

CUSTOMER RELATIONS PRACTICES AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AMONG EEDC CUSTOMERS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Customer satisfaction is very important for every organisation, especially those in service industries where customers interact continuously with service providers. This study examined customer relations practices and customer satisfaction among Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) customers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study was guided by four objectives, which examined customers' perceptions of EEDC's customer relations practices, the relationship between such practices and customer loyalty and cooperation, customers' perceptions of service delivery, and the effect of customer relations practices on the corporate image of EEDC. The study was anchored on the Excellence Theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised 55,230 EEDC customers across thirteen service centers in Ebonyi State. A sample size of 382 respondents was determined, while a multistage sampling procedure involving stratification, proportional allocation, simple random sampling and purposive sampling was used to select respondents. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Of the 382 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 365 were properly completed and retrieved, representing a 95.5% response rate. The data were analysed using frequency distributions and percentages. The findings showed that customers generally perceived EEDC's customer relations practices as inadequate, particularly in the areas of proactive communication, responsiveness to customer concerns and interaction with customers. The findings also indicated weak customer satisfaction and cooperation in some areas, although some positive perceptions were observed regarding the protection of EEDC property and aspects of service delivery. Customers also expressed concerns about prepaid-meter accessibility, electricity billing, electricity supply and the responsiveness of EEDC to service-related complaints. Furthermore, the findings suggested that customer relations practices had not substantially improved customers' perceptions of EEDC's corporate image. The study concluded that EEDC needs to strengthen its customer relations practices by adopting more responsive, interactive and customer-oriented communication strategies. The study recommended, among others, that EEDC should strengthen two-way communication with customers, improve its complaint-resolution mechanisms, provide timely and accurate information about service interruptions, improve service delivery, and ensure greater transparency in billing and metering.

Keywords: Customer Relations Practices, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Service Delivery, Corporate Image, EEDC.

Introduction

Customer satisfaction has become an important consideration for organisations, particularly those operating in service industries where customers interact continuously with service providers. The quality of these interactions can influence customers' perceptions of an organisation, their willingness to continue using its services and their readiness to cooperate with the organisation. For service organisations, therefore, maintaining effective relationships with customers goes beyond providing information about products and services; it involves listening to customers, responding to their concerns and creating channels through which their experiences can inform organisational decisions. (Sugandhi, (2002) Customer relations refers to the strategies and activities through which an organisation establishes, maintains and manages relationships with its customers. Effective customer relations involves communication, responsiveness, complaint handling, feedback management and the provision of services that meet customers' expectations (Sugandhi, 2002). Where customers perceive that an organisation listens to them and responds appropriately to their needs, favourable attitudes and stronger relationships are more likely to develop. Conversely, persistent communication gaps and poor responses to customer concerns may contribute to dissatisfaction and negative perceptions of an organisation. (Gilaninia, Taleghani and Mohammadi, 2013).

Olayinka, Ojenike, Jolaosho & Adebayo (2018) state that customer satisfaction is particularly important in service organisations because customers evaluate services largely through their experiences with the service provider. Satisfaction occurs when customers perceive that the performance of a product or service meets or exceeds their expectations. Kotler and Keller (2012) explain customer satisfaction in terms of the relationship between perceived performance and customer expectations.

Thus, where the service received falls below expectations, customers are likely to experience dissatisfaction. The importance of customer relations is particularly evident in the electricity distribution sector, this is because electricity is essential to virtually every aspect of social and economic activity. Households depend on electricity for domestic activities, while businesses, educational institutions, health facilities and industries require reliable electricity for their operations. Consequently, the relationship between electricity distribution companies and their customers extends beyond the physical supply of electricity to include billing, metering, complaint management, and communication about outages, restoration of faults and other customer-related services. Nigeria's electricity sector has undergone several reforms aimed at improving electricity generation, transmission and distribution. One of the major developments was the unbundling of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) into generation and distribution companies following the electricity-sector reforms. Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) emerged as one of the distribution companies responsible for electricity distribution in parts of South-Eastern Nigeria, including Ebonyi State. The company, therefore, maintains direct relationships with electricity consumers through activities such as metering, billing, service connections, complaint handling and communication about electricity supply.

The quality of the relationship between EEDC and its customers is particularly important because electricity consumers regularly interact with the company over issues relating to supply, billing, metering, faults and other service concerns. Customers expect the distribution company to provide relevant information, respond to complaints and communicate clearly when disruptions occur. Similarly, the company depends on customers to pay electricity bills, protect electricity infrastructure and cooperate with its personnel in legitimate activities such as inspection and disconnection.

The relationship between customer relations and organisational effectiveness can also be understood from the perspective of the Excellence Theory. The theory emphasises the importance of effective communication between organisations and their publics and identifies two-way symmetrical communication as an important approach to building mutually beneficial relationships. From this perspective, organisations should not merely disseminate information to their publics; they should also listen to their concerns and use feedback to improve organisational decisions and practices. Olayinka et al (2018) suggests that in the context of electricity distribution, customer relations should involve more than informing customers about electricity supply and organisational policies. It should include mechanisms for receiving and responding to complaints, communicating service interruptions, obtaining customer feedback and addressing issues that affect customer satisfaction. Where such mechanisms are weak, customers may develop unfavourable perceptions of the organisation even where some improvements are made in service delivery.

