The Role of Digital Corporate Communication in Enhancing Customer Engagement and Building Trust: A Case Study of Kenya Power and Lighting Company

Chege Samuel Karanja
St. Paul's University

Abstract
Digital transformation has made it necessary for corporate communication in organizations to shift in a bid to enhance customer engagement with brands. For companies providing essential services, such as electricity, like the Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), strategic and effective communication is not merely a branding exercise; it is a crucial element of ensuring operational efficiency, mitigating potential crises, and maintaining a positive relationship with the customers and communities they serve. The objectives of the study included: to examine the types of digital platforms used by KPLC and the influence they have on customer engagement on the Company's products and services, to find out the impact of the digital communication strategies used by KPLC on customer satisfaction, and to assess the digital communication reach of KPLC communication channels and the influence it has on customer experience. The study adopted KPLC as a case study and was guided by the Uses and Gratifications Theory complemented by the Social Exchange Theory. The study adopted a quantitative methods approach of data collection and analysis. The study sample included 50 targeted customers who have engaged with the organization on digital media. The findings demonstrate that SMS remains a vital communication channel for Kenya Power customers, aligned with global trends in utility sectors where rapid transactional updates are essential. However, the uneven user experience across channels suggests a gap in integrated digital communication management, echoing literature advocating for a unified digital customer service framework to enhance satisfaction and trust. It is expected that the findings of this study will have far-reaching benefits for the Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC) by providing it with data-driven insights into the effectiveness of its digital communication strategies, enabling the Company to refine its approach, improve customer engagement, and enhance overall operational efficiency as well as KPLC's customer experience.

Keywords: Digital Corporate Communication, Customer Engagement, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Experience, Kenya Power and Lighting Company, Digital Media

1.0 Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in how organizations interact with their stakeholders, driven primarily by the pervasive influence of digital technologies. The advent of the internet, social media platforms, mobile applications, artificial intelligence and advanced data analytics has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of corporate communication, shifting it from a predominantly one-way, top-down model to a dynamic, interactive, and

inherently two-way dialogue. In this new paradigm, effective corporate communication is no longer merely about information dissemination but about fostering genuine customer engagement, building robust trust, and cultivating lasting relationships in a highly competitive and transparent environment. As such, strengthening relationships between an organization and its customers, and stakeholders cannot be overemphasized. For companies operating in critical infrastructure sectors, such as utility providers, these imperatives are amplified, as their services are inextricably linked to the daily lives and economic well-being of entire populations. A balanced and positive approach in communicating a company's key initiatives and achievements not only drives brand love but also increases investors' confidence. Corporate reputation management is an important aspect of business, and its measurement provides valuable insights that help utilities to identify areas that need to be strengthened for continual improvement. Reputation is influenced by a variety of factors that include the opinion of key stakeholders, brand image and the behavior of the business, individuals or teams within a company. The strategy to manage and engage these key stakeholders involves relationship management and concrete initiatives that are critical to an organization achieving its objectives. As such, utilities must strive to improve interactions with the publics they serve even as they strive to change public perception from negative and neutral, to positive.

The digital revolution has empowered consumers with unprecedented access to information, avenues for expressing their opinions, and platforms for demanding accountability from organizations or governments. This shift in power dynamics necessitates that corporations meticulously craft their digital communication strategies to resonate with customer expectations for real-time two-way responsiveness, personalized experiences, and authentic transparency. Customer engagement, in this context, transcends simple interaction; it involves creating meaningful experiences that encourage active participation, foster a sense of belonging, and ultimately lead to loyalty and advocacy. Trust, the cornerstone of any sustainable relationship, is now forged not just through dependable service delivery but also through consistent, honest, and empathetic digital dialogue, especially when addressing concerns, managing crises, or simply providing proactive information.

The Changing Landscape of Corporate Communication

Historically, corporate communication was primarily unidirectional: companies broadcasted information with little room for immediate customer interaction or feedback (Cornelissen, 2017). However, the proliferation of internet-enabled devices, social media channels, and mobile applications has shifted this paradigm towards a participatory process marked by immediacy, transparency, and accessibility (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Consumers today expect not only rapid access to information but also an active dialogue with service providers (Sashi, 2012).

