Communication Methods Used to Disseminate Corporate Identity to Employees by Public Universities in Kenya. (Jan 2016).

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Abstract- Internal communication in the public sector is an important factor in the improvement of service delivery especially in institutions of higher education hence this study to describe the communication methods used by public universities to disseminate corporate identity messages to employees. The research was carried out through the mixed methods design which comprised a descriptive survey for the qualitative data, in-depth interviews and documentary analysis for qualitative data. The target population consisted of ten public universities in Kenya. The sample size was 386 participants which included lecturers, administrative staff, registrars and public relation managers drawn from three older universities and seven recently charted universities.   The findings indicated that the communication methods are top-down and one way. The recommendation was that universities create a communication policy that included a formalized way for information to move from the bottom-up.

Index Terms- Corporate Identity (CI), Corporate Communication, Public Universities, Employee Communication, Internal Communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Van Riel (1997) in Mohamad, Abubakar& AbdulRahman (2007) states the three main concepts in corporate communication that are studied by scholars. The concepts are corporate identity, corporate reputation and communication management. Moreover (Illia & Balmer, 2012) emphasize that the key to having a corporate communications strategy is the notion of a corporate identity: the basic profile that an organization wants to project to all of its important stakeholder groups and how it aims to be known by these various groups in terms of the corporate images and reputations that they hold.

Universities, faced with competition, have realized the role of corporate identity as a powerful source of competitive advantage (Melewar & Akel, 2005). They have thus begun to develop and implement corporate identity programs as part of their competitive strategies (Baker & Balmer, 1997).

Sagimo (2002) states that the fundamental purpose of organizational communication is to enable employees perform according to the organization's strategic intent. It is assumed that organizations have the capability to rapidly identify, send, receive, and understand strategic information that is credible, sensible, and relevant. O'Neil and Spurlock (2009) define internal corporate communication as utilizing tools such as suggestion boxes, presentation and dialogue sessions, paper memo, email, voice mail, corporate email news, webpage, employee newspaper, newsletter, posters and flyers, employee articles in corporate newsletters and e-newsletters, notice boards, and meetings. They note that many organizations are still shying away from the new media despite the campaigns to adopt such forms of communication.

In Kenya, the elevation of fifteen (15) university colleges to fully-fledged universities has increased the number of public universities from seven (7) to twenty-two (22) (Commission for University Education, 2014). This is in addition to the fourteen (14) private universities already in existence. This means that all these universities are in a bid to attract qualified students and members of staff in a highly competitive environment. Furthermore the Universities Act 2012 requires that all student admissions be based on student preference rather than bed capacity as was the case earlier. This puts all universities on an equal footing in their bid to compete for students as opposed to some universities having an upper hand due to their existing infrastructure. It is highly prudent therefore for these universities to rally all their obtainable resources and available means to communicate their unique identities to the public in order to grow their profiles and reputation.

II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

This research used a mixed methods approach which permits the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data in the same study (Creswell, 2009). The mixed methods approach was selected for this study as it enabled the researcher to collect well rounded and detailed data that was not only numerically descriptive but also enabled the study to gather multiple views and different perspectives (Creswell, 2009).

The target population was ten universities comprising of three older universities and seven recently chartered universities. The study also used purposive sampling to select the registrars either academic or administrative and the public relations officers in the selected universities. 3 registrars (academic/administration) and 3 public relations officers were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling was used to select strategic plans and communication policies documents of the selected universities for accumulation of secondary data.

The researcher used three types of research instruments; questionnaire, an interview schedule and an observation guide. The researcher constructed a questionnaire for the university employees who are lecturers and administrative staff which collected quantitative data. The questionnaire was appropriate for this large number of respondents. The researcher used structured closed questions as well as the rating scale in the questionnaire. The closed- ended type of questions facilitated consistency of certain data across respondents. The rating scale was used to measure perception, attitude, values and behavior of the respondents (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Interview questions were used to interview the university registrars and public relations officers because these are the officers who are involved in the formulation of corporate identity and also oversee the implementation of the structure of corporate identity in the universities. This research instrument enabled the researcher to collect in-depth qualitative data on ways of harnessing the corporate identity structure to enhance service delivery, employee use of corporate identity structure and communication feedback from employees. This information enhanced the quantitative data collected by the questionnaire.

