

The Influence of Advertising and Public Relations on Growth of Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises in Benue State

¹**Caleb Terngu Chile**

²**Terngu Iyorkyaa**

Abstract

Advertising and public relations are two marketing promotion tools for effectiveness in business endeavours. It is on this premise that this research investigates how advertising (Ad) and public relations (PR) strategies are used by small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Benue State. Survey research design has been adopted with questionnaire and oral interview used in collecting relevant data. The Test of Hypothesis was done using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Findings generally indicate the awareness and adoption of advertising and public relations by SMEs where results from the Test of Hypothesis also affirm that growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State is influenced by the application of advertising and public relations strategies. Results, therefore, indicate that the calculated r-value of 0.258 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at 0.05 alpha levels with 514 degrees of freedom. However, findings indicate that there exist a considerable number of challenges to effective utilization of Ad and PR strategies. The study, therefore, concludes that there is effective utilization of PR and Ad for the growth of SMEs in Benue State. On this premise, it is recommended among other things, that managements of small and medium scale enterprises should step-up their utility in the knowledge and awareness they already have on the relevance and use of PR and Ad strategies as only then, a significant and tangible growth will be recorded.

Key Words: Influence, Advertising, Public Relations, Growth, SMEs, Benue State

Introduction

There is increasing private and public interest in the growth and development of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs), which are largely seen as stimulus to economic development and industrialization process among developing countries of the world including Nigeria. Evidence of this is seen in the abundant empirical researches, position papers and textbooks by scholars in Nigeria among whom are Ogunsanya (2007), Ekpenyong and Nyong (1992), Kpakol (2007), Ayinzat (2007) and Onugu (2005). In spite of the heightened public interest in the growth of SMEs, Nigeria, a country that seeks to be among the 20 most developed economies by the year 2020, according to Nwaizugbo (2007, p. 161) “has not as a matter of policy directed attention towards promoting marketing as an instrument of development...and that the poor market share of SMEs is attributed, to an extent, to low marketing skills of the operators.” The closest the country has gone towards an SME

¹ **Caleb Terngu Chile Ph.D.** is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Benue State University, Makurdi. E-mail: ternguchile@gmail.com

² **Terngu Iyorkyaa** is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Benue State University, Makurdi. E-mail: iyorkyaa2@gmail.com

policy is the establishment of the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN) in 2003 to facilitate the growth of the SME sector. Essentially, SMEDAN is an SME support agency with no thrust on the powerful tools of advertising and public relations as important components of marketing communications. This problem is well propagated by Nwosu (2007, p. 189) who argues that:

...advertising which used to be seen as a cost-centre in modern business has, as a result of research and continual experienced business-based case reports, become rightly perceived by business all over the world as a profit-centre or tool which contributes to the potentials of other business variables in ensuring business success for small, medium or large enterprises. But in Nigeria, the SMEs do not yet seem to have bought into these new perceptions of advertising and so are still not applying or inadequately applying this crucial and effective business marketing tool. This is rather unfortunate and should therefore not be allowed to continue.

On the other hand, Uzoh (2007) gives vent to ideas regarding public relations. According to him, economic deregulation in Nigeria has brought about massive changes in companies in terms of international linkages and economic relationships, improved consumer awareness which have far reaching implications for corporate image management of companies and underscore the important place for public relations in the new inter-dependent and competitive world. Uzoh further maintains that PR is important to man as oxygen. It is a management function which a company with a clear vision cannot ignore. Yet it is this tool that is least utilized in many Nigerian companies. As a result, many organizations, managers and products have failed due to the absence of effective public relations. Consequently, the above revelations obviously point to the position that advertising and public relations are widely recognized as important tools of the business environment the world over. However, the seemingly abysmal scenario made of their usage among Nigerian companies as scholars have attested provide the spur for this study which sets out to investigate the nature and extent of the application of advertising and public relations strategies and their influence on the growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness of advertising and public relations strategies among small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State?
2. What kinds of advertising and public relations strategies are adopted by small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State?

3. In what areas advertising and public relations strategies influence growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State?
4. What are the challenges involved in the application of advertising and public relations strategies in managing small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State?

