

The Role of Corporate Communication in Building an Organization's Reputation in The Geothermal Development Company, Kenya

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the role played by corporate communication in building organizational reputation at the Geothermal Development Company. The study was conducted through a questionnaire, where information was gotten from primary sources through self-administered questionnaires. The findings from the study showed that corporate communication plays a very crucial role in building organizational reputation at Geothermal Development Company. Conclusions made from the study showed that advertising is an important element in the delivery of products and services and that public relations affect workplace environment. The recommendations from this study were indicative that advertising should be encouraged since it is known to have many favourable effects: it facilitates good performance and ensures that products and services reach the desired target market and that public relations should continue to be done by the company to ensure that the relationship between GDC and the stakeholders is maintained.

Keywords: Geothermal, Corporate Social Responsibility, Grain Dryer, Direct Use, Public Relations

Introduction

Carroll (2015), say that to communicate with both external and internal stakeholders, corporate communication comes in to instil the corporation's favourable point of view. As the pioneer of the corporate communication field (Adler, et. al, 2014), Redding, is acknowledged as the first person to document, in a proper manner, the rise of corporate communication in the early 1980s.

Argenti, in the article "Corporate communication as a discipline toward definition", operationalised the standard job description the role required. The domains he defined included, but were not limited to, corporate advertising and advocacy, image and identity management, financial communication, media relations, employee relations, also referred to as internal communication, corporate philanthropy, also referred to as corporate social responsibility, (CSR), crisis communication, community relations, and government relations (Roper, 2015).

Several theoretical studies suggest corporate communication as a potential predictor of reputation (e.g. Carter, 2003; Alsop, 2004), since the internal and external elements interact with each other and inform each other (Hatch & Schultz, 2000). Preliminary empirical research shows a correspondence between corporate communication attributes and reputation attributes (Flatt & Kowalczyk, 2000; Kowalczyk & Pawlish, 2002; Kowalczyk, 2005).

While Carmeli's (2004) study does not examine reputation, he examines how culture interacts with communication and the industrial relations climate (workplace atmosphere) to predict perceived external prestige of a firm. Therefore, our paper extends prior research by examining the direct and indirect effects of corporate communication and reputation on financial performance, products and services, workplace environment, and vision and leadership, and tests if reputation mediates the effect of corporate communication on financial performance. Financial performance, products and services, workplace environment, and vision and leadership are included as dependent variables under corporate reputation to gauge whether corporate communication and reputation contribute towards a firm's value creation for a competitive advantage. We test the anecdotal and theoretical claims that corporate communication influences reputation, which in turn influences financial performance, workplace environment, product and services, and vision and leadership. Geothermal Development Company (GDC) is a government organization with a mandate of accelerating the development of geothermal resources in Kenya, towards lowering the cost of power. GDC utilizes corporate communication to promote its services and products, maintain a flow of information between the organisation and stakeholders as well as to address legal issues within the organization.

Thus, corporate communication is found to be very important to a company because an institution gets into contact with its suppliers, other elements, and customers, both external and internal, of the institution through communication. For a company, on the other hand, to create the best corporate reputation, it has to rely on corporate communication, (McDonald & Mitra, 2019).

Studies done regarding corporate communication have not predominantly looked in to the impact of corporate reputation on organizations. Many of these studies have focused on the roles and benefits of corporate communication to organizations without touching on the corporate reputation. While theoretical support suggests a link between corporate communication and reputation, limited empirical support exists to establish the link between corporate communication and reputation. The only empirical evidence of corporate communication influencing corporate reputation are presented in a few studies such as in (Flatt

& Kowalczyk, 2000; Carmeli, 2004). This leads to a hypothesis which proposes that corporate communication is positively related to corporate reputation, since corporate communication creates the context for identity and an organization's identity is related to corporate reputation. This study seeks to contribute to the available literature, in analysing how organizations use corporate communication and how it impacts on the reputation of the organizations. It tries to understand how corporate communication empowers stakeholders and changes their behaviour in terms of what they demand and expect regarding the products, services, and information gotten from organizations thus affecting the reputation of organizations.