EEDC customers in Ebonyi State constitute an important public whose experiences can provide useful information about the effectiveness of the company's customer relations practices. Examining these experiences is therefore important for understanding whether customers perceive the company as responsive, communicative and committed to meeting their expectations. It is against this background that this study examined customer relations practices and customer satisfaction among EEDC customers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study specifically considered customers' perceptions of EEDC's communication and relationship practices, customer loyalty and cooperation, service delivery and corporate image. EEDC customers in Ebonyi State interact with the company on a regular basis over issues such as electricity supply, metering, billing and service complaints. These interactions provide opportunities for EEDC to build positive relationships with its customers. However, the extent to which customers

perceive these interactions as responsive and satisfactory remains an issue requiring empirical examination.

The problem is not simply whether EEDC communicates with customers, but whether its communication and customer-relations activities address customers' concerns and contribute to satisfactory experiences. For example, information provided to customers about electricity interruptions may be of limited value if customers do not have adequate opportunities to seek clarification or receive responses to their complaints. Similarly, efforts to maintain customer relationships may have limited impact if customers continue to experience problems relating to electricity supply, metering, billing and the resolution of service faults. Another concern is the possible implication of customer dissatisfaction for cooperation and loyalty. Electricity distribution depends partly on customer cooperation, including payment of bills, lawful use of electricity and protection of electricity infrastructure. Where customers perceive the relationship with the distribution company negatively, this may affect their willingness to cooperate with the organisation. Furthermore, customers' experiences with EEDC may influence their perceptions of the company's corporate image. Consistent communication, responsiveness and effective complaint handling can contribute to trust and favourable perceptions, while poor experiences may produce negative perceptions of the organisation. However, there is insufficient empirical evidence from the present study area to establish how EEDC customers in Ebonyi State perceive the company's customer relations practices and whether these practices are associated with customer satisfaction, loyalty, service delivery and corporate image.

It is this gap that necessitated the present study. The study consequently examined customer relations practices and customer satisfaction among EEDC customers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, with particular attention to customer satisfaction, loyalty and cooperation, service delivery and corporate image.

Statement of the Problem

Customer satisfaction is an important aspect of the relationship between service providers and their customers. In an essential service such as electricity distribution, customers expect reliable electricity supply, effective communication, accurate billing, accessible metering facilities, prompt complaint resolution and courteous treatment. When these expectations are not adequately met, customers may develop negative perceptions of the service provider and become less willing to cooperate with its operations.

Electricity distribution in Nigeria continues to face challenges affecting both service providers and consumers. Despite successive reforms aimed at improving efficiency and service delivery, consumers continue to express concerns about unreliable supply, billing, metering, service interruptions and complaint handling. These challenges make effective customer relations particularly important. Good customer relations enable service providers to communicate effectively, obtain feedback, address complaints and explain issues relating to service delivery. Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) provides electricity distribution services to customers in Ebonyi State. Its interactions with customers involve issues such as electricity supply, billing, metering, service interruptions, transformer faults and complaint resolution. The quality of these interactions may influence customers' perceptions of the company and its services. Effective communication and responsive customer service may enhance satisfaction and cooperation, while poor communication, delayed responses and unresolved complaints may contribute to dissatisfaction and negative perceptions.

The concern of this study, therefore, is to determine whether EEDC's customer relations practices adequately meet customers' expectations and promote satisfaction. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how customers in Ebonyi State perceive EEDC's communication, responsiveness,

complaint handling and relationship-management practices, and how these practices relate to customer satisfaction, loyalty, cooperation, service delivery and corporate image. Although previous studies have examined customer satisfaction and service quality in Nigeria's electricity sector, there remains a need for context-specific evidence on customer relations practices among EEDC customers in Ebonyi State. This study addresses this gap by examining customer relations practices and customer satisfaction among EEDC customers in the state, with particular attention to communication, responsiveness, complaint handling, customer loyalty and cooperation, service delivery and corporate image.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to examine customer relations practices and customer satisfaction among EEDC customers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives were to:

1. . Examine customers' perceptions of EEDC's customer relations practices in Ebonyi State.
2. Determine the extent to which EEDC customer relations practices contribute to customer loyalty and cooperation in Ebonyi State.
3. Examine customers' perceptions of the contribution of EEDC customer relations practices to service delivery in Ebonyi State.
4. Determine customers' perceptions of the contribution of EEDC customer relations practices to the corporate image of the company in Ebonyi State

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are customers' perceptions of EEDC's customer relations practices in Ebonyi State?
2. To what extent do EEDC customer relations practices contribute to customer loyalty and cooperation in Ebonyi State?
3. What are customers' perceptions of the contribution of EEDC

customer relations practices to service delivery in Ebonyi State?

