

Assessment of Kiagbodo Residents' Perception on Edwin Clark University Public Relations Strategies

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Abstract—The study examines the perception of Kiagbodo residents on Edwin Clark University public relations strategies and identifies the methods used by Edwin Clark University public relations unit. Specific objectives were to examine the frequency of public relations practice activities towards the host community, Kiagbodo residents. The theories found suitable to anchor on this study were Social Exchange Theory and stakeholders' theory. The research design employed for the study was descriptive survey design, which entails the use of questionnaire. The population figure of the study was 286,400 people living in Kiagbodo according to Nigeria projected of 2016. A sample size of 400 was statistically obtained from the above population using the Krejcie and Morgan's formula (1970). The study employed probability sampling, using the random sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. Data gathered were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentage. The findings from this study shows that public relations strategies in Edwin Clark University has an impact on the the Kiagbodo residents in different forms. The public relation officer engages in community meeting with the community leaders constantly. The organization public relations department has been able to educate residents of this community on a positive image light to push to the university goals and vision.

I. INTRODUCTION

Publics in this context refers to all those groups whose activities affect an organization and are being affected by the organization. According to Lattimore (2014), publics refers to "groups that are almost always important to an organization." Nwodu (2017). He further emphasis that, "it is proper to term a combination of different groups of people who affect and are also affected by the activities of an organization as publics". The implication is that no organization exists as an island. To exist and function effectively therefore, there must be certain groups (in

this context publics) who are imparted upon by the very existence of that organization and whose actions also impact on the survival of the organization. So, public relations as a deliberate use of action and communication to achieve smooth relationship between an organization and its publics, we mean that the profession is concerned with ensuring healthy relationship between the management of the organization and both the internal and external publics.

Public Relations can be defined as the strategic management of communication between an organization and its various stakeholders, including the public, media, investor, employees and other relevant parties. The Public Relations full form involves a wide range of activities and tactics aimed at building and maintaining a positive reputation. Enhancing brand awareness, managing crises and fostering positive relationships with audiences. It involves crafting compelling messaging, leveraging media channels. Organizing events and engaging with stakeholders to influence perceptions, shape public opinion and achieve organizational objectives. In essence, Public Relations is a vital tool use by organizations to communicate effectively, interconnected and transparent. (PRLab)

Public relations understood as effort to establish good relationship with a person or an organization in the hope of gaining some benefits starting with the existence of man. It has always been in the nature of man from time immemorial to court the friendship of other people, in order to attract their favour. Dating back to the biblical time the Israelite as individuals and collectively as a nation always strive to please God in their attempt to maintain His protection and defense over them against other nations. In the same view, the early Christians who in footsteps of Jesus went about converting people to a point of view, using

communication, were also practicing public relations. Obiageli (2014).

Although none of these activities were known as public relations, their goals and outcomes were frequently the same as those of contemporary practice. The Greeks put messages on stones near watering holes to demoralize the Ionian fleet, according to Herodotus (2015). Alexander the Great sent laudatory reports to the Macedonian Court after each of his victories on the battlefield.

Emperor Asoka (273–326 B.C.) of India used messages carved on massive stone pillars placed at strategic intersections to address his people. The Rosetta Stone, which dates to 196 BC, was essentially a press release extolling the virtues of an Egyptian king. Similar to how it is done today, the ancient Olympic Games were advertised to strengthen the image of athletes as heroes.

Similarly, during festivals in most ancient traditions in Nigeria, people sent gift to the traditional rulers, other opinion leaders and friends in the community just to establish and sustain good rapport with them. Public relations were then expressed variously as offering of gift to other, singing of peoples praises, attending to their needs and doing things for them with the intention of pleasing them and eventually reaping from such efforts. Obiageli (2014)

Throughout history, the practice of public relations has been a reflection of social, cultural, and economic forces that have shaped and influenced society through the centuries. The field of public relations is constantly evolving, and a number of ongoing developments will shape the practice of public relations in the coming years.