This shift poses both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, digital platforms facilitate rapid information dissemination, engagement through personalized content, and transparent interactions that build trust (Men & Tsai, 2012). On the other, organizations must manage diverse and voluminous interactions, ensure accurate messaging, and address criticism in real time, especially in sensitive sectors such as utilities where service interruptions can severely damage reputation (Tang & Qiu, 2016).

However, effectively leveraging these digital channels for enhanced engagement and trust is far from straightforward. Organizations grapple with the complexities of managing multiple platforms, curating diverse content, responding to myriad queries and complaints, and navigating the often-volatile currents of online sentiment. The challenge is particularly acute for public utility companies, which often face high volumes of customer interactions, public scrutiny, and the inherent difficulties associated with service interruptions and infrastructure management. In such environments, a failure to strategically harness digital communication can exacerbate public dissatisfaction, erode trust, and damage reputation, while a successful approach can transform operational challenges into opportunities for strengthening customer relationships and fostering a positive public image. This can go a long way in winning public confidence and buy-in which are crucial for the success of a corporation.

Utility Companies and the Imperative for Effective Communication

For utilities like the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, effective communication is critical not merely for branding or marketing but for operational continuity, public safety and perception management. Given the crucial role the organization plays in the transmission, distribution and retail of electricity in the country, effective communication becomes central to the utility's business sustainability. Frequent power outages due to both precedented and unprecedented

causes, billing disputes, and infrastructure maintenance are common occurrences necessitating proactive, clear communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Failure to communicate transparently and responsively risks customer dissatisfaction, erosion of trust and poor perception, and escalations to regulatory scrutiny (Borden & Scheufele, 2001).

Kenya Power and Lighting Company, as the singular electricity provider in Kenya, serves over 9 million customers, making the stakes of communication particularly high. Beyond routine updates, the company must manage crisis communication especially during national outages, build customer loyalty, and navigate the expectations of a digitally engaged populace.

It is against this evolving backdrop that the present study sought to delve into the transformative role of digital corporate communication in enhancing customer engagement and building trust, focusing specifically on the Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC). As the sole provider of electricity transmission, distribution, and retail services in Kenya, KPLC occupies a central and indispensable position within the national economy and the daily lives of millions of Kenyans. The KPLC key mandate is to plan for sufficient electricity generation and transmission capacity to meet demand; build and maintain the power distribution and transmission network and retail electricity to its customers. With a customer base of over 9 million, a power grid comprising of over 86,000 kms of high and medium voltage lines, extending in both rural and urban areas, and over 75% electricity connectivity in the country, the Company plays a vital role in powering the nation's social-economic prosperity (Kenya Power Annual Report, 2024). As the country's off-taker and distributor of electric power, with a national footprint in all the 47 counties of Kenya, its operations are critical for industrial growth, commercial activity, and domestic comfort and dignity. Consequently, KPLC's ability to effectively communicate with its vast customer base on various issues like addressing power outages, managing billing queries, introducing new services, and handling public feedback directly impacts public perception, operational efficiency, and overall customer satisfaction.

Historically, utility companies have often been perceived as bureaucratic and unresponsive, with communication primarily flowing in one direction. This has also been the case for Kenya Power and Lighting, which since inception over 100 years ago, has faced accusations of being "tone deaf" to customer complaints and queries. However, the digital age presents KPLC with an unparalleled

opportunity to redefine its relationship with its customers, moving towards a more interactive, responsive, and trustworthy engagement model. The digital age provides a chance for the organization to promptly respond to electricity consumers' queries, share crucial information on safety, outages and policy issues, conduct surveys to gather stakeholder perception and drive brand love. Social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram, alongside dedicated mobile applications like WhatsApp, AI Chatbot, service portals, and responsive websites, have become vital conduits for KPLC to inform, assist, and interact with its customers. Yet, the true efficacy of these channels in fostering genuine engagement and building enduring trust remains a critical area for investigation. Understanding how KPLC utilizes these diverse digital platforms, the impact of its communication strategies on customer satisfaction, and the reach of its channels in shaping customer experience is paramount for optimizing its communication efforts and setting benchmarks for other public service providers. Furthermore, the understanding of their effectiveness or lack of it will also be helpful to KPLC in its journey to improve digital communication, build public trust and influence public perception.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aimed to assess the role of digital corporate communication at KPLC in enhancing customer engagement and building trust by evaluating:

1. The types of digital platforms used and their influence on customer engagement.

2. The impact of digital communication strategies on customer satisfaction.

3. The reach of KPLC's digital communication channels and their influence on customer experience.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

To provide a robust conceptual foundation for this inquiry, the study was fundamentally guided by the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G), complemented by the Social Exchange Theory (SET).