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: Growth of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Benue State is not influenced by the application of advertising and public relations strategies

Review of Concepts

Advertising: Advertising is widely regarded as both a social and economic force in all free enterprise systems the world over. This is due mainly to the fact that advertising is recognized as a persuasive information force in influencing and affecting the behavior of people in a society. Although advertising has grown from a state of crudity to the highest level of sophistication today, it has continued to utilize the same sets of methods, tools and techniques that have been in use overtime. At the home-front in Nigeria, Ofodile (2003, p. 319) subscribes to the advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON)'s definition of advertising as a form of communication through the media about products, services or ideas paid for by an identified sponsor. The essence of this definition is the emphasis on communication through a medium. According to Okigbo (1997, p. 7) advertising involves "the printed, written, spoken or pictured representation of a person, product, service or movement, openly sponsored by the advertiser and at his expense, for the purpose of influencing sales, use, votes or endorsement."

Many definitions of advertising are still tenable. Nwosu and Nkamnebe (2006, p. 4) cited Pride and Farren (1985) to have defined advertising as, "a paid form of communication about an organization and/or its products, that is transmitted to a target audience through a mass medium". Kotler (1980, p. 519) prefers to see advertising as "non-personal form of communication conducted through paid media under clear sponsorship." If the various definitions of the concept- advertising- are collapsed, it will become possible to isolate salient points that set advertising apart from other marketing communications tools. The points are discernible in this manner: (i) Non-personal (ii) Paid form of communication (iii) Done through the mass media (iv) Used for tangible and intangible goods, idea and another communicable phenomena (v) Involves persuasive communication (vi) With identified sponsor (vi) Targeted to pre-determined audience

Public Relations: Today, while a single universally accepted definition of public relations still eludes practitioners; sustained headway toward a clearer understanding of the field is being made. For

example, Obe and Adebayo (2010, p. 9) document that Harlow, in the course of his PhD pursuit, was reputed to have analysed 472 definitions and interviewed 84 public relations professionals, mostly veterans to arrive at his own definition of public relations thus:

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics, involves the management of problem or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound ethical communication technique as its principal tools.

Another working definition of public relations was offered by Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, and Toth (2007, p. 4) that:

Public relations is a leadership and management function that helps achieve organizational objectives, defines philosophy and facilitates organizational change. Public relations practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external publics to develop positive relationship between organizational goals and societal expectation. Public relations practitioners develop, execute and evaluate organizational programmes that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among an organisation's constituent parts and publics.

The definition of public relations offered by Lattimore *et al* (2007) harps on the responsibilities of public relations. Most of the work of public relations practitioners centres on what is being described in the definition. An explanatory definition of public relations bothering on the responsibilities of practitioners is conveniently tenable and acceptable here.

Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs): Analyses of the concept of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in terms of definitions, descriptions and explanations are many. In Nigeria, efforts at arriving at definitions of the concept started a long time ago. According to Kpakol (2007, p. 16), from 1970 – 1975, the Second National Development Plan in Nigeria formulated a Small Industries Development Programme (SIDP) that proposed and implemented a blue print with a view to providing technical and financial support to the then existing and prospective small-scale industries. According to the instituted organ, any manufacturing, processing or servicing industry with a capital investment not exceeding N150, 000.00 (One hundred and fifty thousand naira only) in machinery and equipment alone is to be treated as small-scale industry in the country.

In a separate account, George (2007) points out that in the year 2001 a revision of the criteria for definitions of SMEs was carried out. The following criteria then emerged: (i) Micro/cottage industry is an enterprise with total capital of not more than N1.5 million including working capital but excluding cost of land, and or labour size of not more than 10 workers; (ii) That small scale industry is an enterprise with total capital of over N1.5 million but not more than N50 million, including working capital but excluding cost of land, and or labour size of 11 – 100 workers; (iii) That medium scale industry is an enterprise with a total capital of over N50 million, but not more than N200 million, including working capital but excluding cost of land, and or a labour army of 101 – 300 employees; and (iv) Large scale industry is an enterprise with a total capital employed of over N200 million, including working capital but excluding cost of land and or labour strength of over 300 employees.

Influence of Advertising and Public Relations on Growth of Businesses

Corroborative evidences in numerous scholarly literatures have established linkages between the functions of advertising and public relations to the growth of businesses. While making reference to advertising and other elements of promotion including public relations, Belch and Belch (2001, p. 5) have acknowledged the basic fact that advertising and promotion are integral parts of our social and economic system. According to the duo:

In our complex society, advertising has evolved into a vital communications system for both consumers and businesses. The ability of advertising and other promotional methods (public relations) to deliver carefully prepared messages to target audiences has given them a major role in the marketing programmes of most organizations. Companies ranging from large multinational corporations to small retailers increasingly rely on advertising and promotion to help them market products and services.