Literature review

Without regard to space and time, reputation of modern organizations, has already been impacted a lot by corporate communication. According to Meierer (2010), communicators in the corporate world should be the ones responsible for corporate communication operations which in the long run, would decisively contribute towards improving reputation and ensuring that the products and services' market value go up. By identifying corporate communication objectives, it is imperative that operations, techniques, and tools are evaluated through suitable quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to Sapna, every corporation needs to be aware of the numerous fears varied stakeholders have when it comes to reputation-building strategy choice, compared to corporate communication (Sapna, 2020).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Agenda Setting Theory

To talk about this theory, is to talk about Dr. Max McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw. This theory was formally developed by the two in a study on the 1968 United States of America presidential election. In the 1968 "Chapel Hill study," they demonstrated a very strong relationship between what the most important election issue to the residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was, and what was the most important issue according to the local and national news media. By comparing the two issues as reported in the news with what was the perception of the public regarding the most important election issue, they determined the degree to which the media sway's public opinion (Littlejohn and Foss, 2016).

Research scholars on agenda setting, throughout the years, emphasize more importantly on issues like, (a) who is going to be responsible for the corporate communication's agenda setting? (b) what are the corporate communication's agendas, and lastly, (c) how far is corporate communication in a position of influence to, or direct the public agenda? McCombs & Shaw believe that there is an effect the public agenda has on the corporate communication agenda. This theory, apart from being important to mass communication, is also important when it comes to other related social science studies like corporate communication. Corporate communication, under the theory, is seen not to have any public agenda influence especially when it comes to matters of attitudes or opinions. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2016), the audience is seen to basically form their own opinion with such an influence from corporate communication, and focus on the issues that they consider worthy of being included on their psychological agendas.

In relation to this study, Agenda Setting Theory can be useful in gauging the crucial role that communication plays in GDC's effort to build and maintain a good reputation with its stakeholders.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Developed by Howard Giles in 1970, first as a Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) and later as Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in 1973, the theory explains the various ways during which people are able to accommodate their communication, their main motivations for accommodation, and therefore, the very consequences of accommodating their communication. CAT is known to link interpersonal communication issues with the intergroup stakes of an encounter in the larger context. To put it into context, sometimes people's communications are often driven by their personal identities as James or Winnie, while at other times, within the exact same interaction, their words, demeanour and nonverbals, are instead fuelled, mostly entirely, by their identities as members belonging to a particular group; that is, James can speak not as James the individual, but as a representative of, let's say, communication scholars to groups of mathematicians, artists or chemists (Giles, 2016).

There are two main accommodative strategies that CAT consists of *convergence* and *divergence*. The primary focus for converging one's behavior is the yearning to get an approval from others. To be in a position to achieve an ostensible match with others, an individual will adjust to, and apply a wide range of their linguistic, paralinguistic, and nonverbal behavior to be on the same level of similarity with the others (Griffin, 2014).