Public relations seen as organized activities aimed at influencing the public favourably implies that the founding fathers of Nigeria Independence practiced public relations. Through eloquent speeches, mass mobilization and press publications they persuaded the masses to desire and work for their emancipation from the colonial master. Nationalist fathers such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Herbert Macaulay etc. organized several political activities to influence public opinion in favour of national independence. Obiageli (2014)

Public relations veterans in Nigeria documented that the first conscious public relations effort was in 1940 when the government established an information dissemination unit primarily to provide government

information to people. The then British colonial government was burdened with the desire to create a favourable image for its local subjects. Therefore, it established the information office in Lagos to dissipate public hatred and disapproval of its policies. In 1944 its name was changed to public relations office and in 1954 to Public Relations Department. This department is currently known as the Ministry of Information. Obiageli (2014)

Five years after being a government venture, the private sector followed in 1949 with the United African Company (UAC) recognized as the first Nigerian company to set up a public relations department. The job description of the department was to provide information on the activities and build a good image for UAC. The Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN and now PHCN) became the first government establishment to create a public relations department, in 1950. Nigeria Railway Corporation followed and employed Dr. Samuel Epelle as its first public relation officer in 1956. He was one of the first persons to play active role in the nascent days of public relations in Nigeria. Dr. Epelle founded the first professional body called Public Relations Association of Nigeria (PRAN) in 1963. This was later changed to Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), a name it has retained until date. He was also credited as the first Nigerian to write a book titled *Essentials of PR* which was published in 1967. Obiageli (2014)

It was not until 1990 did NIPR obtain a legal backing to regulate public relations practice in Nigeria. This came in June 1990 when the Federal Government of Nigeria empowered the association through Decree 16 of 1990. The promulgation of Decree 16 gave NIPR a statutory recognition as well as its code of ethics as contained in its constitution. The code of ethics is a declaration of principles that guide the members in their professional practice of public relations.

Edwin Clark University is located in Kiagbodo Community, Burutu Local Government Area, Delta State Nigeria, has a significant presence in the community. As a higher educational institution, Edwin Clark University's activities and operations have a substantial impact on the Kiagbodo Community. Effective public relations practices are essential for building and maintaining a positive relationship, managing communities and information dissemination, building trust and understanding addressing community concerns and issues and

fostering collaboration and partnership between Edwin Clark University and Kiagbodo community.

The Edwin Clark University, (ECU), Kiagbodo, Delta State is a private University based in Kiagbodo, Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State. It was approved by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Universities Commission (NUC) as the 60th private university in Nigeria on 11th May, 2015. At the time of this research, the Edwin Clark university is nine (9) years old.

The University is owned by the Edwin Kiagbodo Clark Foundation, a foundation set up in honour of Chief (Dr) Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, OFR, CON, who is the president of the foundation. The Board of Trustees and Governing Council of the foundation are made up of eminent Nigerians from six geo-political zone of the country. Academic activities commenced on 10th September, 2015 with the admission of 105 pioneer students.

The University was formally opened on 14th November, 2015 with the installation of the first Chancellor, Chief (Dr) Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, OFR, CON and the maiden matriculation of the pioneer students.

This study, therefore seek to examine the role of the public relation activities in Edwin Clark university towards her publics. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the public relation role in harmonizing organizational goals and the host community in the same perspectives, by shaping public discourse, and promoting unity and integrity in university community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Most scholarly definitions of public relations touched on the word “publics” either directly or indirectly. This is because “publics” are very crucial to the survival and business continuity of an organization. ‘Publics’ in this context refers to all those groups whose activities affect an organization and are being affected by that of the organization. According to Lattimore (2024) publics refers to “groups that are almost always important to an organization. Nwodu (2017) broadly defines publics as “various individuals (internal or external), community or corporate entities who one way or the other, affect and are being affected by the operations or activities of an organization which could

be corporate, government agency or public institution.” Nwodu (2017) further emphasis that, “it is proper to term a combination of different groups of people who affect and are also affected by the activities of an organization as publics”. The implication is that no organization exists as an island. To exist and function effectively therefore, there must be certain groups (in this context publics) who are imparted upon by the very existence of that organization and whose actions also impact on the survival of the organization.

Newsom and Carrell (2011:7) summarized it by submitting that publics “is any group of people tied together by some common factor.

Public Relations

Public relations is “essentially about positively and systematically using actions and communications to influence people’s attitudes, opinions, belief, interest and behaviour in a given or desired direction (e.g. Adopting good environmental behaviours as well as building lasting credibility and reputation for individuals and corporate entities like profit or non-profit organizations and even nations, states, local government or communities” Nwosu and Uffoh, (2016). Also, the world Assembly of Public Relations in Mexico (1978) defined public relations as the art and science of analyzing trend, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders and implementing planned programme of action which will serve both the organizations and public’s interest. Furthermore, Dr. Rev. Harlow (1980) define public relations as a distinctive management functions which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and it is publics, involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasize the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of the effectively utilize changes serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques.