Belch and Belch (2001) note that advertising is the best known and most widely discussed form of promotion, probably due to its pervasiveness. It has been argued that advertising is a cost-effective method for communicating with large audience by business enterprises. A single advertisement, say 30 seconds spot can reach millions of audiences during a major television network programme. Business enterprises need to market themselves, their products as well as services. The decision to buy products manufactured by enterprises can be made by a consumer on the basis of exposure to advertisement of the product. According to Defleur and Dennis (1998, p. 338) advertising “is but one factor among many in shaping consumer choice and human values”. From this perspective one would agree that advertising messages are used to educate consumers not only to the benefits of products but also on general improvements in product features.

Kaufman (1997) admits that advertising is one of the key ingredients in economic growth of any nation. Business organizations need support even from dealers and retailers to enable the movement and eventual sales of produced goods. Advertising, therefore, helps in getting dealer and retailer support. When the product is well known, retailers will stock it to cater for customer demands. Thus, by reaching customers, the advertisers are getting indirectly dealer and retailer support in stocking the product. Furthermore, Fill (2006) draws our attention to the persuasive strategy of advertising that benefit businesses. According to Fill, a major purpose of advertising campaigns in Nigeria is for persuasive purposes through creative use of appeals to reason or emotion. Advertising provides a persuasive strategy to dramatize the marginal difference between competing products and services.

Advertising's most important overall contributions in Nigeria is promoting a thriving and expanding economy. Indeed, in speeding up demand for products, it contributes in a way to the overall prosperity of the economy. Advertising can make a dynamic contribution to rising levels of economic activity and help create more jobs. The implication of these facts is that Nigerian economic enterprises stand to benefit when the economy thrives generally. Advertising, indeed, has that capacity to contribute to expanding Nigeria's economic environment where business enterprises would thrive. More scholars have acknowledged the information role advertising performs which can be beneficial to the growth and expansion of businesses in Nigeria. Authors such as Akande (1999), Ozoh (1998) and Fill (2006) have all acknowledged this fact. Akande acknowledges that advertising provides more information on brands and services than any other promotional element. Fill (2006) maintains that "of all the elements in the promotional mix, advertising has the greatest level of control." Apparently, what Fill implies by control is the manipulation of advertising information to the direction the advertiser desires even on short notice. When advertising provides a wide array of information on products and services, demand for manufactured goods and services on offer is stimulated. This means that businesses will have to produce more in order to cope with demand. To produce more would mean that some enterprises will have to expand in terms of production equipment and manpower and to strive for efficiency in production quality. This chain of advertising could be stimulated through social and economic power of advertising.

It is not only advertising that contributes to and influence businesses positively, businesses also can be influenced positively for growth through the function of public relations. For a start, there is a wide agreement among scholars that promotional activities have assumed the integrated approach and that PR complements other tools of the promotional mix (Fill 2006, Belch and Belch, 2006). There is wide acceptance in opinion among authors that public relations is a management function that can be used in the management of businesses especially in organizations that understand and appreciate the crucial role it plays. Among scholars who are of this opinion include Fill (2006), Keghku (2007), Utomi (1990), and Canfield (1970). According to Fill (2006, p. 679), "public relations is a management

activity that attempts to shape the attitudes and opinions held by an organization's stakeholders." Keghku (2002) posits that while the status of public relations has been elevated in business organizations top-level executives in particular are expected to spend substantial portions of their energies and efforts on public relations-related matters. Keghku further submits that public relations is practiced by all managers in business, not just by those whose title or job description contains the term. Public relations is a management philosophy used in the conduct of daily activities of businesses. Utomi (1990) sees public relations as a management function with all the embodiments of planning, organizing, forecasting, and budgeting as its functions. Utomi locates public relations within the prisms of corporate communications and strategic planning of public relations, according to the author, strategic planning is about evaluating the political, economic and business environment of the enterprise to line up to the challenges of projected environmental circumstances and grows at the level forecast for the enterprise.