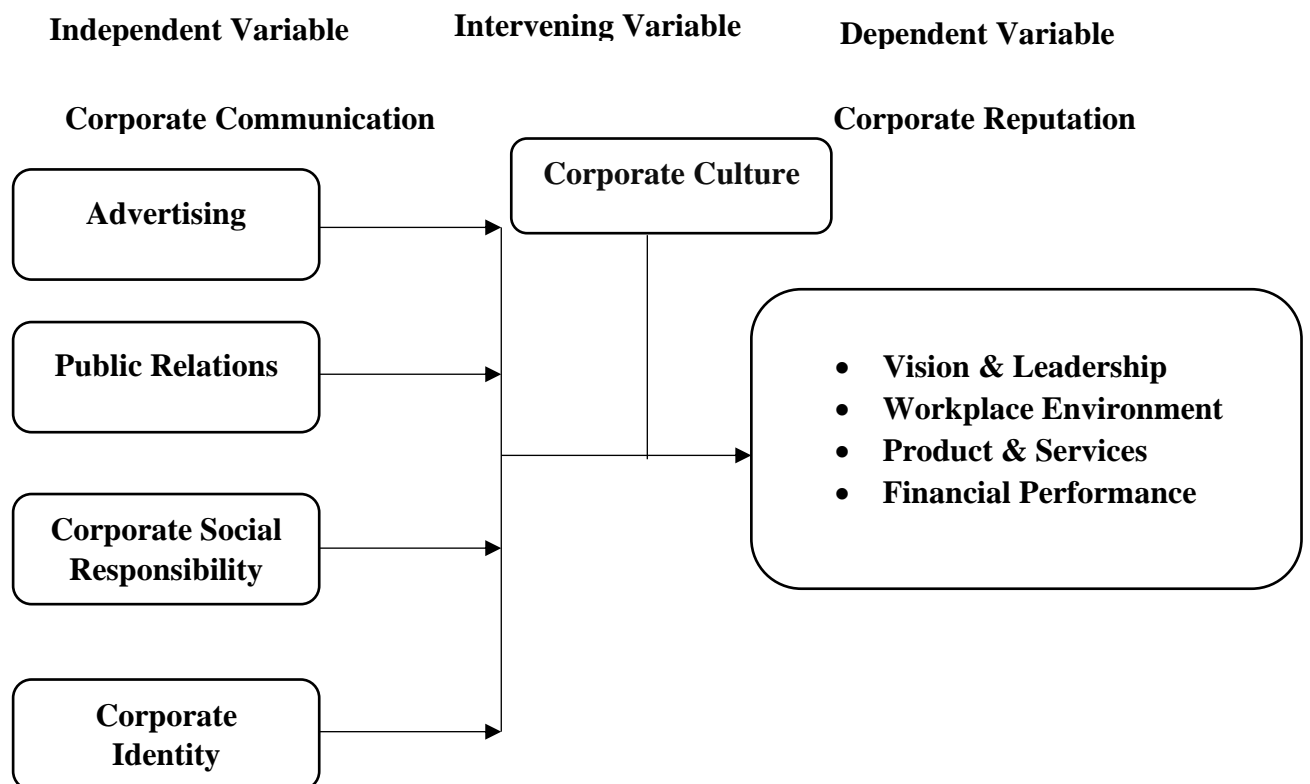
Divergence, as a communication strategy, on the other hand, highlights the differences in nonverbal behaviour and speech behaviour between different communicators. If individuals perceive that the others do not belong to a particular group, they will communicate in a divergent way to accentuate, to others or to themselves, that they belong to a divergent group (Griffin, 2012).

CAT when considered between communicators, mainly trains its focus on the coordination challenges and choices and the type of communication strategies chosen by them. According to Giles (2016), since every person comes face to face with the challenge of trying to maintain personal authenticity while at the same time striving to recognize the demands of social interdependency, accommodation is best viewed as a balancing act involving give-and-take.

In relation to this study, CAT can be used to convince the press and other stakeholders to get a buy in concerning what GDC is offering. The communication experts can use convergence to predict the behavior of the press as well as stakeholders before doing a presser.

Conceptual Framework

In conducting this study, and to show the relationship between the two variables, a conceptual framework was developed. The dependent variable, in this study, is corporate reputation, and the independent ones are advertising, public relations, and corporate social responsibility. The following figure illustrates the relationships and constructs between the research variables talked about above.



Corporate communication can greatly influence corporate reputation through corporate culture. By what an organization deems as its culture, reputation can be developed through communication, therefore, corporate communicators need to involve corporate culture in their engagements with external and internal stakeholders in a bid to build a strong organizational reputation. To better understand the relationship between corporate communication and an organization's corporate reputation, it is important to analyze the Corporate Communication variables of advertising, public relations, corporate social responsibility and corporate identity against the reputational variables of vision & leadership, workplace environment, product & services and financial performance.

Research Methodology

A descriptive research design was applied in this study since the study involved gathering quantitative and qualitative data that describes the characteristics and nature of the role of corporate communication in building GDC's corporate reputation. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a descriptive research design is defined as a type of design used in obtaining information that concerns a phenomena's current status and describes "what exists" concerning conditions or variables in a specific situation.

The target population for the study was 1000 employees of GDC, made up of the Managing Director/CEO, General Managers, Managers, Deputy Managers, Chief Officers, Senior Officers, Officers, and other staff. The study used a sample size of 150 employees, representing 15% of the total population. A sample size of 10% of the sample population is considered adequate for descriptive study, according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2008). In this study, the target population is the 1000 employees of GDC thus 150 employees represent 15% of the population making the sample population well within the standard sample size. The study used stratified random sampling as a method of sampling from a population. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) posits that when populations vary, sampling of each stratum independently is advantageous.

Descriptive statistics method was applied to analyze quantitative data where data was scored by calculating the percentages, means, and variance. This was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. Analyzed findings was presented in form of frequency tables, pie charts, and bar charts.