The researcher employed documentary/ content analysis using observational schedule to extract first-hand information on corporate identity structure, communications methods on disseminating corporate identity structure and expectations on service delivery on the employees from the university strategic plans and communication policies. This data would also enhance the quantitative data collected by the questionnaire.

III.   RESULTS/FINDINGS

Table 1
Use of internal memos (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	.5	.7	.7
	INTERNAL MEMOS	136	74.7	99.3	100.0
	Total	137	75.3	100.0	
Missing	System	45	24.7		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 2
Use of internal memos (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	INTERNAL MEMOS	141	75.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	45	24.2		
Total		186	100.0		

Table 1 internal memos for lecturers and table 2 internal memos for administrative staff.   The tables above show that universities most common communication method to disseminate CI is the use of internal memos at 136 (74.7%) for lecturers and 141 (75.8%) for administrative staff. This could be because universities follow a top-down method of communication.

Table 3
Use of notices (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NOTICES	121	66.5	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	61	33.5		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 4
Use of notices (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NOTICES	128	68.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	58	31.2		
Total		186	100.0		

Table 4 and table 5 above show for lecturers and administrative staff use of notices are at 121 (66.5%) and 128 (68.8%) for lecturers and administrative staff respectively.

Table 6
Use of E-mail (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	UNIVERSITY EMAIL	94	51.6	100.0
Missing	System	88	48.4	
Total		182	100.0	

Table 7
Use of E-mail (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	UNIVERSITY EMAIL	109	58.6	100.0
Missing	System	77	41.4	
Total		186	100.0	

Due to adoption of newer technologies and their advantages such as affordability, accessibility and speed, use of emails is also a major communication method used in universities as can be seen in tables 6 and 7 above for lecturers and administrative at 94 (51.6%) and 109 (58.6%) respectively.

Table 8
Use of sms (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	TELEPHONES (SMS)	63	34.6	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	119	65.4		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 9
Use of sms (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	TELEPHONES (SMS)	48	25.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	138	74.2		
Total		186	100.0		

On the other hand the use of short message service (sms) has not been prevalent as it could be because it does not provide a sufficient avenue for provision of corporate identity messages hence it has only 63 (34.6%) for lecturers and 48 (25.8%) for administrative staff as seen in tables 8 and 9 above.

Table 10
Use of meetings (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MEETINGS	72	39.6	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	110	60.4		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 11
Use of meetings (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MEETINGS	50	26.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	136	73.1		
Total		186	100.0		

Tables 10 and table 12 above shows that meetings as avenues for disseminating corporate identity are also not very common. This could be because meetings normally have fixed agendas and few are specifically called to advance corporate identity. Lecturers at 72 (31.6%) and administrative staff at 50 (26.9%).

Table 13
Use of social media (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SOCIAL MEDIA (FACEBOOK, TWITTER, WHATSAPP	65	35.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	117	64.3		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 14
Use of newsletters (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	UNIVERSITY NEWSLETTER	33	18.1	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	149	81.9		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 13 and table 14 show that social media use is 65 (35.7%) and the newsletter is 33 (18.1%) for lecturers. This could be because newsletters are mostly published quarterly and are not widely available and that lecturers have also embraced new media technologies especially for communication with students.

Table 15
Use of social media (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SOCIAL MEDIA (FACEBOOK, TWITTER, WHATSAPP	32	17.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	154	82.8		
Total		186	100.0		

Table 16
Use of newsletters (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	UNIVERSITY NEWSLETTER	37	19.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	149	80.1		
Total		186	100.0		

Table 15 and table 16 show social media use is 32 (17.2%) for administrative staff and newsletter use is 37 (19.9%). These two methods may not be used so well amongst administrative staff because their communication is mostly instruction oriented and these two forms do not relay instructions formally.

Looking further at the communication methods used to disseminate corporate identity respondents were asked to respond to the statement the channels of communication are effective as seen in table 47 and 48 below for lecturers and administrative staff respectively.