It is not only in the general management of resources that the role of PR is felt. Public relations is further posited as a marketing function in business management. As a business function, public relations acts in synergy with other promotional activities like advertising to stimulate awareness and demand for products and services provided by enterprises. According to Jefkins (1998) public relations and advertising are associated with marketing. Jefkins acknowledges further that public relations can be applied to every part of the marketing mix of which advertising is but one ingredient. The marketing mix consists of every element in the marketing strategy of packaging, research, pricing, selling distribution and after sales services. All of these bear some degree of communication and goodwill. Market education can be a vital public relations contribution on which the success of advertising may well depend. In light of this understanding, the small and medium scale enterprises stand to benefit from public relations especially in creating good or conducive corporate image for the enterprises. Advertising is more likely to succeed where public relations has already "wet the ground" for it to thrive.

The influence of public relations to the growth of business can still be established in the domain of issues and crisis management in organizations. Conflict and crisis are often experienced in organizational settings. When they occur, it becomes expedient that they are tackled to make way for continuity of business. Examples of conflicts and crisis abound in organizational environments among which are staff demonstrations, industrial accidents resulting to loss of lives and property, petty quarrels among employees, termination of appointments among others. All these could become potential sources of conflict and crisis. Writers such as Scott and Newsom (1981) and Azaiki (2012) have acknowledged the fact that public relations can be used in managing issues and crisis when they occur in organizations. Dilenschneider (2000) has also provided elaborate illumination on the use of public relations by small scale enterprises. According to Dilenschneider (2000, p. 243):

In a small business, unlike a large company, you have a limited budget...you realize very quickly that public relations is a cost-effective way to get the word out about your products. Also, public relations is more credible since third-party endorsement from the media seems more objective to read...through public relations you're able to reach all key constituencies in a targeted way.

Dilenschneider provides public relations strategies that SME business can deploy to influence its growth. Among the public relations strategies identified include: direct mail, newsletters, special events and media relations. Others are seminars, club membership, name change and community service. Dilenschneider concludes that these public relations tools can give the right kind of public attention needed by a small scale enterprise. Thus, the various opinions analyzed are scholarly testimonies which buttress the fact that both advertising and public relations are important communications functions that must be fully integrated into the management of small and medium scale businesses if they are to experience positive growth.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the excellence theory. According to Bowen (2007), the theory represents the theoretical knowledge and findings of landmark study funded by the International Association of Business Communication (IABC) Research Foundation. The theory explains how best public relations can contribute, as a management ideology, to the overall organizational effectiveness. The basic thesis of excellence theory according to Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002, p. 57) is that "communication has value to an organization because it helps to build good long-term relationships with strategic publics." The team of researchers commissioned by the International Association of Business Communication (IABC) Research Foundation carried out the study that spreads over a decade with the vision of finding out what Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002, p. 306) state is to identify the key factors that make public relations "excellent" in its contribution to organizational effectiveness in its role as a management function and in the internal composition, structure and function.

After the study, the team of researchers developed theoretical propositions that enabled the nucleus of excellence theory principles. The researchers built their research findings on the "excellence" factor which was isolated into ten principles of excellence but condensed into eight variables. According to Bowen (2007), the principles are listed in the following manner: (1) The value of communication as seen by the CEO and top management of an organization; (2) Contribution to strategic organizational functions is an indicator of public relations excellence; (3) Performing a management function is essential to public relations being included in strategic management; (4) The model of public relations preferred by an organization; (5) The potential of the communication department to actually practice

the ideal type of excellent public relations; (6) Activist pressure on an organization forces it to communicate with external publics; (7) Organisational culture, structure and other employee-related variables are also a factor of excellence; (8) Embodying diversity, particularly in relation to the status of women in a female-dominated profession.

In a separate qualitative research conducted, Vercic (1996) identified another principle of excellent public relations as “ethics and integrity.” The commitment of organizations to ethical decision making is seen as a crucial factor of public relations excellence. According to Bowen (2007), organizations with organized training programmes and codified decision-making paradigm or model were more excellent than those that simply attempted to be ethical without investing resources in defining, training, and analyzing ethics. Guided by the principles of this theory, one can say that the theory provides a normative guide on how public relations should be practiced, structured and implemented among small-scale enterprises. The theory delineates the factors that help public relations contribute to overall organizational excellence which the small and medium scale enterprises can enhance their operations by maintaining two-way, balanced communication with the various publics they depend on for survival.