Category	Target population	Percentages
General/ Regional Managers	6	4
Heads of Departments	20	13.3
Communication experts	18	12
Community relations experts	21	14
Consultancy experts	20	13.3
Supply Chain experts	32	21.3
Finance experts	33	22
Total	150	100

Both primary and secondary data was collected during the study. Questionnaires containing both open-ended and closed-ended questions were the main data collection instruments used to collect data for the study. To test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted to help in finding out the reliability and validity of data collection instruments. It was also done to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The contents of the responses, as given by the respondents, was checked against the study objectives. Evidence of content representativeness, relevance, and the overall relevance to the research variables indicated that the research instruments were valid. All ethical considerations were observed. Importantly, the confidentiality of the respondents was guaranteed. The researcher informed the participants of the intended use of the study, obtained all the necessary permits to undertake the study such as the NACOSTI permit and signed a non-disclosure Agreement from the organization where data was collected.

Results and Discussions

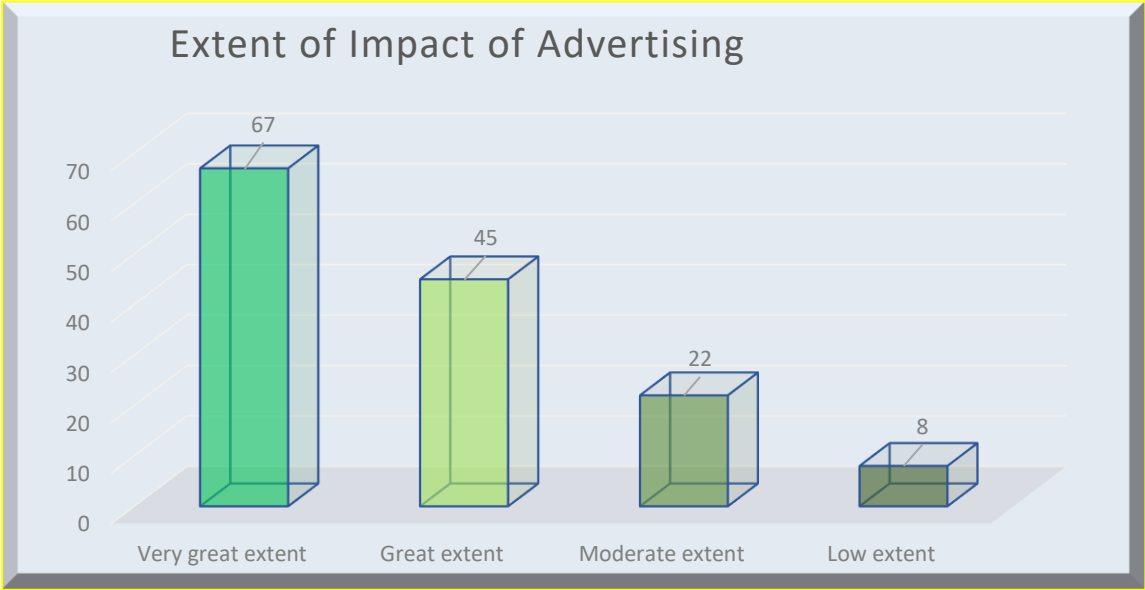
The research focused on GDC employees who are authorities in Corporate Communication. Respondents comprised of the General/ Regional Managers (GMs), Head of Departments (HoDs), Communication Experts, Community Relations Experts, Supply Chain Experts, Consultancy experts and Finance Experts. The research sample was made up of 150 individual respondents ranging from 21 to over 51 years old. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to respondents, 142 were properly filled and taken back thus giving 95% response rate in this study report. Out of these, 114 were male (80%) while 28 (20%) were female. Distribution of respondents according to age: 40.1% were aged between 21 - 30 years, 29.58% were aged between 31 - 40 years, and 19.72% were aged between 41 - 50 years while 10.56% were aged over 51 years.