4. What are customers' perceptions of the contribution of EEDC customer relations practices to the corporate image of the company in Ebonyi State?

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Customer Relations Practices

Kanu (2021), explains customer relations practices as the deliberate activities through which an organization establishes, maintains and improves its relationship with its customers. They include communication with customers, provision of relevant information, responsiveness to complaints, feedback management, customer support, fair treatment and efforts to understand and respond to customers' needs. Customer relations therefore extend beyond merely informing customers about organizational activities; they involve continuous interaction between an organization and its customers. In service organizations, customer relations are particularly important because the customer's evaluation of an organization is influenced not only by the service received but also by the manner in which the organization interacts with the customer. Communication that is timely, clear and responsive can help customers understand organizational decisions and service conditions. Similarly, effective complaint-handling mechanisms provide customers with opportunities to communicate their concerns and enable the organization to identify areas requiring improvement. (Ikwaugu, 2019). For electricity distribution companies, customer relations may include informing customers about planned outages, responding to complaints about billing and metering, providing information about electricity restoration, attending to transformer-related complaints and maintaining accessible channels through which customers can communicate with the organization. These activities are important because electricity consumers frequently depend on the distribution company for information concerning changes or interruptions in service.

Research supports the importance of communication and relationship management in the electricity distribution sector. Johnson, Babaleye and Owolabi (2025), in their study of the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company, found that customers were aware of various communication and engagement strategies, including customer-care services, SMS alerts, community programmes and stakeholder meetings. However, the researchers noted that communication efforts alone were insufficient where customers continued to experience irregular electricity supply, billing problems and poor complaint resolution. They therefore argued that communication and relationship-building should be accompanied by improvements in actual service delivery. Customer relations should therefore be understood as a two-way process. An organization does not only communicate information to customers; it also listens to customers, obtains feedback and uses that information to improve its activities. This distinction is important to the present study because one of the concerns raised by customers in the study relates to the responsiveness of EEDC to their complaints, suggestions and service-related concerns.

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the customer's overall evaluation of a product or service after comparing the experience received with prior expectations. A customer is generally satisfied when the service experience meets or exceeds expectations and dissatisfied when the perceived performance falls below expectations. (Edwin & Egeruo, 2016). Customer satisfaction is particularly important in service organizations because customers often have repeated interactions with service providers. Their satisfaction can influence continued patronage, loyalty, cooperation and their overall perception of the organization. In the case of electricity distribution companies, customer satisfaction may be influenced by the reliability of electricity supply, billing practices, accessibility of meters, complaint resolution, staff responsiveness and the quality of communication between the company and its customers. Customer satisfaction should therefore not be

viewed only in terms of whether electricity is available. It also encompasses the customer's experience in dealing with the distribution company. A customer may experience an electricity interruption but remain relatively satisfied if the company provides timely information, responds to complaints and restores service within a reasonable period. Conversely, prolonged service interruptions accompanied by poor communication or ineffective complaint handling may produce dissatisfaction.

Ewuim et al. (2020), in a study of service delivery and customer satisfaction involving EEDC customers in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, examined challenges affecting electricity service delivery and customer satisfaction. Their study demonstrates the relevance of service quality to customer satisfaction within the same organizational and geographical context as the present study. More recent evidence from the Nigerian electricity distribution sector also supports the relationship between customer experience and satisfaction. Orovwiroro, Awa and Ademe (2024) found that dimensions of customer experience, including assurance, critical moments, outcome focus and product experience, contributed significantly to customer experience and satisfaction among electricity consumers. Their findings suggest that the interactions customers have with electricity distribution companies are important components of their overall satisfaction.

Customer loyalty and Cooperation

Customer loyalty refers to the willingness of customers to continue their relationship with an organization and maintain a favourable attitude towards its products or services. In service organizations, loyalty may be reflected in customers' willingness to continue using the service, comply with legitimate organizational requirements, recommend the organization and cooperate with service providers.

In the electricity distribution sector, customer cooperation is particularly important because the provision and payment for electricity

involve responsibilities on both sides. The distribution company is expected to provide reliable service, accurate billing, appropriate metering and effective customer support, while customers are expected to pay legitimate bills, protect electricity infrastructure and avoid illegal connections, meter bypass and energy theft.

Customer relations practices can contribute to cooperation by creating understanding between the organization and its customers. When customers believe that an organization communicates honestly, listens to their concerns and responds fairly to complaints, they may be more willing to cooperate with the organization. Conversely, persistent dissatisfaction can weaken trust and reduce customers' willingness to support organizational activities. Experience in the electricity sector indicates that positive customer experiences can contribute to loyalty and retention. Orovwiroro et al. (2024) reported that positive customer experience dimensions were important for customer satisfaction and that customer satisfaction could contribute to loyalty and retention in the electricity distribution context.