The Uses and Gratifications framework views media users as active agents who selectively engage with communication tools to satisfy distinct needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Rather than media exerting unilateral influence, audiences consciously choose platforms and content based on utility, including information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, and problem-solving.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that audiences are active participants in the communication process, consciously seeking out media that satisfy their specific needs and desires. Rather than viewing media as simply influencing passive recipients, U&G focuses on what people do with media rather than what media does to people. The theory is based on several assumptions which include; that audiences use the media with a goal in mind, that is, to satisfy a particular need, that audiences are not passive users of media but rather have an active role that they play in media consumption, that media is also in competition with other sources to satisfy audience needs, and that audiences are very conscious of their motivations for using a particular media. In the context of KPLC's digital corporate communication, this theory is invaluable for understanding why customers choose to engage with KPLC on digital platforms. Do they seek immediate problem resolution, information on power outages, billing inquiries, feedback channels, or a sense of community and connection? By understanding the "gratifications" customers seek (e.g., convenience, information, social interaction, security, problem-solving), KPLC can tailor its digital content and interaction strategies to better meet these needs, thereby enhancing engagement and fostering a more positive perception. In the context of KPLC's digital platforms, U&G enables analysis of customer motivations for interaction. It is crucial for KPLC to know why customers opt for particular digital platforms and why they shun others. For instance, customers may utilize SMS primarily for transactional functions like bill payment reminders, whereas social media might serve informational or communal purposes. Tailoring communication to these sought gratifications can maximize engagement (Ruggiero, 2000).

Complementing U&G, Social Exchange Theory (SET) explains relationships through a cost-benefit analysis, where individuals seek interactions that maximize rewards and minimize costs (Homans, 1958). The Social Exchange Theory provides a framework for understanding human interactions as a series of exchanges where individuals weigh the potential benefits and costs of engaging in a relationship. According to SET, people are motivated to maintain relationships

where the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs. In the realm of digital corporate communication, customers engage with KPLC if they perceive that the benefits (e.g., getting a quick response, resolving an issue, receiving important updates, feeling heard) outweigh the costs (e.g., time invested, frustration with unresponsive systems, privacy concerns, cost of data etc). Similarly, KPLC invests in digital communication with the expectation of benefits such as improved reputation, reduced customer service load, especially in its banking halls and contact centres, increased customer loyalty, and ultimately, enhanced trust. This theory helps to explain why trust is a critical outcome of effective digital communication: when customers feel that their interactions with KPLC online consistently yield positive outcomes (benefits), their trust in the organization grows. Conversely, negative experiences (high costs) can quickly erode trust. With this insight, KPLC can be able to creatively and intentionally develop digital communication strategies to meet the various needs of its digitally savvy clientele. Together, U&G and SET offer a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the motivations behind customer engagement with KPLC's digital platforms and the reciprocal nature of building trust through positive and beneficial digital interactions.

Literature Review

Digital Corporate Communication and Customer Engagement

The integration of digital technologies reshapes corporate communication by enabling organizations to foster ongoing dialogue and build relationships (Malthouse et al., 2013). Customer engagement refers to the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral investment a customer makes in interactions with an organization (Brodie et al., 2011). Digital platforms, including SMS, social media, mobile apps, and websites, facilitate these engagements by providing real-time information, personalized interaction, and easy channels for feedback (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Empirical studies highlight social media's role in enhancing engagement by creating communities, promoting transparency, and allowing customer co-creation (Hollebeek, 2011). Yet, the challenges of managing high interaction volumes and negative feedback sometimes constrains organizations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Trust Building Through Digital Communication

Trust is a multi-dimensional construct encompassing reliability, integrity, and goodwill (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Digital communication can enhance trust by ensuring timely information, transparent processes, and empathetic response during crises (Gefen, 2002). Conversely, misinformation, unresponsiveness, and system failures weaken trust (Ou & Sia, 2010). In utility sectors, trust is critical for acceptance of tariff changes, reporting outages, and cooperation during maintenance. Studies note that utilitarian communication strategies promoting transparency and accountability are more likely to foster trust (Rawlins, 2008).