Research Findings

Impact of Advertising on the delivery of Products & Services

On whether advertising had an impact on the delivery of products and services in Geothermal Development Company of Kenya, 129 respondents' answers were in the

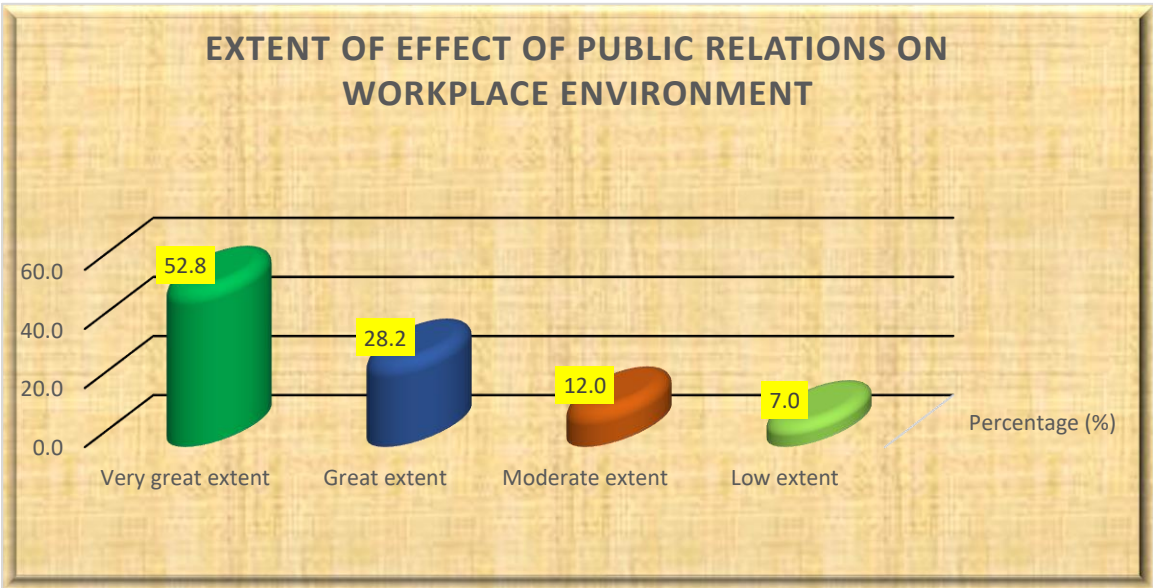
affirmative while 13 respondents said that advertising had no impact on delivery of products and services.



On the extent of the impact, it can be seen that 67 respondents (47.2%) were of the opinion that advertising has an impact on delivery of products and services in GDC to a very great extent, 31.7% to a great extent, 15.5% to a moderate extent and 5.6% had low extent on the delivery of products and services in GDC.

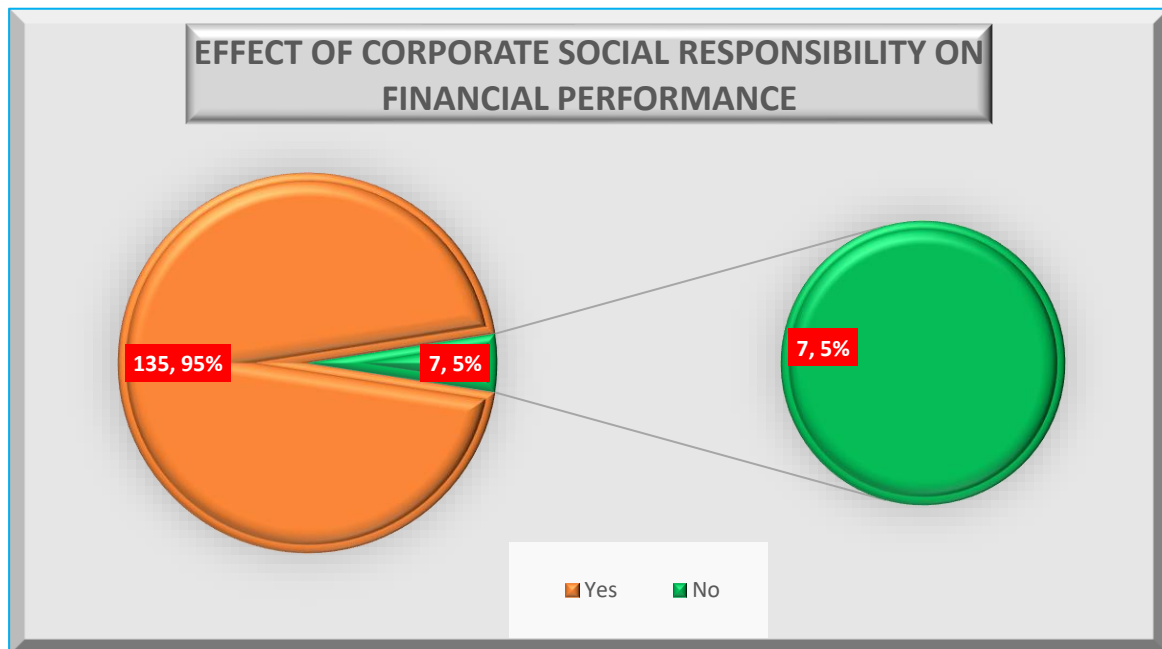
Effect of Public Relations on Workplace Environment