Customer Relations and service Delivery

Service delivery refers to the process through which an organization provides its services to customers. In electricity distribution, service delivery encompasses electricity supply, metering, billing, maintenance, complaint handling, restoration of supply and other activities directly experienced by customers. Edwin and Egeruo, (2016) posit that the quality of customer relations can influence perceptions of service delivery. When customers receive timely information about outages, receive prompt responses to complaints and can easily communicate with the service provider, they may develop more favourable perceptions of the organization. However, effective customer relations cannot completely compensate for poor service delivery because communication has to be accompanied by tangible improvements in the service itself. Johnson et al. (2025), posit that communication and stakeholder-engagement strategies improved awareness and relationship-

building but did not eliminate dissatisfaction associated with irregular electricity supply, overbilling and poor complaint resolution. Similarly, Tamu, Babandako and Masud (2025) explain that service-quality dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, tangibility and empathy, significantly influenced customer satisfaction. This reinforces the importance of responsiveness and service quality in determining customers' evaluations of electricity distribution companies.

Customer Relations and Corporate Image

Corporate image is the overall perception that stakeholders have about an organization. It develops from customers' experiences, organizational communication, service performance, reputation and interactions with the organization. Tamu et al (2025) explain that customer relations can influence corporate image because customers often form their perception of an organization from their direct experiences with its employees, communication channels and service processes. An organization that responds promptly to complaints, communicates accurately and treats customers fairly may develop a favourable image. In contrast, unresolved complaints, poor communication and unsatisfactory service delivery can contribute to negative perceptions.

Corporate image is therefore not created through communication alone. An organization's image is also influenced by whether its actions correspond with the expectations created through its communication. For an electricity distribution company, claims about improved service or customer support may fail to improve its image if customers continue to experience poor electricity supply, billing problems or inadequate complaint resolution. (Orovwiroro et al. 2024)

Empirical Review

Johnson, et al (2025) examined public relations strategies and customer satisfaction in Nigeria's electricity distribution companies, using the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company as a case. The study adopted a

mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews with 353 consumers. The findings showed that customers were aware of several communication and engagement strategies, including media engagement, SMS alerts, town-hall meetings, community programmes and customer-care services. However, irregular power supply, overbilling and poor complaint resolution reduced the effectiveness of these strategies. The study concluded that communication and relationship-building must be accompanied by tangible improvements in electricity supply, billing and customer service.

The study is relevant to the present research because it examined the connection between organizational communication, customer relations and satisfaction within the Nigerian electricity distribution sector. However, it focused on IBEDC customers in Ibadan, whereas the present study focuses specifically on EEDC customers in Ebonyi State. The geographical difference provides justification for examining customer relations practices in the Ebonyi context.

Ewuim, Agbodike, Ukeje, Ogbulu, Onele and Ojogbane (2020) examined quality service delivery and customer satisfaction in EEDC Abakaliki. The study focused on the challenges affecting electricity service delivery and customer satisfaction in the Abakaliki area. Its findings identified factors affecting the performance of electricity supply and highlighted the continuing importance of service delivery to customer satisfaction. The present study builds on this earlier work but adopts a different emphasis by examining customer relations practices and their perceived implications for satisfaction, loyalty and cooperation, service delivery and corporate image.

Tamu, et al (2025) investigated service quality and customer satisfaction among Abuja Electricity Distribution Company consumers in Minna metropolis. Using a quantitative survey of 300 consumers and a structured questionnaire, the researchers examined service-quality

dimensions including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Their findings indicated that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy significantly influenced customer satisfaction, while assurance did not have a significant effect. The study recommended improved electricity supply and prompt responses to customers' complaints and suggestions. The finding is relevant to the present study because responsiveness to complaints and the quality of service delivery are important components of customer relations. It also supports the argument that customer satisfaction depends not only on communication but on the organization's ability to respond to customer needs through actual service improvement.

Orovwiroro, et al (2024) investigated customer experience and customer satisfaction in the Nigerian electricity distribution sector using 234 respondents and Structural Equation Modelling. The study found that assurance, critical moments, outcome focus and product experience contributed to customer experience, which in turn was important to customer satisfaction. The authors concluded that electricity distribution companies need to understand customer expectations and improve the quality of customer experiences in order to encourage satisfaction, loyalty and retention. This finding agrees with the present study's emphasis on customer relations as an important part of customers' experiences with EEDC. It also suggests that satisfaction should be examined from the perspective of the total customer experience rather than electricity supply alone.

Adedayo, Ijaiya, Dauda, Abdulazeez and Bello (2026) examined the effect of customer relationship management on customer satisfaction among customers of Abuja Electricity Distribution Company. The study used a quantitative approach and collected data through a structured questionnaire. Its analysis indicated that customer knowledge, customer value and customer relationship management technology had significant positive effects on

customer satisfaction. The study reported that the model explained 58% of the variation in customer satisfaction and recommended that AEDC should tailor its customer relationship management strategies towards customer satisfaction. The study is particularly relevant because it provides recent evidence that structured customer relationship practices can contribute to customer satisfaction in Nigeria's electricity distribution sector. However, the study examined AEDC rather than EEDC and used inferential analysis, whereas the present study uses descriptive analysis to examine customers' perceptions in Ebonyi State.

