ABSTRACT

Public relations (PR) in Kenya is a significant discipline and a growing industry. However, it still faces many challenges with one of the major challenges is the misconception of PR in the country. Seemingly, many people still confuse public relations for marketing or advertising. Further, firms are yet to fully understand the benefits of PR in their strategic management particularly when employed to their daily operations. Unilever (K) Ltd faced allegations of sexual harassment and abuse of its female employees on its Kericho tea plantations. This has led to the company acquiring a negative public image both internationally and locally. However, all these problems which were revealed were denied or downplayed by local management. This has led to the public viewing Unilever as a company which focuses on costs reductions and profit maximisation at the expense of their employees. The study focused on PR in strategic management of firms in Kenya by focusing on Unilever (K) Ltd in its Kericho Tea Plantation. The study was guided by three objectives; to examine the value of PR to the strategic management, to study the effect of organisational culture to the effectiveness of PR strategy and to investigate the role of organisational structure to the effectiveness of a PR strategy at Kericho Tea Plantation of Unilever (K) Ltd. The study was guided by a conceptual framework, anchored on system approach theory, stakeholder management theory, and Grunig’s situational theory of public. The study area was Kericho Tea Plantation of Unilever (K) Ltd with the study adopting a descriptive research design. The target population was the human resource (HR) department, which was made up 100 of employees and PR department comprised 10 employees of Unilever’s Kericho Tea Plantation. Multistage sampling was used to select the sample to participate in the study. The sample size for the participants to participate in the survey from the HR department was calculated using a formula provided by Yamane (1967) to acquire 50 participants while a census was used to acquire 10 participants to participate in the interview from the PR department. Further, random sampling was used in selecting the sample from the HR department. The data collection procedure entailed self-administered questionnaires to the selected respondents and interviews conducted on the employees in the PR department. The completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 21). The data collected from the interviews were analysed through content analysis. Mixed method data analysis was utilised whereby both qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilised. The study established that while Unilever values PR, it lacks structures such as training of its employee on best practices as well as informing employees on PR policies and strategies within the organization. Unilever value for PR is seen from the commitment and support of the top management to the PR issues and department. The study also established that the organizational structure of the company is aligned to the PR strategy. The study recommends that the Unilever (K) Ltd needs to rethink its PR strategy and develop a more effective strategy in PR with all the stakeholders and parties working hand in hand in ensuring the company’s image is corrected. The findings of this study are useful to the management of Unilever (K) Ltd as well as other firms in managing and developing its PR strategy. The findings also add to the existing body of knowledge on public relation and its management.