Table 17
Effectiveness of channels of communication (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	3.3	3.3	3.3
	DISAGREE	41	22.5	22.5	25.8
	UNDECIDED	5	2.7	2.7	28.6
	AGREE	77	42.3	42.3	70.9
	STRONGLY AGREE	53	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	182	100.0	100.0	

Table 18
Effectiveness of channels of communication (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	8	4.3	4.3	4.3
	DISAGREE	32	17.2	17.2	21.5
	UNDECIDED	4	2.2	2.2	23.7
	AGREE	91	48.9	48.9	72.6
	STRONGLY AGREE	51	27.4	27.4	100.0
	Total	186	100.0	100.0	

For lecturers 53 (29.1%) strongly agreed, 77 (42.3%) agreed, 5 (2.7%) were undecided, 41 (22.5%) disagreed and 6 (3.3%) strongly disagreed. For administrative staff 51 (27.4%) strongly agreed, 91 (48.9%) agreed, 4 (2.2%) were undecided, 32 (17.2%) disagreed and 8 (4.3%) strongly disagreed. For both respondents, the majority felt that the communication methods were effective, this could be because they encounter these communication messages on a regular basis through memos and notices.

Table 19
Mean of effectiveness of channels of communication (lecturers)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The channels of communication in the university are effective.	182	1	5	3.71	1.201
Valid N (listwise)	182				

Table 20
Mean of effectiveness of channels of communication (administrative staff)

	N	Min	Max		Mean	Std. Deviation
The channels of communication in the university are effective.	186	1	5		3.78	1.153
Valid N (listwise)	186					

Table 19 and 20 above show the mean mark for lecturers to be at 3.71 as compared to the maximum mean of 5 and the mean mark of administrators to be at 3.78 as compared to the maximum mean of 5. These marks are on the lower side of the maximum mean and it could be because the channels are not wholly effective.

Table 21
Mean of effectiveness of channels of communication

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Administrative Staff	186	3.78	1.153	.085	3.61	3.95	1	5
Lecturers	182	3.71	1.201	.089	3.54	3.89	1	5
Total	368	3.75	1.176	.061	3.63	3.87	1	5

Table 22
Analysis of Variance of Groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.392	1	.392	.283	.595
Within Groups	507.105	366	1.386		
Total	507.497	367			

Table 22 shows that there is no significant difference in effectiveness of communication channels between groups at 0.595>0.05. This could be both respondents perceive that the channels of communication are minimally effective.

Respondents also gave their contribution on the ways to promote the unique identity of the university to the staff members.

Both respondents, lecturers and administrative staff agreed that branding was the most effective way to do this as per table 23 and 24 below. This could be more so for administrative staff who in most universities are provided with branded items such as shirts, pens, umbrellas for use by the university.

Table 23
Branding as a way of promoting CI to staff members (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Branding	105	57.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	77	42.3		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 24
Branding as a way of promoting CI to staff members (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Branding	112	60.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	74	39.8		
Total		186	100.0		

Table 25
Seminars as a way of promoting CI to staff members (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Seminars on university's proposed strategies	74	40.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	108	59.3		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 25 above shows that lecturers preferred seminars on university's proposed strategies as an effective mean of promoting the unique identity while table 26 below shows that administrative staff preferred regular departmental meetings. This could be deduced as to the different nature of work performed by the respondents whereby lecturers could prefer an ad hoc interactive session as

opposed to formally scheduled meetings. Table 27 below shows that lectures put meetings at 67 (36.8%) and table 28 shows that administrative staff put seminars at 58 (31.2%).

Table 26

Meetings as a way of promoting CI to staff members (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Regular departmental meetings	73	39.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	113	60.8		
Total		186	100.0		

Table 27

Meetings as a way of promoting CI to staff members (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Regular departmental meetings	67	36.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	115	63.2		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 28

Seminars as a way of promoting CI to staff members (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Seminars on university's proposed strategies	58	31.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	128	68.8		
Total		186	100.0		

Both lectures and administrative staff, do not regard informal meetings as an appropriate way for corporate identity dissemination as can be seen in table 29 and 30 with lecturers at 66 (33.0%) and administrative staff at 57 (30.6%) respectively. This could be because corporate identity messages usually stem from the top down in a formal structured way.

Table 29

Informal gatherings as a way of promoting CI to staff members (lecturers)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Informal gatherings between staff and senior management (interdepartmental staff games, team building,)	60	33.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	122	67.0		
Total		182	100.0		

Table 30

Informal gatherings as a way of promoting CI to staff members (administrative staff)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Informal gatherings between staff and senior management (interdepartmental staff games, team building,)	57	30.6	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	129	69.4		
Total		186	100.0		

These findings are also augmented by interviews done with the registrars who reiterated that universities disseminate these CI messages through internal memos and emails. One registrar had also created a WhatsApp group (social messaging mobile platform) where he would post appropriate messages and also

welcome views from staff members. Another registrar pointed out that job descriptions were also good avenues through which corporate identity messages were disseminated. He also stated that during meetings at all levels of the university, corporate identity messages were re-emphasized and these also provided a good avenue for dissemination. Statutory documents were also cited as other methods of communication. One public relation manager also pointed out that these communication methods were mostly top down and could even have negative connotations for instance 'a memo has come' is usually said with a presentiment of bad news. Another PR manager also stated that feedback options for employees were limited to departmental meetings. This viewpoint was also reiterated by a registrar who stated that feedback options for employees was in departmental meetings and maintaining an open door policy where employees felt they could work and air their views.