Summary of Literature Review

The reviewed studies establish that customer satisfaction in the Nigerian electricity distribution sector is influenced by several factors, including service quality, reliability, responsiveness, customer experience, complaint handling and relationship-management practices. Studies have also examined EEDC in Abakaliki, as well as other distribution companies such as IBEDC and AEDC. However, much of the existing literature has concentrated on service quality, customer experience, public relations strategies or customer relationship management as separate areas. There is comparatively less attention to how customers in Ebonyi State perceive the broader customer relations practices of EEDC and how these practices relate simultaneously to customer satisfaction, loyalty and cooperation, service delivery and corporate image.

Furthermore, some recent studies have employed inferential or specialized analytical techniques, while the present study seeks to provide a descriptive assessment of customers' perceptions across EEDC's service centers in Ebonyi State. The present study therefore fills a contextual and empirical gap by examining customer relations practices from the perspective of EEDC customers in Ebonyi State and relating these practices to the major outcomes identified in the study objectives.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Excellence Theory developed from the work of Grunig and other scholars in public relations. The theory explains the conditions under which communication is managed can contribute to organizational effectiveness. A major idea associated with the theory is the importance of two-way symmetrical communication, in which organizations do not merely disseminate information but also listen to their publics and seek mutually beneficial relationships.

The theory is relevant to the present study because customer relations involve continuous communication between EEDC and its customers. Customers need opportunities to communicate their complaints, expectations and concerns, while EEDC needs to communicate information about electricity supply, billing, metering, outages and other service-related matters.

The relevance of Excellence Theory to this study is particularly evident in the distinction between one-way information dissemination and two-way communication. If EEDC only provides information without adequately receiving and responding to customer feedback, communication may not produce the mutual understanding required for satisfactory customer relationships. Effective customer relations should therefore involve listening, feedback, responsiveness and adjustment of organizational practices where necessary.

The theory also provides a basis for understanding the relationship between communication and organizational effectiveness. In the context of this study, effective customer relations should contribute to customer satisfaction, cooperation and favourable perceptions of EEDC. However, the theory does not imply that communication alone can solve service-delivery problems. Rather, communication should form part of a broader organizational approach in which customer feedback is considered in decision-making and service improvement.

The theory is, therefore, appropriate for this study because it provides a framework for assessing whether EEDC's interactions with customers reflect meaningful two-way communication and whether such interactions contribute to satisfactory customer relationships.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain information from EEDC customers regarding their perceptions of the company's customer relations practices and their level of satisfaction with the services provided. The design enabled the researcher to collect and describe data on customers' experiences and perceptions without manipulating the variables under investigation. This study was conducted in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, with particular focus on customers of Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) within the state. EEDC provides electricity distribution services to customers across the South-East region of Nigeria, including Ebonyi State.

The study covered the thirteen (13) EEDC service centers in Ebonyi State. These service centers constituted the geographical areas from which the study population was drawn. The choice of Ebonyi State was informed by the need to examine customer relations practices and customer satisfaction among consumers served by EEDC within the state.

The population of the study comprised registered EEDC customers in the thirteen (13) service centers in Ebonyi State. According to information obtained from the EEDC billing unit, the total number of customers in Ebonyi State as of January 2024 was 55,230. Thus, the population of the study was 55,230 EEDC customers. The sample size for the study was determined from the population of 55,230 customers using an online sample-size calculator. The calculation produced a sample size of 382 respondents. Therefore, 382 respondents constituted the target sample for the study.

The study adopted a multistage sampling procedure involving stratification, proportional allocation, simple random sampling and purposive sampling. At the first stage, the thirteen (13) EEDC service centers in Ebonyi State constituted the strata for the study. Stratification was adopted to ensure that customers from each service center were adequately represented in the sample. The number of respondents allocated to each service center was determined proportionately according to the population of customers in each service center.

Bowley's proportional allocation formula was used to determine the number of respondents allocated to each service centre:

$$n_i = (N_i/N) \times n$$

Where:

- n_i = number of respondents allocated to each service center
- N_i = population of EEDC customers in each service center
- N = total population of EEDC customers
- n = total sample size

At the second stage, simple random sampling was used to select two streets from each of the thirteen service-center areas. This was done to give the selected streets within each service-center area an opportunity to be included in the study. At the third stage, purposive sampling was used to select respondents from the selected streets. Respondents were selected based on their eligibility as active EEDC customers. This approach was considered appropriate because the study required respondents who had actual experience with EEDC services and could provide relevant information about the company's customer relations practices and service

delivery. The multistage sampling procedure was adopted to ensure adequate geographical representation of EEDC customers across the thirteen service centers while also ensuring that the respondents had direct experience with EEDC services.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in line with the objectives and research questions of the study. The questionnaire contained items relating to EEDC's customer relations practices, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and cooperation, service delivery and corporate image. The items were designed to obtain respondents' perceptions of their experiences with EEDC and the company's interactions with its customers. The questionnaire was administered to selected EEDC customers in the thirteen service-center areas covered by the study.