The study established that 123 (86.6%) respondents agreed that public relations had an effect on workplace environment in GDC, with 19 (13.4%) respondents saying that public relations had no effect on workplace environment within Geothermal Development Company.



100 respondents (52.8%) were of the opinion that public relations affect workplace environment to a very great extent, 28.2% were of the opinion that it has a great effect, 12.0% moderate effect and 13 respondents (7.0%) believed that there was a low extent on how public relations affected workplace environment in GDC.

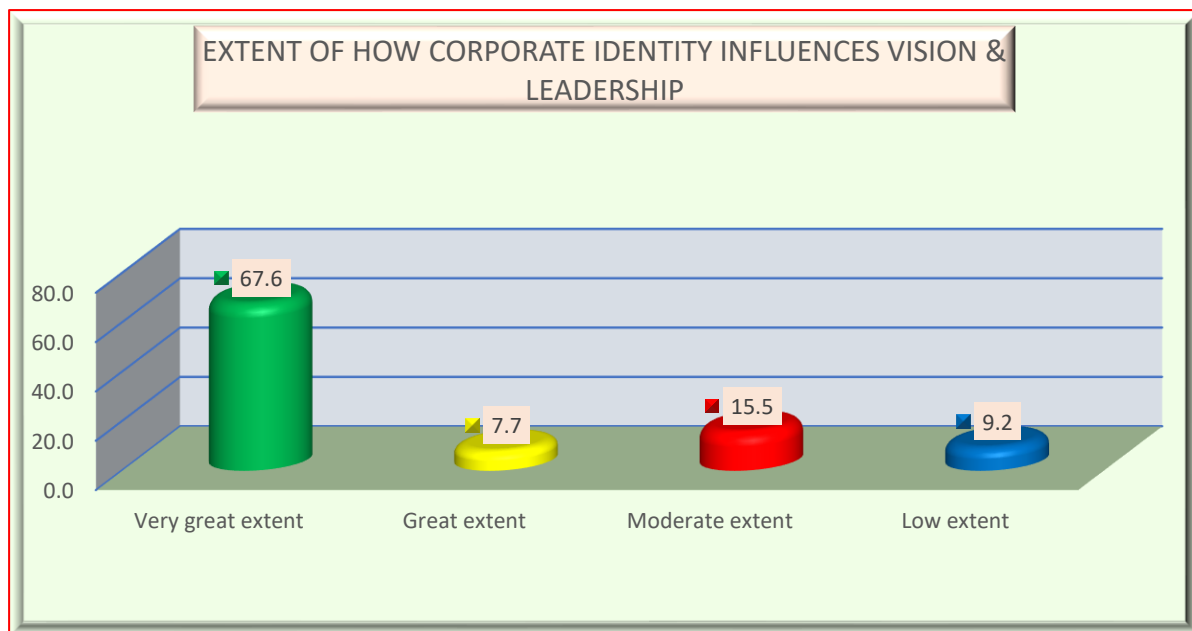
Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Financial Performance



On whether CSR had any effect on financial performance in GDC, the majority of the respondents 95.1% answered in the affirmative, while the 4.9% disagreed. By comparing the two responses it was evident that corporate social responsibility affected financial performance in GDC. Additionally, 90 respondents (47.2%) were of the opinion that CSR affected the financial performance of GDC to a very great extent, 23.9% to a great extent, 9.9% moderate extent and 27 respondents, (19.0%) were of the opinion that CSR affected financial performance to a very low extent.

Influence of Corporate Identity on the Vision and Leadership of GDC

The question on the influence of corporate identity on the vision and leadership of GDC saw 112 (78.9) respondents agreed that indeed corporate identity influence the vision and leadership of GDC, with 30 (21.1%) respondents saying it did not. On the extent of the influence, 67.6% were of the opinion that corporate identity influenced the vision and leadership of GDC to a very great extent. 7.7% to a great extent, 15.5% indicated a moderate extent influence, whereas 9.2% indicated that corporate identity influences vision and leadership of GDC to a low extent.