A PR manager also mentioned websites as good drivers of corporate identity messages as well as emails pointing out that most staff members had official university e-mails and addresses and this could be reached electronically. He also pointed out that e-notices posted on websites were beginning to have the same response as hard copy notices. Feedback avenues on websites were provided although they were not well utilized.

End of year appraisals were also cited as means of feedback by a registrar as well as end of year parties. "They are not just for eating, they are opportunities for staff members to contribute" he stated. It was generally acknowledged across the board that although corporate identity messages were cascaded through formal means from top to down, there was no established way for employees to give their feedback on the effectiveness or impact of the messages.

One PR said "people respond to the messages because they come in form of orders not because of understating" One registrar stated that the university had established a complaints committee to handle issues raised, although it was rarely utilized. A PR manager stated that he had established a good rapport with members of staff of all cadres and so was often in reception of feedback form employees. He gave an example of where the university drivers felt neglected in terms of in-service training which was part of the university's core values, they explained that other workers were periodically being trained on new ways of performing but they had been neglected. Based on this information the PR officer approached the transport manager and the vice chancellor to kick start the process of training them on modern methods of defensive driving.

This situation is reflective of how the lack of a formal policy on internal communications, leaves employees with few options of feedback. One registrar said that "policy documents are only for serious issues such as intellectual property issues" thus implying that communication is not a 'serious issue'. It was also observed that out of the ten universities visited, only one university had formulated a communications policy that was mostly concerned with top-down communications.

This ties in with a study by Zheng (2009) which found that most managers defined information as one way messages, news about the organization and things employees needed to know to be able to do their work. Horomia (2007) also reiterates that in most organizations, there is no template for the governance structure and content of internal communication.

Griffin, Laplonge and Laplonge (2011) describe the importance of maintaining dialogue at all levels of the organization in order to engage people and create a culture of belonging. They exhort managers to talk with employees rather than talk at employees. Lockwood (2007) also identifies branding as a form of communication strategy that promotes employee engagement as it continually sends a message about the company, its mission, values and products to the workforce. The organization's brand values must be communicated regularly and prominently through an organization's communication channels.

The use of a wide variety of communication channels is also advocated due to the variety of the workforce, Griffin, Laplange and Laplange (2011) state that rather than taking a one-size-fit-all approach, internal communication should segment the workforce, identity and target employee segments through an appropriate selection of communication channels and content to reflect the true diversity of its workforce. These findings also agree with Tariszka- Semegine (2012) who states that downward communication is more prevalent than upward communication. She also found out that employee satisfaction with upward communication tends to be lower than their satisfaction with downward communication, particularly with the strategies used in upward communications such as survey and complaints procedures.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate that internal memos, notices, emails are the most prevalent methods for both lecturers and administrative staff. Lecturers found SMS and social media to be applicable methods while administrative staff found meetings to be a better method of cascading CI messages. Newsletters were found not to be very useful in cascading these messages for both the lecturers and administrative staff. The findings also indicate that the channels of communication in place are effective in terms of relaying information from the top-down but, structures are lacking for conveyance of information from down to top. The findings show that branding is the most ideal way of promoting awareness of CI, lecturers preferred seminars as the appropriate way of promoting CI messages while administrative staff found meetings to be more appropriate. This disparity in preferences was found to be because of the nature of their work. The findings also indicate that almost all universities lack a proper communication policy that guides the communication structure.

The findings imply that there is a structured recognized way of cascading information from the top- down but there is no structured way for down-top information. There was also a lack of communication policy document that guides communication, meaning effectiveness of existing communication structures is difficult and also interlinking them to change situations becomes difficult. The study recommends that universities also institute formal structures of information being relayed from the bottom. The study also recommends that communication polices be instituted that guide on how internal communication can be internally modified to accommodate changing dynamics of employees.

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