or influence) the organization's activities and inspects their real claims on the business. As indicated by Bigne et al., (2012) the worry for social issues influencing shoppers, for example, nature has come about to organizations receiving advertising exercises that are intended to associate the brand with the association's purchasers consequently enhancing customers impression of the firm. Specialists have recognized that any firm can center around living up to partner's desires (being partner situated) and that such procedure possibly upgrades business exhibitions (Ferrell et al, 2010; Phillips et al. (2010).

Partner's voices must add to corporate choices and as much as they may possess no stock, they have an ethical claim to take an interest in the basic leadership process. Conveying advertising

exercises to the partners impacts corporate picture and notoriety. There is a positive connection between advertising develop and notoriety, which thusly impacts piece of the overall industry however not benefit (Mehdi, 2015). The stakeholder theory informed the second objective of the study; to assess the effect of stakeholder involvement public relations strategy on the performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi, Kenya.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Shamsan and Otieno, (2015) did an examination on impacts Public relations Strategy: a contextual analysis of Kenya Red Cross society by adopting a descriptive design. The respondents for the study were selected through stratified random and purposive sampling techniques. The discoveries demonstrated that there is a noteworthy impact of key advertising on association execution. This was though the financial commitment that was required in order to undertake it. The investigation found that advertising influences the correspondence to work applicable in the key administration process through its attention on correspondence with key partners and adjusting correspondence objectives to the hierarchical mission, improves assembly of inside and outside help for corporate and keeps representatives educated about special openings, industry patterns and best practices through its worry with picking up, demonstrating the company to itself and as a good example of association for both outer and inner conditions and having an overwhelming part in accomplishing authoritative development. The study however focused on the Kenya Red Cross, a case study and thus limiting the capability to generalize the results. Also, the variables studied were organizational alignment, crisis management, media relations, and donor relations.

Nyenjeri et al., (2014) inspected the impacts of advertising in conveyance of ranger service administrations at Kenya Forest Service Headquarters. Data was gathered from a sample of 70 respondents through an overview. Straightforward arbitrary testing was utilized to choose respondents for the investigation. Meeting plan was produced and used to gather information from Heads of Departments and an arrangement of survey regulated to whatever is left of the members. Factual Packages of Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel were utilized to investigate the coded information. The data was displayed in figures and translated in view of unmistakable measurements. The examination presumed that undoubtedly PR assumes an imperative part in building item mindfulness, making enthusiasm, giving data and fortifying the brand. The examination prescribes that KFS ought to use PR all the more effectively to make more attention to its staff, clients, partners and people in general.

Aregbeshola and Munano, (2012) investigated the connection between stakeholder inclusion in vital arranging and association's execution at the University of Venda. Polls were regulated to an objective populace of 150 drawn from the scholarly, regulatory and benefit staff, understudies and administration staff with 130 being returned (75.3% reaction rate) yet 113 being usable. Level of inclusion was estimated on a Likert's 5-point scale. Over 67% of the respondents showed that the open door gave by the administration to the partners of the University to take an interest in the key arranging process in the long run impacted the usage of the vital arrangement. While around 19% were uncertain of the degree of that effect, around 14% trusted that the usage of the key arrangement has nothing to do with the open door given to partners to take an interest in the arranging procedure. 67% of respondents showed that giving chances to the staff individuals (regardless of the hierarchical framework) has a positive effect on the staff inspiration to

completely and dedicatedly actualize the technique in a way that guarantees a change in the general execution of the University. The examination presumed that effective usage of the key arrangement is commenced on the opportunity conceded to partners to take an interest in the vital arranging process.

Mwikuyu, (2012) completed an examination on the degree of partner inclusion in methodology detailing and usage in the National Social Security Fund. The study employed a descriptive research design. The investigation utilized a meeting manual for getting reactions from the respondents in order to get inside and out data from them. The examination focused on departmental heads, all based at the central command in Nairobi Kenya. From the examination discoveries, it was uncovered that the majority of the divisions rehearses vital arranging and do partner investigation to decide the different partner premiums. The investigation set up that the greater part of the offices includes their partners in technique definition and execution and that different components impact the degree to which these multi-partners are included.

2.4 Research Gaps

A knowledge gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the issue discussed. For instance, Nyenjeri et al., (2014) inspected the impacts of advertising in conveyance of ranger service administrations at Kenya Forest Service Headquarters. Data was gathered from a sample of 70 respondents through an overview. Straightforward arbitrary testing was utilized to choose respondents for the investigation. Meeting plan was produced and used to gather information from Heads of Departments and an arrangement of survey regulated to whatever is left of the members. Factual Packages of Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel were utilized to investigate the coded information. The data was displayed in figures and translated in view of unmistakable measurements. The examination presumed that undoubtedly PR assumes an imperative part in building item mindfulness, making enthusiasm, giving data and fortifying the brand. The examination prescribes that KFS ought to use PR all the more effectively to make more attention to its staff, clients, partners and people in general. However, the study was a case study and therefore results cannot be generalized to other organizations.

Secondly, a methodological gap can be identified as the above researchers for example Mwikuyu, (2012) completed an examination on the degree of partner inclusion in methodology detailing and usage in the National Social Security Fund. The study employed a descriptive research design. The investigation utilized a meeting manual for getting reactions from the respondents in order to get inside and out data from them. The examination focused on departmental heads, all based at the central command in Nairobi Kenya. From the examination discoveries, it was uncovered that the majority of the divisions rehearses vital arranging and do partner investigation to decide the different partner premiums. The investigation set up that the greater part of the offices includes their partners in technique definition and execution and that different components impact the degree to which these multi-partners are included. Even though the study revealed that inclusion of all the stakeholders influences performance, the results cannot be applied to large motor vehicle dealers in Kenya and therefore the current study sought to fill the gap.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). This involved an in-depth review of studies related to the influence of strategic public relations on performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Three sorting stages were implemented on the subject under study in order to determine the viability of the subject for research. This is the first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on the influence of strategic public relations on performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The search was done generally by searching the articles in the article title, abstract, keywords. A second search involved fully available publications on the subject on the influence of strategic public relations on performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on the articles that related to the influence of strategic public relations on performance of large motor vehicle dealers in Nairobi City County, Kenya which was split into top key words. After an in- depth search into the top key words (strategic public relations, performance, large motor vehicle dealers), the researcher arrived at 3 articles that were suitable for analysis. These are the findings from the research.

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4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

Public relations ensure that the organization attains and manages accord as well as positive behaviors among the stakeholders of the company. Public relations are responsible for building and maintaining a hospitable organizational environment. All-inclusive different public relations specialists have propelled the centrality of relationship administration to advertising practice. Strategic public relations comprise of a two-way communication between the firm and its publics and necessitate listening to the constituencies on which the company depends along with analyzing as well as understanding the behaviors and attitudes of the audiences. The study concluded that stakeholder involvement public relations strategy was likely to have significant effect on performance of Large Motor Vehicle dealers in Nairobi.

4.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that the Large Motor Vehicle dealers should create a framework that guides the access to information to ensure they optimize and benefit the most from their knowledge management made possible through openness public relations strategy. The management of Large Motor Vehicle dealers should carry assessment on the value of different stakeholders on their operations to formulate the extent of their involvement in decision making processes. This is because stakeholder management is a complex process which can slow down firm decision-making time. The management of the Large Motor Vehicle dealers should monitor their financial investment in PR to guarantee value for money. Correctional measures should be instituted where there is wastage in financial resources.

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