In the assertion by Jelena Relic (2024), public Relations are critical for business as they can help build trust, credibility and loyalty with the local community. By establishing positive reputation in community, businesses can enhance their brand

image, stand out from the competition and ultimately increase their bottom line.

Public relations practitioner needs to act as a mediator and help to translate organizational goals and objectives into reasonable, publicly acceptable policy and action by the community. In this way, enabling environment for his organization to operate in a way that would be mutually beneficial to both parties.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchor on two theories: Social Exchange and the Stakeholder theories.

2.2.1 Social Exchange Theory

Thibaut and Kelley developed this theory in 1959. Social exchange theory proposes that we evaluate our relations by way of cost-benefit analysis. By weighing the potential benefits and risks of our relationships, we are able to maintain relationships where the benefits are low. The theory is simple, allowing most people to understand its general assumptions and relate to them. It is a broad approach used to explain and predict relationship maintenance. It clarifies when and why individuals continue and develop some personal relationship, while ending others. Why is it that people maintain certain relations and end others? Additionally, the theory takes into account how satisfied one will be with relationships that one chooses to maintain. As the name of the theory suggests, an exchange approach to social relationships is much like an economic theory base on the comparism of rewards and cost.

Going by the theory, the major force in international relationships is the satisfaction of both party's interest. This therefore, means that human beings weigh out rewards versus costs when developing relationships. Thus, people are likely to end a particular relationship when they are not satisfied. Social exchange also ties in closely with social penetration theory. Theory has the following assumptions;

- Personal relationships are function of comparing benefits. There are different types of relationships, but all are built on interactions involving benefits and costs.
- People want to make of the benefits, while lessening and the costs. This known as the minimal principle; and
- By nature, human are selfish. Thus, as a human being, you tend to look out for yourself first and

foremost. Humans are relational beings who seek rewards and avoid punishments.

Above all, this theory suggests that organizations engage in Public Relations and exchange resources with their host Community, hence, it is imperative to this study for Edwin Clark University to engage in Public Relations to gain support, legitimacy and resources from her host community 'Kilagbodo' as a means of corporate social responsibility or a means of giving back to the community that has enabled their operations over the years.

2.2.2. Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory is an outcome produced by the battles between berle and Dodd in 1930s. Dodd believed that directors are the trustees of corporations, with the result that they have to balance the interests of all constituents of companies and behave in a socially responsible manner. However, Freeman is generally credited with popularizing the stakeholder concept in 1984. However, the concept was first used in 1963 in an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute. The concept, according to its first usage refers to groups whose support, the organization needs, to remain in existence. Edward Freeman developed the concept into a theory and champion in the 1980s Amodu, (2022). The stakeholder theory attempts to address the principle of who or what really counts.

The stakeholder theory is, therefore, based on the assumption that organizations, whether private or public, have obligations to several groups that make up the society. These constituents are referred to as stakeholders-individuals and groups that are critical to the existence of the organizations; they influence what the organization does or they are being influenced by organizational actions. As an integral part of the normative organizational management theories, the stakeholder theory stipulates that management have a moral duty to protect not only the corporation but also the legitimate interest of all stakeholders. Thus, all stakeholders' interest must be maximized at all times. In this way, when an organization invests in the society, it is expected to reap this in form of improved reputation and understanding when things go wrong and equally maximize even the profit motive of the owners in the process (Olatunji, 2018). Stakeholder theory posits that a firm's long-term existence depends upon addressing stakeholders' concerns; Corporate

Social Responsibility (CSR) has expanded firms' responsibilities to stakeholders and the public Owolabi, (2016). Olatunji (2017) avers that:

The stakeholder concept enables management to address the divergent needs and interests of critical groups, including owners of capital, employees, customers and suppliers, as well as, the needs of those of emerging groups including governments, competitors, consumers, advocates, environmentalists, special interest's groups and the media. There is need for the interests of these groups to be taken into consideration because they do play vital roles in the success of the business enterprise.

This theory is relevant to the study on corporate social responsibility of organizations, this is because the theory has a very tight connection with social responsibilities, which means that corporations' social value is concerned with and focuses on promoting the potential of all participants. That is to say, the theory tries to keep the ethnics and economics together and achieve a successful goal for corporations and that make it relevant to this study.