Research Methodology

The study employs both quantitative and qualitative designs. For the quantitative design, the researchers employed the survey while the oral interview was utilized in respect of the qualitative design. The population of study was made up of 1,156 persons in Benue State. This figure was drawn from the small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) managers in Benue State totaling 975 and the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations members in Benue State with a total of 181 (Ministry of Commerce and Industries, 2016). The population of NIPR was derived from the list of membership obtained at the NIPR state secretariat in Makurdi for the year 2016. NIPR members were studied because of their knowledge through their professional PR practice across societies – which qualify their providing relevant information for the study. A sample size of Five Hundred and Sixty-Seven (567) was chosen for this study, statistically determined using the Taro Yamane’s formula for determination of sample size. According to Okwandu (2004, p.130), in determining the sample size from a heterogeneous population, we can use Taro Yamane’s formula as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Using multi-stage sampling approach, stratified, random and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents for this study. Questionnaire and oral interview were the research instruments. Thus, 567 respondents were administered questionnaire in Katsina-Ala, Gboko, Makurdi

and Otukpo, twenty (20) SMEs managers who were not respondents to the questionnaire were therefore purposively selected and included in the sample. The respondents were also business managers from the same areas with considerable numbers of SMEs established therein. As a result, four (4) SMEs managers were each interviewed from Katsina-Ala, Gboko and Otukpo while the remaining eight (8) interviewees were SMEs managers in Makurdi Metropolis. The reason for having more SMEs managers interviewed from Makurdi was based on the fact that the study area (i.e. Makurdi) has more SMEs concentrated there compared to the other areas under study. Therefore, the choice of those who constituted the sample here was made to reflect the nature of business locations across the major commercial areas in Benue State. On the other hand, the Test of Hypothesis was done using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Section A: Data from Questionnaire

A total of five hundred and forty six (546) copies of questionnaire were distributed. Out of this number, five hundred and sixteen (516) copies were returned and found fit for the analysis. However, Fourteen (14) copies were returned but not worthy for analyses while sixteen (16) other copies were not returned – presents 5% mortality rate.

Table I: Level of Awareness of Ad and PR Strategies by SMEs Managers in Benue State

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high (70% - above)	31	6
High (50-69%)	364	71
Low (40-49%)	98	19
Very low (0-39%)	23	4
Total	516	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Data on Table 1 imply that the level or extent of respondents' awareness on the use of advertising and public relations strategies by SMEs in Benue State is on a considerable scale.

Table 2: Kinds of Ad Strategies mostly adopted by SMEs Managers in Benue State

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Commercial announcements	204	40
Direct mail advertisements	Nil	Nil

Use of testimonial advertisements	Nil	Nil
Internet advertising	Nil	Nil
Use of posters	98	18
Use of electronic and print billboards	58	11
Print and broadcast media advertisements	20	4
Product and corporate stickers	30	6
Transportation, bodily inscription of vehicles	106	21
All of the above	Nil	Nil
None of the above	Nil	Nil
Total	516	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Table 2 implies that small and medium enterprises in Benue State. do embark on commercial announcements, use posters, electronics and print billboards, as well as sign-post, adopt the print and broadcast media advertisements and usually embark on transport advertising-bodily inscription of vehicles.

Table 3: PR Strategies mostly adopted by SMEs Managers in Benue State

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct mail	Nil	Nil
Seminars	10	2
Name change	20	4
Sponsorships (sports, education programmes, reality shows, etc.	43	8
Community service)	Nil	Nil
In-house publications (newsletters/bulletins, folders, flyers & leaflets)	43	8
Media relations (press releases, briefings, conferences, interviews, etc.)	56	11
Word of mouth	178	34
Good environment (landscaping, décor: interior and external	61	12
Calendars, almanacs, writing pads and jotters, dairies, T-shirts, face caps)	105	30
All of the above	Nil	Nil
None of the above	Nil	Nil
Total	516	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Table 3 reveals that SMEs embark on public relations strategies such as seminars, name change, sponsorships such as sporting events, educational programmes and competitions as well as reality shows. Others are in-house publications such as newsletters, bulletins, folders, flyers and leaflets; engage in media relations such as press releases, briefings, conferences and interviews, use of words of mouth. In addition, they embark on good environment by landscaping and decorations of both internal and external areas, and ensure their enterprises go on producing calendars, almanacs, writing pads, jotters, dairies, T-shirts and face-caps.

Table 4: Ways Ad and PR Strategies have Influenced Growth of SMEs in Benue State?