A total of 382 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to selected EEDC customers across the thirteen service-center areas in Ebonyi State. The questionnaires were administered to eligible respondents in the selected streets. Out of the 382 copies distributed, 365 copies were properly completed and retrieved, representing a response rate of approximately 95.5%. Seventeen (17) copies were either not returned or were improperly completed and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Consequently, the analysis in this study was based on the 365 valid copies of the questionnaire retrieved from the respondents.

The data obtained from the 365 valid copies of the questionnaire were coded, organized and analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequency distributions, and simple percentages. The results were presented in tables and interpreted according to the research questions. The analysis focused on

the extent of EEDC's customer relations practices and their perceived implications for customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and cooperation, service delivery and corporate image.

Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The analysis is presented according to the research questions that guided the study. Responses to the questionnaire items are presented using frequencies and percentages. The response categories were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The results are presented in tables and interpreted in relation to the research questions.

Table 1: EEDC'S Utilization of Public Relations Techniques in Satisfying Customers

Variables	SA	A	U	D	SD
EEDC is proactive in handling issues that have to do with electricity supply to her customers.	38 10.4%	51 14.0%)	16 4.4%	123 33.7%	137 37.5%
EEDC usually communicates to her customers before interrupting their electricity power supply.	20 5.5%	36 9.9%	31 8.5%	105 28.8%	174 47.7%
EEDC has shown that it is keen on listening to the challenges faced by its customers by using various communication channels to reach them.	43 11.8%	54 14.8%	23 6.3%	103 28.2%	142 38.9%
EEDC has had to personally apologize or compensate its customers whenever the need arises using various PR channels.	19 5.2%	33 9.0%	58 15.9%	121 33.2%	134 36.7%
The PR practice by EEDC is interactive and the interests of its customers are always considered before adopting new policies.	43 11.8%	77 21.1%	19 5.2%	101 27.7%	125 34.2%

Source: Basil-Eze's Field Survey, 2026

Findings from the table above indicate that respondents largely perceived EEDC's utilization of public relations techniques in satisfying customers as **inadequate**. Across the five indicators, the combined proportions of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed were substantially higher than those who agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 2: EEDC's PR Practices and Customer Loyalty and Cooperation

Variables	SA	A	U	D	SD
I now promptly pay my electricity bills without complaint as a result of EEDC PR practices.	67 18.3%	72 19.7%	44 12.1%	99 27.1%	83 22.7%
As a result of EEDC PR practices, I am now more cooperative with EEDC staff to inspect or disconnect my electricity supply if need be.	33 9.0%	47 12.9%	103 28.2%	112 30.7%	70 19.2%
As a result of EEDC PR practices, I do not engage in or encourage meter bypass or energy theft.	69 18.9%	74 20.3%	97 26.6%	68 18.6%	57 15.6%
I am now more committed to safeguarding and protecting EEDC property in my area.	111 30.4%	119 32.6%	45 12.3%	59 16.2%	31 8.5%
I am now more satisfied with EEDC operations as my electricity provider.	12 3.3%	37 10.1%	53 14.5%	129 35.3%	134 36.7%

Source: Basil-Eze's Field Survey, 2026

Findings from the above table indicate that EEDC's PR practices have had a **mixed influence on customer loyalty and cooperation**. While the practices appear to have contributed positively to customers' commitment to safeguarding EEDC property and, to some extent, discouraging energy theft, they have had less positive influence on bill payment, cooperation with staff, and overall customer satisfaction.

Table 3: EEDC PR Practices and Quality Service Delivery

Variables	SA	A	U	D	SD
I now enjoy improved electricity supply from EEDC.	69 18.9%	79 21.6%	58 15.9%	85 23.3%	74 20.3%
I was able to acquire a prepaid meter without much stress.	11 3.0%	32 8.8%	124 34.0%	89 24.4%	109 29.9%
EEDC electricity billings are fair and commensurate with its electricity supply.	23 6.3%	49 13.4%	16 4.4%	121 33.2%	156 42.7%
EEDC is now more prompt in attending to and resolving my electricity-related complaints.	67 18.4%	83 22.7%	37 10.1%	79 21.6%	99 27.1%
EEDC ensures timely restoration of breakdowns in the transformer in my area.	59 16.2%	78 21.4%	28 7.7%	97 26.6%	103 28.2%

Source: Basil-Eze's Field Survey, 2026

The findings from the above table 3 suggest that EEDC's PR practices have **not resulted in substantial improvement in perceived quality of service delivery**. The most notable area of dissatisfaction relates to electricity billing, followed by prepaid meter acquisition and the timely restoration of transformer breakdowns.