This theory posits that organizations have a responsibility to engage with stakeholders, including host community. Edwin Clark University may prioritize Public Relations Practice to address the concerns and needs of its stakeholders.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1: Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey design for the study. Check and Schutt (2014) Opine survey method allows the researcher to choose from a range of approaches to recruit participants, collect data, and use various equipment methods while collecting information from the respondents through their responses to questions. Survey have shown to be one of the most efficient and reliable methods of research. The choice of survey was premised on the nature of the study, which entails direct response from the Kiagbodo residents on the impact of public relation strategies of Edwin Clark University.

3.2: Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised males and females of 18 years and above. The total population of Kiagbodo community by 2006 census was 207,977. This figure ought to have formed the population of the

study. However, from 2006 till date, the population have increased in the community, children under-age then now of age. The study decided to use the Nigeria projected of 2016 of 286,400, instead of 2006 of 207,977.

Method of Data Collection

In order to collect data for the study, the researcher employed the services of three research assistants who were trained on how to administer the instrument on the respondents. The data collection took both the researcher and her assistants a period of three week to administered and retrieved, after which the Responses were collated for analysis.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the questionnaires administered to respondents in kiagbodo residents has the following demographic details

Table 1,2,3,4 and 5 shown majority of respondents 240 (63%) were male while the remaining 132 (37%) were female. The application of this finding is that more male than female were in the study, majority of respondents are between the range of 26-35years which have 140 frequency and (37%), 15-25years and 36-45years has the same frequency of 100 (26%), the last frequency of 40 (11%) are age range 46years and above, shows that majority of respondents are self-employed with 200 (52%), followed by student 120 frequency (32%), contain information on the educational qualification of samples respondents. Data obtained showed that a frequency of 260 (68.4%) of the respondents had WAEC/NECO, followed by NCE/BSC/MSc. Frequency of 100 (26.3%). Lastly there no Ph.D. & above respondents, indicates that a greater frequency of 180 (47.3%) of respondents are single and married. This result implied that more single people responded in filling the questionnaire than those who were married.

SECTION B:

IV. DISCUSSED THE FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO THE STUDY

Research question one: Does Edwin Clark University has public relations department?

Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9 address research question on if Edwin Clark University has public relations department. The findings indicates that there is a

functional proactive principles officers working effort to project the university good image amongst host communities with effective public relations service. As shown from the table 6 above, respondents response show that strongly agree are frequency of 120 (32%) on the effective use of Public Relations methods to engage with Kiagbodo community, follow by agree and strongly disagree with the frequency of 100 (26%), non were undecided. As shown from the table 7 above, respondents response show that 47%, which is 180 people, agree on Edwin Clark University's public relations effort is sufficient to maintain a positive relationship with Kiagbodo Community while 80 (21%) strongly disagree and disagree. As shown from the table 8 above, more respondents agreed on that the relationship between Edwin Clark University and Kiagbodo community was improved in recent years due to effective public relations with frequency of 140 (36%), followed by those that dis agreed with frequency of 100 (26%). Lastly is the undecided and disagreed has the frequency of 40 (11%). As shown from the table 9 above, respondents response show that equally frequency of people agree and strongly disagree on that the relationship between Edwin Clark University and Kiagbodo community has improved in recent years due to effective public relations with frequency of 120 (35%), follow by strongly agree with frequency of 100.

Research question two: What methods do Edwin Clark University use in its public relations practice in Kiagbodo community?

Table 10, 11, 12 and 13 address research question on what methods do Edwin Clark University use in its public relations practice in Kiagbodo community? The findings indicate that the public relations officer of the university uses town hall meetings with the community leaders to discuss the goals and benefits of Edwin Clark University to the residents of kiagbodo. As shown from the table 10 above, respondents response shows that equally frequency of people agree and strongly disagree on that the relationship between Edwin Clark University 's public relations efforts have benefitted the Kiagbodo Community. With frequency of 120 (35%), follow by strongly agree with frequency of 100. As shown from the table 11 above, more people agree that Edwin Clark University's public relations practice has contributed to a positive

relationship between the university and Kiagbodo community with frequency of 160 (42%), followed by those that strongly disagree. As shown from the table 12 above, respondents' response more on Edwin Clark University's public relations practice is trustworthy. Those that strongly agree, agree and strongly disagree has the same frequency of 100 (20.3%), followed by those that undecided with frequency of 80 (21.1%). As shown from the table 13 above, respondent's response on Edwin Clark University's public relations practice was transparent and honest. Those that strongly agree and agree has the same frequency of 100 (26%), followed by those that strongly disagree with frequency of 80 (21%).