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stimulated sales of products and services	168	33
Accorded high public visibility to the enterprises	12	2
Created good image of the enterprises	30	6
Contributed to market objectives of enterprises	27	5
Created more public recognition of enterprises	102	20
Opened up more business opportunities for enterprises	27	6
Helped the enterprises to compete both nationally and internationally	Nil	Nil
Attracted skilled manpower to the enterprises	7	1
Helped the company to be run profitably	143	27
All of the above	Nil	Nil
None of the above	Nil	Nil
Total	516	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Table 4 reveals that the influence of advertising and public relations strategies on growth of small and medium scale enterprises is felt in the stimulation of sales of products and services of most enterprises, high public visibility accorded most of the enterprises by the use of the strategies, the good image most of the enterprise acquire due to the application of the strategies, attainment of many market objectives of the various enterprises, effective as the local enterprises gained public recognition, influenced the opening up of business opportunities for the local enterprises, more and skilled manpower was attracted to the local enterprises and lastly influenced most enterprises in running profitably, continually and consistently.

Table 5: Challenges in the Effective use of Ad and PR Strategies to Influence Growth of SMEs in Benue State

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not recognizing that advertising and PR can be used by enterprises	17	3.3
The use of non advertising and PR professionals	8	1.6
The cost of advertising and public relations may be prohibitive	12	2.3
Poor choice of advertising and PR tactics or strategies	9	1.7
Poor choice of media avenues to publicize the strategies	14	2.7
Absence of research in appropriate strategies to adopt	21	4.1
The unsuitable environment of location (economic, political & social)	11	2.1
Poor identification of the right stakeholders to communicate with through advertising and PR.	16	3.1
All of the above	408	79.1
None of the above	Nil	Nil
Total	516	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Data on Table 5 indicate that non recognition of advertising and public relations use by management of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State, non advertising and public relations professionals, cost of advertising and public relations practice in a major hindrance in the use of such strategies. Apart from that, other challenges include poor choice of media avenues in publishing advertising and public relations strategies as a possible challenge, the poor choice of advertising and public relations tactics was a possible challenge in ensuring effective growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State. Also, the absence of research in appropriate adoption of strategies was a possible challenge too, possible challenge from the economic, political and social perspectives (i.e. the unsuitable environment of location), poor identification of ideal stakeholders to communicate with, through advertising and public relations, as a possible challenge to the use of the strategies by small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State. In fact, the data signify that all the above challenges were the possible challenges of advertising and public relations use by managers of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State.

Section B: Oral Interview

This section of the chapter is concerned with the presentation of data gathered using oral interview with twenty (20) managers of small and medium-scale business enterprises located in Kastina-Ala, Gboko, Makurdi and Otukpo. The views gathered from these respondents are synthesized, synchronized and summarily presented in the proceeding paragraphs. First, in providing the required responses on whether managers of small and medium-scale enterprises are aware that advertising and public relations strategies can help their business enterprises grow, all the 20 interviewees unanimously agreed that they are fully aware that the use and application of advertising and public relations strategies can influence the growth of their enterprises. On whether the interviewee's business enterprises have been using advertising and public relations to enhance the growth of their businesses, all the respondents generally agreed that their business outfits have been using advertising and public relations strategies for the growth of their businesses. In fact, the interviewees were of the same view that it is their recognition of the influence of advertising and public relations strategies on the growth of their businesses that has motivated them to adopt the advertising strategies they have been using.

Furthermore, a probe on the advertising and public relations strategies respondents' business outfits have been using to facilitate the growth of their enterprises revealed varied responses in this regard. That is, while some managers said they often use particular advertising and public relations strategies, others were not using them. For example, while 18 of the sampled business managers said they have been using signposts (popularly known as signboards), two interviewees (i.e. managers of a bakery and sachet water producing businesses in Kastina-Ala) said they were not using signposts. The respondents unanimously agreed that "word of mouth" was the major and the most often used communication apparatus by their business enterprises to enhance the growth of such businesses. On the use of commercial announcements/advertisements through the mass media, ten respondents noted that they had on particular occasions placed commercial announcements/ advertisements on radio stations. The radio stations, according to them, are Ashi Waves in Kastina –Ala, Radio Benue Makurdi and Joy FM Otukpo.

