

# **The Practice of Public Relation of Ethiopian Telecommunication**

## **Corporation: The Case of Central Addis Ababa Zone**

**By**

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### **1. Background of the Study**

Public relation can be defined as the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (Cutlip, 2000:4). It is the best tool for creating effective communication with the public. Nowadays it has become a two way communication, sending message from the organization and receiving feedback from the public.

ETC provides different kinds of services to a large number of customers in order to meet its mission in developing and maintaining modern information and communication network infrastructure to improve the availability of information to the entire society. Due to the great number of customers, their characteristics and diversity, interest, expectation and needs also vary. From this perspective, ETC is trying to satisfy its customers as much as possible through its services and their implementation. Based on government policy, ETC is the only telecom service provider all over the country. This permits the corporation to work without the risk of competition from other organizations and rivals. Even if, there is no competition, customers, as well as government and other stakeholders of the corporation expect more from it.

ETC as a huge corporation in the country must develop and maintain favorable image and relationship with its vast and diversified customers. In building favorable image and maintaining better relationship with the public at large, the better tool is considered to be public relations. Public relations can establish and maintain better relationship and

dependability between the two sides, the corporation and its public. Better PRs is a vital work for a marketer to create better image in customers mind and maintain the relationship among different stakeholders of the corporation. To this end, the researcher will try to assess the PRs practice of ETC in this study.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Public relation can be defined as deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its public (Banik, 2002:5). Cutlip (2002:6) has also highlighted that public relations play a great role in facilitating the marketing activities of a business organization. Now-a-days, PRs concept changes into communication between an organization and its public and gathering information about the present situations of an organization in the dynamic market that helps in creating favorable image. PRs also promote focus on both internal and external relations. Internally there must be good relation with its members of an organization, whereas externally with customers, stakeholders and the public at large.

Public relations also takes as a part of marketing management mix through promotion as a tool for establishing and maintaining both side relationships between the corporation and its public. Planned and frequent PRs activities can help in building favorable image in the minds of the public about the organization. Besides PRs has its own impact especially on promotional and marketing activities of the organization. From this perspective any company especially those that are at a corporate level must have well organized and frequent PRs programs in order to create favorable image in the customers mind as well as the public at large.

Based on this, the researcher tried to see the PRs activities done by ETC so far and came up with the following observation through preliminary assessment. The corporation uses as PRs tools Tele Negarit, which is distributed only for the employees. Limited in number, it is not distributed in a regularly and doesn't get employees attention. The company's profile also gets printed but not distributed efficiently. The press release done by the communications division is limited only when some problem occurs. Recently the

corporation uses websites for information availability, but here also the internet service is under question mark because the internet service isn't reliable.

As a communication company, it must facilitate efficient information availability for both internal and external customers. This can be implemented through effective PRs activities and programs like applying two-way communications, appropriate PRs tools, participation in community services and social events and the like. This leads the researcher to assess and evaluate the performance of PRs practices of ETC in creating and maintaining favorable image in customers' mind.

### **3. Research questions**

The study will try to seek answer to the following research questions:

- What is the effort of the corporation's public relations programs in creating and maintaining favorable image in publics' mind?
- Does the Corporation use the feedback from the public as an input in creating better relationship?
- Is there a well developed and organized information centers for public relations activities?
- What is the extent of the corporation's participation in social activities, events, customer's information programs and the like?

### **4. Objectives of the Study**

#### **4.1 General Objective**

This study was generally aimed to assess the public relations practices of Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation in light of public perception and communication pattern in use.

#### **4.2 Specific Objectives**

In an attempt to answer the research questions raised, the study tries to:

- investigate the extent to which the company creates favorable image in the minds of customers,
- analyze whether the company is effectively utilizing two-way communications or not,

- assess the formation and organization of information centers to facilitate the public relations activities' and
- investigate the extent of the corporation's involvement in community service and social affairs.

## **5. Research Method**

The research was conducted using descriptive research method. The researcher used descriptive research method in order to describe the PRs variables like PRs roles, application of two-way communications, involvement of the corporation in community services and others.

Customers, employees of CAAZ and the corporate communications officer were considered as participants of the study. In order to select sample customer respondents, the researcher used non-probability sampling approaches, specifically convenient sampling technique because of the units of samples is available in a certain specific time and place, like customers available in service delivery points. Whereas, in the case of employees, probability sampling approach particularly systematic random sampling technique (Selecting every Kth employees) was employed. The total number of employees in this particular zone, CAAZ, is about 497 based on the company's profile of 2008. The researcher selected 30% of the total population.

Both primary and secondary data were employed for the study. The primary data were obtained through distributing a questionnaire and interviewing the corporation's personnel. The secondary data were gathered from different texts, books written related with the subject matter, appropriate data from the corporation, related researches conducted before, and from Internet and other sources. In order to collect the primary data, the questionnaire was distributed to the representative samples of both employees and customers. Besides, interview check list was used for obtaining response from 5 employees of corporate communications division including the division manager. The following table summarizes the total number of questionnaire distributed to and returned from employees of CAAZ.

**Table 1: Questionnaire Distributed and Returned**

Item	Employees Respondents		Customers Respondents	
	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Questionnaire distributed	150	100	150	100
Questionnaire returned	138	92	141	94
Questionnaire not returned	12	8	9	6

As shown in the above table 138 (92%) of employees were willing to fill and return the questionnaire to the researcher, whereas 12(8%) of the questionnaire distributed to the employees were not returned, and 141 (94%) of customers were willing to fill and return the questionnaire to the students researcher, but 9(6%) of questionnaires distributed to the customer were not returned.

The data collected from distributed questionnaires were analyzed by quantitative measurement method and computed in terms of frequency distribution and tabulated in the form of percentage. The responses gathered through interview were narrated.