Table 4: EEDC PR Practices and Corporate Image

Variables	SA	A	U	D	SD
The consistency of the engagement and interaction between EEDC and its customers has helped to improve customers' perception of the company.	53 14.5%	77 21.1%	49 13.4%	88 24.1%	98 26.8%
The PR practice of EEDC has helped to clear certain doubts that existed in the minds of customers.	52 14.2%	73 20.0%	61 16.7%	83 22.7%	96 26.3%
EEDC PR practices have helped to build trust and confidence in EEDC among its customers.	43 11.8%	69 18.9%	52 14.2%	99 27.1%	102 27.9%
The perception of EEDC has significantly improved to that of a responsible and proactive company in the minds of its customers.	66 18.1%	70 19.2%	47 12.9%	85 23.3%	97 26.6%
EEDC PR practices have led to an improvement in the corporate image of the company.	65 17.8%	69 18.9%	66 18.1%	70 19.2%	95 26.0%

Source: Basil-Eze's Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 above indicates that respondents generally **did not perceive a significant improvement in EEDC's corporate image as a result of its PR practices**. Although some respondents acknowledged positive effects of EEDC's engagement and communication activities, the proportion of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed was generally higher than those who agreed or strongly agreed.

Discussion of Findings.

EEDC'S Utilization of Public Relations Techniques in Satisfying Customers

The opinion of respondents on the extent to which EEDC utilizes public relations techniques to satisfy its customers was presented in Table 7. The findings revealed that although EEDC engages in public relations

practices aimed at satisfying its customers, a greater proportion of respondents were dissatisfied with these practices. Respondents particularly indicated that EEDC was not proactive in handling customer complaints and did not usually communicate with customers before interrupting electricity supply. These practices may contribute to increased customer dissatisfaction. Rahim et al. (2012) noted that dissatisfied customers may complain, engage in negative word-of-mouth or, in some cases, remain with a service provider where suitable alternatives are unavailable. This may be particularly relevant to EEDC customers given the limited alternatives available to electricity consumers. The finding is consistent with Amponsah et al. (2015), who found that subscribers of the National Health Insurance Scheme in Mankranso were dissatisfied with the public relations services provided by the scheme's public relations office.

On whether EEDC listens to customers' challenges through various communication channels, the findings suggest that the company places greater emphasis on information dissemination than on two-way communication. This limited opportunity for feedback may contribute to customer dissatisfaction. Elem (2018) argues that organizations seeking customer empathy and cooperation should not only disseminate information but also obtain feedback from their publics to promote mutual understanding. The finding is also consistent with Usman (2013), who reported low levels of consumer satisfaction with the services of electricity distribution companies in selected zones in Nigeria. Similarly, respondents largely disagreed that EEDC's public relations practices are interactive and that customers' interests are considered before new policies are adopted. This suggests that customers perceive limited involvement in decisions that affect them. Since communication is central to public relations, effective interaction provides an avenue for organizations to understand the expectations and concerns of their publics. As Ehikwe (2002) observes, communication enables organizations to identify public expectations, explain organizational goals and promote

mutual understanding.

The findings are particularly relevant to Excellence Theory, which emphasizes the value of public relations in developing and maintaining quality relationships between organizations and their strategic publics. The theory suggests that effective organizations engage in two-way, symmetrical communication that allows both the organization and its publics to influence the relationship. In the case of EEDC, the findings indicate a need to move beyond information dissemination towards more interactive and responsive customer relations practices. EEDC should actively seek customer feedback, respond promptly to complaints, consider customer interests in policy decisions and communicate openly about service interruptions. Such practices can strengthen mutual understanding, improve customer relationships and potentially enhance customer satisfaction.

EEDC's PR Practices and Customer Loyalty and Cooperation

The findings from table 2 above indicate that EEDC's public relations practices have not substantially increased customer loyalty and cooperation. On prompt payment of electricity bills, the findings suggest that some customers pay their bills primarily to maintain access to electricity rather than as a result of satisfaction with EEDC's PR practices. This may be associated with concerns about billing accuracy. Edwin et al. (2016) observed that electricity bills in Nigeria are often overestimated, particularly where meter readings are not regularly obtained, resulting in customers receiving high bills. Similarly, Usman (2013) identified tariff accuracy as an important factor influencing customers' willingness to pay electricity bills.

The findings on meter bypass and energy theft further suggest that EEDC's PR practices have not sufficiently influenced customers' attitudes towards these practices. This highlights the need for stronger public relations efforts focused on educating customers about the consequences of energy theft and promoting trust and cooperation between EEDC and its customers. Seitel (2001) posits that effective public relations can help organizations gain

the support and acceptance of their publics. Similarly, Latif et al. (2011) noted that effective PR practices can influence public attitudes through positive image-building, publicity and cordial relationships with customers.

In line with Excellence Theory, the finding suggests that customer loyalty and cooperation are more likely to develop where communication is interactive, responsive and based on mutual understanding. EEDC therefore needs to strengthen its engagement with customers by addressing concerns about billing, providing clear and timely information, encouraging feedback and building trust through responsive customer relations practices.