Summary of Findings

To what extent does advertising impact on the delivery of products & services in GDC?

According to this finding, advertising impacts on the delivery of products and services in GDC to a very great extent by 47.2%, great extent 31.7%, moderate extent 15.5% and low extent by 5.6%. It can be concluded that advertising has a great impact on the delivery of products and services in Geothermal Development Company of Kenya.

To what extent does public relations affect workplace environment in GDC?

According to this finding, public relations affect workplace environment in GDC to a very great extent by 52.8%, great extent 28.2%, moderate extent 12.0% and low extent by 7.0%. It can be concluded that public relations has a very great effect on workplace environment in Geothermal Development Company of Kenya.

To what extent does corporate social responsibility affect financial performance in GDC?

According to this finding, corporate social responsibility affects the financial performance in GDC to a very great extent by 47.2%, great extent 23.9%, moderate extent 9.9% and low extent by 19.0%. It can be concluded that corporate social responsibility has an impact on the financial performance of the Geothermal Development Company of Kenya.

To what extent does corporate identity influence the vision & leadership in GDC?

According to this finding, corporate identity influences the vision and leadership in GDC to a very great extent by 67.6%, great extent 7.7%, moderate extent 15.5% and low extent by 9.2%. It can be concluded that corporate identity has an important influence on the vision and leadership in the Geothermal Development Company of Kenya.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that corporate communication has a major role in building an organization's reputation in relation to the Geothermal Development Company of Kenya and that advertising is an important element in the delivery of products and services: Respondents explained that without advertisement, most customers might not be in a position to know what services and products GDC offers, thus, it is through advertisement that they get to know about the company and request for their services like the use of grain dryer in Menengai or the provision of well logging services such as coiled tubing services. The respondents also noted that GDC could benefit from advertising its consultancy services such as courses offered in its training programme.

The majority of respondents indicated that public relations affected workplace environment in GDC. They explained that it was through the PR activities they carry out in their areas of operations that has created conducive environment between GDC and the local communities around the project area. However, others opined that the PR activities need to be increased through more collaborations with the locals.

From the study analysis, the researcher noted that corporate social responsibility is an essential accompaniment of financial performance in GDC. The respondents said that the more CSR activities were carried out, the more financial performance of the institution improved. Others explained that CSR, just like advertisement, would attract more stakeholders to the services offered by the company, thus improving their sale, hence an improvement in financial performance. An example which was given by one of the respondents was on the geothermal grain drying services done in Menengai. The respondents noted that it was through the CSR activities done by GDC that the farmers around the project learnt of the service and started to bring their grain for drying during the pilot stage of the project.

Corporate Identity was said to be one of the key issues influencing the vision and leadership in GDC. In this regard, the respondents indicated that there are leaders in the organization who are seen as the face of the company based on how they interact with stakeholders. The respondents said that those leaders wear the name of the company with pride, thus it becomes easy for them to implement the company's vision and get buy in from staff and stakeholders.

Recommendations

From the study, it is recommended that advertising should be encouraged since it is known to have many favourable effects: It facilitates good performance, and ensures that products and services reach the desired target market.

Public Relation is essentially seen as a factor that creates positive attributes to the company. It was recommended that PR should continue to be done by the company in order to ensure that the relationship between GDC and the stakeholders is maintained.

Corporate Social Responsibility was said to be one of the key issues affecting the financial performance of GDC. It was recommended that the company should advance its CSR systems to ensure that they get more out of them in terms of financial performances.

Corporate Identity was said to be one of the key issues influencing the vision and leadership in GDC. It was recommended that the company should encourage more staff to voluntarily identify themselves with the company so that implementing the company's vision and mission does not become a problem when explained to all stakeholders.

Suggestions for further research

Based on the research done, it can be concluded that corporate communication plays a big role in building an organization's reputation, thus when dealing with reputation building, it is suggested that factors like advertising, CSR, PR, and corporate identity be considered by different organizations. Other researchers should also do more research under this topic and similar areas with different variables other than advertising, public relations, corporate social responsibility, and corporate identity, which the researcher has used under this study, in other related industries to determine if similar factors have an influence on the role of corporate communication in building an organization's reputation.

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