Also, out of the 20 interviewed respondents, twelve of them said they used calendars, almanacs, writing pads and jotters as part of the public relations strategies to enhance the growth of their business outfits. Only nine respondents noted that their business organizations were using T-shirts and faze caps with information about their products/services and organizations encrypted on them. As regards the use of bodily inscription of vehicles, eight respondents said they use vehicles with information about their products/services and businesses on them while the remaining twelve said they have no vehicles for their enterprises that they could brand them with relevant information about

their products/services. On the use of product and corporate stickers as an advertising strategy, eight interviewees agreed to that. On the use of posters, 16 of the interviewees said that they often use posters that contain information about their products/service. It was also revealed through the interview that of all the business managers spoken with, it was only the manager of Healthy Ways Gym and Spac Makurdi that often times organize seminars as the rest never adopted this strategy. On the use of good environment as a public relations strategy, all the respondents spoke with one voice that this was a strategy they never toy with as their business outfits always put in a great deal of efforts in ensuring good environment in order to attract customers and prospective ones to their business for increased patronage. According to them, the use of the “good environment” strategy is also meant to create a harmonious environment for their workers (internal publics). Pertaining to the strategy of “name change”, it was two respondents that said they have used this strategy. On the use of gifts as a strategy, all the business managers interviewed noted that they often present gifts to customers, members of the host communities and workers as according to them, is to ensure that their businesses are socially responsible to the public.

As regards how the use of advertising and public relations strategies by the business outfits of the respondents have had influence on the growth of their businesses, respondents were unanimous that the advertising and public relations strategies they have been employing overtime have greatly created the needed awareness about their products, services and businesses in general. They noted that the advertising and public relations strategies they adopted have facilitated immensely the patronage of their products/services thus enabling their business enterprises to be run profitably. In fact, the respondents opined that the advertising and public relations strategies adopted by their business organizations have enabled their business enterprises to compete favorably with others carrying out similar businesses.

On whether the business enterprises of the sampled respondents usually encounter challenges that hinder them from effectively using advertising and public relations strategies, all the respondents agreed that they encounter certain challenges. They identified inadequate funds as the major factor that often times challenges their business enterprises from effectively utilizing advertising and public relations strategies. According to the interviewees, if there were adequate funds, their business outfits will utilize all available advertising and public relations techniques to facilitate the growth of their businesses. Aside this factor, 17 respondents also identified lackadaisical attitude of their managements towards employment of advertising and public relations strategies frequently despite the enormous benefits accruable from the use of advertising and public relations.

Results from Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis One (H_{01}): *Growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue state is not significantly influenced by the application of advertising and public relations strategies.*

Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical tool, findings from the test of hypothesis indicate that, the calculated r-value of 0.258 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at 0.05 alpha levels with 514 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State is not significantly influenced by the application of advertising and public relations strategies is rejected. Therefore, this implies that that growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State is significantly influenced by the application of advertising and public relations strategies is upheld. However, the relationship between the two variables is low which implies that, despite the claim in the application of advertising and public relations among small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State, the influence on growth of the enterprise appears low.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study have indicated that the level of knowledge and awareness on the importance and use of advertising and public relations strategies among small and medium scale enterprises to enhance their business growth was relatively high. This is evidenced in the findings from the interview responses where 17 out of 20 managers interviewed in their separate opinions attested that they were fully aware of the fact that, the use of advertising and public relations can influence growth of small and medium scale enterprises. Thus, result in the above is corroborated by findings from Table 1, where 71% majority of the managers specifically rated their knowledge of the use of advertising and public relations strategies for growth of SMEs to be on a high side of 50-60% average level.

It is not out of place to infer from findings in this study that most managers of small and medium scale enterprises have average knowledge of business communication potentials in engendering growth in their various businesses. Theoretically, with the high expression in knowledge and use of these business communication strategies, it can be held that small and medium scale managements are already on the verge to achieve excellences, which is in conformity with the excellence thesis as postulated by Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002). The acknowledgement of value in advertising and public relations strategies by managers of small and medium scale enterprises could positively propel performance in the management activities of small and medium scale enterprises especially in the area of business communication activities.