EEDC PR Practices and Quality Service Delivery

The findings on whether EEDC's PR practices have contributed to improved electricity supply show a relatively close margin between respondents who agreed and those who disagreed, while a considerable proportion remained undecided. This suggests that some customers perceive improvements in electricity supply, although such improvements are not sufficiently consistent to generate a clear positive perception among the majority of respondents. There is therefore a need for further improvement in service delivery.

Regarding access to prepaid meters, the findings indicate considerable dissatisfaction, as a substantial proportion of respondents disagreed that they were able to acquire prepaid meters without much stress. This suggests that customers may encounter difficulties in obtaining prepaid meters. The findings also reveal considerable dissatisfaction with EEDC's billing practices, with a large proportion of respondents perceiving electricity bills as unfair and not commensurate with the level of electricity supplied. Such concerns may negatively influence customers' attitudes towards the company and their willingness to cooperate with it.

This finding supports Ugbohmeh et al. (2018), who established that service quality has a direct relationship with customer satisfaction and that poor service quality can negatively affect customers' attitudes and behaviour.

The implication is that effective public relations cannot be separated from the actual quality of services delivered. Communication may improve customers' understanding of a service, but sustained satisfaction depends largely on whether customers experience reliable and satisfactory service.

Furthermore, the findings indicate some improvement in EEDC's efforts to attend to and resolve electricity-related complaints. However, respondents also reported continuing challenges associated with overloaded transformers and delays in restoring power when transformers break down. This suggests that improvements in complaint handling have not been sufficient to address some of the fundamental service delivery problems experienced by customers. This finding is consistent with Oliyinka et al. (2018), who found that reliability of electricity distribution services did not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction in Olumo Business Hub, Abeokuta, and reported concerns regarding staff knowledge and courtesy in building customer trust and confidence.

From the perspective of Excellence Theory, the finding underscores the importance of linking communication with responsive organisational action. Effective public relations should not merely inform customers about service challenges but should also facilitate feedback, responsiveness and organisational improvement. EEDC therefore needs to strengthen both its communication with customers and its response to service delivery challenges, particularly in the areas of electricity reliability, metering, billing, complaint resolution and transformer maintenance.

EEDC PR Practices and Corporate Image

The findings presented in Table 4 indicate that EEDC's public relations practices has not significantly enhanced its corporate image. Respondents generally indicated that the company's engagement and interaction with customers had not improved their perception of EEDC. This suggests the need for more strategic and customer-oriented PR practices. Oluwanishola (2017) argues that organizations seeking to build a favourable

image should adopt PR strategies that positively influence customers' attitudes and perceptions, while Ikwuagwu (2019) emphasizes the importance of effectively communicating organizational achievements to the public.

The findings further reveal that many customers lack trust and confidence in EEDC's operations and services and perceive the company as falling short of their expectations. This is consistent with the principles of Excellence Theory, which emphasizes two-way, symmetrical communication and the need for organizations to identify and respond to the concerns of their publics. EEDC therefore needs to strengthen customer engagement, listen to feedback and demonstrate responsiveness through tangible actions. This finding contrasts with Tamunomiebi et al. (2019), who found that adaptive capacity was associated with a positive corporate image and identity in the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company. The difference may reflect variations in organisational practices, customer experiences and operational contexts.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that EEDC's public relations practices have not sufficiently achieved the desired level of customer satisfaction among its customers in Ebonyi State. Although EEDC engages in PR activities, customers generally perceive its communication and engagement practices as inadequate, particularly in the areas of proactive communication, complaint handling and two-way interaction. The study further concludes that EEDC's PR practices have not substantially increased customer loyalty and cooperation. While some customers demonstrate cooperation in protecting EEDC property, overall satisfaction and willingness to cooperate remain relatively low. The study also establishes that EEDC's PR practices have not significantly improved perceived quality of service delivery, particularly in relation to billing, prepaid meter acquisition, electricity supply and timely resolution of faults.

Finally, the study concludes that EEDC's PR practices have not positively enhanced its corporate image. Customers continue to express concerns regarding trust, confidence and the company's ability to meet their expectations. In line with Excellence Theory, the findings suggest that EEDC needs to move beyond one-way information dissemination and adopt more effective two-way and symmetrical communication that enables the organization to understand and respond to the concerns of its customers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. EEDC should strengthen its public relations and communication practices by adopting more proactive, interactive and two-way communication. Customers should be regularly informed about service interruptions, encouraged to provide feedback, and assured that their complaints and concerns are promptly addressed.
2. EEDC should improve practices that promote customer loyalty and cooperation by enhancing transparency in billing, educating customers on metering and energy use, and building trust through fair, and consistent and responsive customer relations.
3. EEDC should improve the quality and reliability of service delivery by ensuring easier access to prepaid meters, improving billing accuracy, responding promptly to electricity-related complaints, and carrying out timely maintenance and restoration of faulty transformers and other infrastructure.
4. EEDC should adopt strategic customer-oriented PR practices to enhance its corporate image by consistently engaging customers, addressing their expectations and concerns, communicating transparently, and demonstrating through its actions that customer interests are valued. This will help build trust, confidence and a more positive relationship between EEDC and its customers.

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