Research question three: How do Kiagbodo residents perceive Edwin Clark University's public relations practice?

Table 14, 15, 16 and 17 address research question on how do kiagbodo residents perceive Edwin Clark University public relation practice. The findings indicate that kiagbodo residents perceive Edwin Clark public relations practice to be very useful and impactful. As shown from the table 14 above, respondents' response on how Edwin Clark University's public relations practice has positive impact on Kiagbodo community. That that agrees and strongly disagrees has the same frequency of 120 (32%), followed by those that strongly agree with frequency of 100 (26%).

As shown from the table 15 above, respondents' response on how Edwin Clark University's public relations practice has positive impact on Kiagbodo community. Those that agree and strongly disagree has the same frequency of 120 (32%), followed by those that strongly agree with frequency of 100 (26%). As shown from the table 16 above, respondents' response that 47% which is 180 people agree on Edwin Clark University has benefited Kiagbodo community economically while 80 (21%) strongly disagree and disagree. As shown from the table 17 above, more respondents agreed on that university has contributed to a positive image of Edwin Clark University in Kiagbodo community with frequency of 140 (36%), followed by those that dis agreed with frequency of 100 (26%). Lastly is the undecided and disagreed has the frequency of 40 (11%).

Research question four: What impact do Edwin Clark University's public relations practices have in Kiagbodo community?

Table 18, 19, and 20 address research questions four on what impact do Edwin Clark University In addressing this research question, The findings indicate that the university public relations practice impact is on the community by increase in populations which has gain much on economic growth. As shown from the table 18 above, respondents response that equal frequency of people agree and strongly disagree on that the Community radio is a useful channel for Edwin Clark University to engage with Kiagbodo community with frequency of 120 (35%) , follow by strongly agree with frequency of 100. As shown from the table 19 above, respondents response that equally frequency of people agree and strongly disagree on that the Edwin Clark University's community outreach programs are effective in building relationships with the Kiagboo community with frequency of 120 (35%) , follow by strongly agree with frequency of 100. As shown from the table 20 above, respondents response more people agree that Partnerships with local organizations are an effective way for Edwin Clark University to engage with the Kiagbodo community frequency of 160 (42%), higher than those that strongly agreed with frequency of 120 (32%).

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1.1 Summary of findings

The findings from this study shows that public relations practice in Edwin Clark University has an impact on the the Kiagbodo residents in different forms. The public relation officer engage in community meeting with the community leaders constantly. The organization public relations department has been able to educate to residents of this community on positive image light to push to the university goals and vision.

5.2 Limitations to the study

The researcher encountered respondent's hesitation in accepting questionnaires from the researcher in the community. Somewhere Ignorant to the topics of discussion, while some of them welcomed the idea and were willing to filled the questionnaires that led the

researcher to conduct the study on public relations strategies of Edwin Clark University in Kiagbodo community.

5.3. Conclusion

The conclusion of the study is a comparative analysis of findings and literature review to find out if those findings correlate or expose the literatures in existence.

The study shows that Edwin Clark University has its unique way of handling its public relations in terms of students, employees, media, community and corporate social responsibilities.

The university as a result of its philosophy of imparting academic and moral values that will give the Nigerian youth, the desire guidance in area of entrepreneurship, self-employment and self-reliance so as to seek to employ rather seek employment in today's globalized world has fashioned its relation along the path that will aid in achieving its set goals. For instance, Edwin Clark University can affect academic and moral value to Kiagbodo community.

Respondent generally agreed on the effective use of public relations methods for engaging Kiagbodo community and the contribution to a positive relationship between Edwin Clark University and Kiagbodo community.

Edwin Clark University's public relations efforts were seen to benefit Kiagbodo community economically and contribute to a positive image. Partnerships with local organizations were viewed as an effective engagement strategy. There are split opinion regarding trustworthiness, transparency and usefulness of community radio for engagement.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Edwin Clark University should improve on trustworthiness and transparency, efforts to clarify communication and increase openness in public relations to help build a stronger community trust in Kiagbodo community.
2. Since the partnerships with local organizations were seen as effective, continuing or expanding these collaborations could enhance community engagement in Kiagbodo.
3. Edwin Clark University should agree on positive economic and image contribution, maintaining or increasing efforts in these areas could be beneficial to the community.

4. Considering split views on community radio usefulness, Edwin Clark University should assess the effectiveness of various communication channels to engage Kiagbodo community. This might help in optimize public relations strategies.

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