Although the level of awareness about the importance and use of the strategies as demonstrated by managers of small and medium scale enterprises was relatively high, the study found that the application or deployment of the strategies were not so significantly high. As indicated in Table 2, findings indicate that SMEs have been applying few out of the many advertising strategies in their efforts to engender growth of their business. This is indicated in the 40% majority of managers who attested that they mostly engage in commercial announcements while 21% other managers disclosed that, they go on transportation advertisements through bodily inscriptions on vehicles with pictures, messages or words. Not only that, findings also indicated that managements of small and medium scale enterprises have been engaging in few public relations strategies to stimulate growth of their businesses, which prominently among the strategies is the engagement in 'word of mouth'. This is as indicated by the 34% managers in majority that attested to it. The result in the above is also corroborated by findings from the interview as managers' responses clearly indicated that the application of the kind of advertising and public relations strategies was in varying nature. This finding shows that, SMEs had preferences to the use of the strategies, even when they are aware of the importance in the use of all the strategies.

Thus, evidence from the result implies that the selection of few strategies over others was mainly due to lack of finance, as well as other needs of various enterprises as expressed by 18 out of 20 managers that were interviewed. It can be deduced from the findings so far in this study that, the use of few advertising and public relations strategies by the small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State may not influence a significant growth on their businesses. Communication is a process and phenomena that cannot be engaged in a partial manner; and since advertising and public relations strategies form part of business communication tools, it is more rewarding to engage such tools in a holistic manner, as only a tangible result can be achieved. Perhaps, findings in this study validate the result of Hypothesis that although growth of SMEs was influenced by the application of advertising and public relations strategies, such influence was on a very low level. It is therefore glaring to observe that, the non application of many of the strategies may likely be the cause of the low influence being experienced on the growth of small and medium scale enterprises as shown in result of Test of Hypothesis.

Notably, findings indicate that use of advertising and public relations strategies have had positive influence on the growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State (see Table 4). This result was corroborated by findings from the interview sessions where all the 20 managers interviewed unanimously agreed that the nature of influence of the strategies on the enterprises was more positive than negative. It is thus inferred that the use of advertising and public relations strategies, have had a positive influence (insignificant though) on the growth of small and medium scale enterprises in Benue State. This finding can be said to be in agreement with the result of

Hypothesis where it was upheld that growth of SMEs in Benue State was positively influenced by the application of the strategies. It has been established in findings of previous works including that of Nwosu (2007) that the use of business communication strategies is essential and valuable, especially to up-coming business organizations since they usually strive for development and growth.

It was further found that the application of advertising and public relations strategies by SMEs in Benue State had challenges (See Table 5 & Responses to Oral Interview). Owing to the result, it could be implied that low level of utilization of advertising and public relations strategies by SMEs could be triggered by many of the challenges disclosed by managers. Although one may be tempted to interpret the manner of the application of such strategies to be a deliberate neglect on the part of the enterprises, findings from the interview session indicated clearly, as managers unanimously complained of the lack of finance being a major challenging factor that causes the non-engagement of all or many relevant advertising and public relations strategies that can engender significant influence on the growth of their businesses. Again, if a business organization is to go by the thesis of excellence theory as used in this study, the value of business communication strategies ought to be factors such organizations would strive to always uphold in their bid to achieve growth.

Conclusion

Since this study became necessary due to public observations about the lack of significant growth among Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) in Benue State, findings have shown overwhelming evidence for the study to conclude that although high awareness is demonstrated by SMEs managers about the relevance and use of advertising and public relations strategies, such have not been significantly utilized to engender greater growth among SMEs in Benue State. The situation is due to impeding factors encountered by SMEs for the desired positive growth of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Benue State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Managements of small and medium scale enterprises should step-up their utility in the knowledge and awareness they already have on the relevance and use of public relations and advertising strategies as only then, a significant and tangible growth will be recorded in the domestic economy of Benue State.
2. Small and medium scale enterprises should develop management policies that would always ensure a total and holistic development of the promotional tools so as to engender a significant influence on their growth.

3. Management of small and medium scale enterprises should endeavour to engage in constant researches on the kinds of promotional strategies they engage so as to evaluate and reevaluate their contribution as only then, appropriate and valuable strategies can be chosen to ensure meaningful utility of the strategies and avoid waste of finances.
4. In order to manage peculiar challenges involved in the use of public relations and advertising strategies to their barest minimum, management of small and medium scale enterprises should endeavour to make policies on possible budget and possible sources of funds (which results show to be the major challenge) for effective engagement in business promotions, as this will enable them to effectively utilize the promotional strategies and record positive result on a long term. Not only that, management should make mandatory policies or engagement of professional personnel in business communication and promotions that can showcase the values and importance of Ad and PR strategies to their organization so as to change this and encourage their effective application and achieve meaningful results.

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