## **6. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

This section deals with summary of the major findings, conclusions and recommendations.

### **6.1 Summary of the Major Findings**

Major findings of the study are listed here under.

- The images of the corporation in its public's minds were concentrated at medium level as indicated by respondents. In developing the relationship between ETC and its public, both internal and external publics of the corporation gave similar responses and most of them replied that their relationship with ETC as medium.
- Regarding building mutual understanding between two parties, 48 (34%) of customer respondents replied that it was moderate, however, 44(32%) of

employee respondents indicated that there was low mutual understanding with their corporation

- The use of feedback from the public as an input in creating better relationship make customers feel as part of the corporation. In this case, most of both groups of respondents attested low experience of the corporation in taking information from the public which partly shows failure of the PRs department. Regarding questions related to providing tools to accept complains, suggestion and opinions, answering questions raised by the public and facilitating meetings with them, respondents indicated that there is low practice in ETC.
- Regarding the availability of information, customers of ETC had different responses. Out of the total customer respondents most of them rated availability of information as medium, where as, employees replied that the performance was low. Concerning the ability of information personnel and the technological development of the information centers, both groups have similar opinions. The PRs department is making information available, updating personnel and developing the information centers well in order to facilitate the public relation activities of the corporation.
- In order to assess the effort of ETC in supporting public events and participation in both internal and external events, both employees and customers have similar opinions. They replied that the experience of the corporation in participating and supporting social activities were moderate. But the communications personnel asserted that, ETC had a better experience in supporting and participating publics' events regularly.
- In developing corporate culture, most of employee respondents agreed with medium level of PRs practice. In case of implementing two-way communications, employees here also opted for medium level. Likewise, the corporate communications officer indicated that the practice of the corporation in implementing two-way communications was not efficient. The PRs department fails also to establish the overall team spirit among employees of different

departments. Almost 50% of the total respondents rated it at medium level. Among the rest, the majority rated low and very low. Regarding job satisfaction based on relationship with the management, majority of respondents' concentrated at medium level. This implies the effort of the PRs department in developing relationship between two parties to assure job satisfaction of employees was not effective.

- Concerning the service delivery, majority respondents said it was medium and below. The services delivery of the corporation was not satisfactory. One aspects of service delivery is making information available for customers, which is the major task of public relations department. Regarding this issue, the practices of ETC was at moderate level in the eyes of its customers.
- Finally, the level of satisfaction was measured based on the overall activities of the corporation. The result summarizes that, the majority of respondents said it was moderate.

## **6.2 Conclusions**

The corporation public relations practice in creating and maintaining the image of ETC in the minds of the public at large was at moderate level. Furthermore, activities done by the PRs department in building mutual understanding was viewed differently by internal and external public of the corporation. In addition, the extent of the relationship between the corporation and its public was moderate. Similarly, the PRs effort in creating and developing corporate culture, which represent the corporation's personality, was also found to be moderate. Generally, the performance of the PRs department in creating and maintaining favorable image in the minds of its public was at moderate level. The department did not utilize its resources as well as its effort in order to create an image better than the corporation has now.

The ultimate goal of using feedback from the public is to strengthen the relationship with them. It also helps to know what the public needs. Regarding this issue, the corporation practice was low. In addition to this, the extent of participation of the public in taking

corrective actions and strategy formulation is one aspect of getting information and strengthening the relationship between the two parties. However, the performance of ETC regarding the issue was not efficient. Therefore, the PRs practice in using feedback from the publics and developing better relationship between ETC and its public was not efficient and effective.

Regarding the development and organization of information center, the PRs department activities weren't impressive, although, information centers are the new approach to PRs. As a communication institution, ETC's effort in developing and organizing information centers wasn't efficient at all.

Supporting and participating in social activities and public events helps to get better reputation in the minds of the public and to build better relationship with them. The corporation's practices regarding the issue were not as efficient as expected from the huge company in the country. The corporation's efforts in supporting events of its public were at moderate level. Similarly, arranging meetings with the public is one aspect though the practices of ETC were low. In addition, the participation of the corporation in events of its internal and external public was low and medium, respectively.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions drawn, the researcher would like to forward the following recommendations.

- The corporation's PRs practice in creating and maintaining the image of ETC in the minds of its public were at moderate level; however, the activities and programs that aimed to get the attention of target group must be well implemented. In building mutual understanding between ETC and its public, the PRs department must focus on internal public of the corporation because their mutual understanding with ETC was worse than with that of external public. In order to change this situation, the PRs department should facilitate different meetings between the two parties to improve their understandings. The



department should focus not only on employees, but also on external public of the corporation to improve mutual understanding between the two parties.

- In developing corporate culture the PRs department must focus internally. The PRs activities should focus on updating the employees, improving the flow of information, creating effective communication between employees and the management. This leads to harmony between the two vital parties of the corporation.
- In making tools available to receive information from customers of the corporation, ETC must implement easily accessible tools to get feedback. Tools like suggestion boxes, information desk that facilitate face-to-face communication, calling centers and the new technological features like SMS and using internet access make the flow of information from the public easy.
- In handling customers' complains and questions, the communications division of ETC should focus on its information centers and personnel working in those centers. By implementing latest information technologies and by updating the personnel with those technologies the problem of the corporation can be minimized.
- To strengthen the relationship with its public, the corporation PRs department should focus on facilitating meetings with the public. The PRs department should focus on the development of the information centers in number as well as quality and capacity of the centers in making information easily accessible.
- In order to improve corporation's efforts in participating and supporting in social events, the corporation should hold such events and activities by itself. Activities like customers day, loyal customers, donations, preparing events (Telecom day, Mobile and Internet users) and other related activities helps the corporation build better reputation in the minds of its public.

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