The Kenyan Context and KPLC

Kenya's digital landscape is expanding rapidly, with increasing mobile penetration and internet access shaping consumer expectations (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2024). KPLC has launched various digital initiatives such as SMS alerts, mobile applications, and social media engagement aimed at enhancing service delivery and customer relations (KPLC Annual Report, 2024).

Despite this, challenges remain related to infrastructure reliability, billing transparency, and widespread awareness of digital services (Kenya Energy Regulatory Commission, 2023). This juxtaposition underscores the need for empirical examination of KPLC's current digital strategies and their effectiveness.

3.0 Methodology Overview

Research Design

This research adopted a quantitative approach, leveraging structured questionnaires to gather statistically analyzable data from a purposive sample of KPLC digital customers. This method allows insight into patterns of engagement, satisfaction, and perceptions related to KPLC's digital communication efforts.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total of 50 KPLC customers who have actively engaged with the company via digital platforms were purposively selected to ensure relevance and experience. Participants included a diverse mix

of demographic backgrounds, digital literacy levels, and geographic locations (urban and peri-urban).

Data Collection

An online survey was administered between July 15th and August 4th, 2025. It collected demographic data, usage patterns of digital platforms, perceptions of communication effectiveness, satisfaction levels, and trust indicators.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends, correlations, and gaps in digital communication impact. Qualitative comments from open-ended questions were coded thematically to supplement quantitative findings.

4.0 Data Analysis

This section analyzes customer feedback regarding KPLC's digital communication strategies and their impact on customer engagement, satisfaction, and overall experience. It is based on a survey of KPLC customers**.**

Demographics Overview

The respondent pool primarily consists of individuals aged 25-50 years, with a notable representation of females (67%) from urban (33%) and peri-urban (67%) locations. The majority (78%) hold a Degree or Masters qualification, and 83% reported a 'Proficient' digital literacy level, indicating a digitally-savvy demographic.
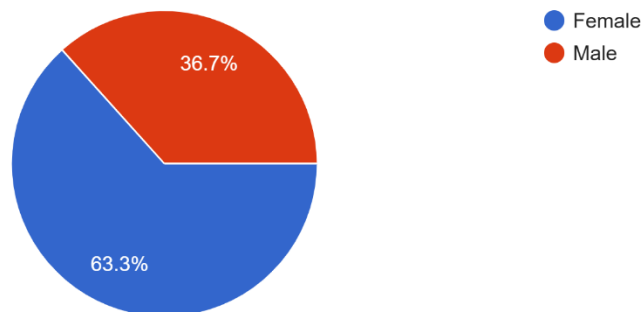
Demographic information Age group
30 responses
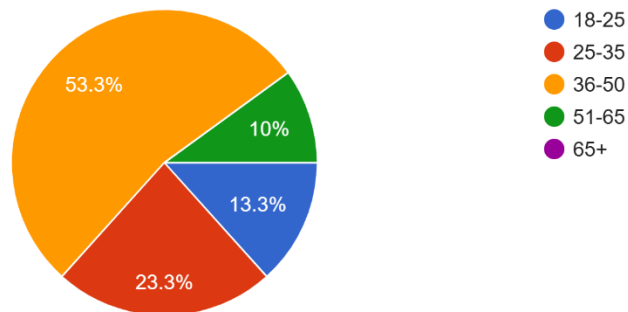
The respondent pool primarily consists of individuals aged 25-50 years. The majority of the respondents were between 36-50 years.
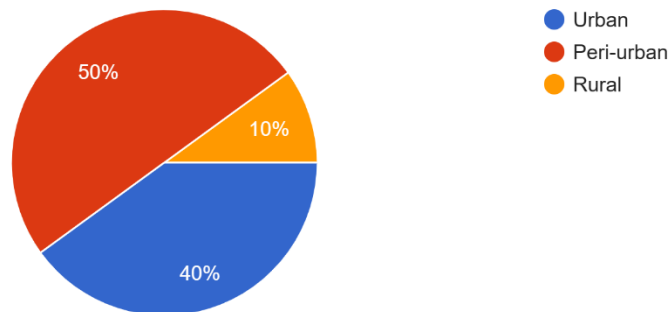
Gender
30 responses

The respondents are predominantly female with 63.3% of the total responses.
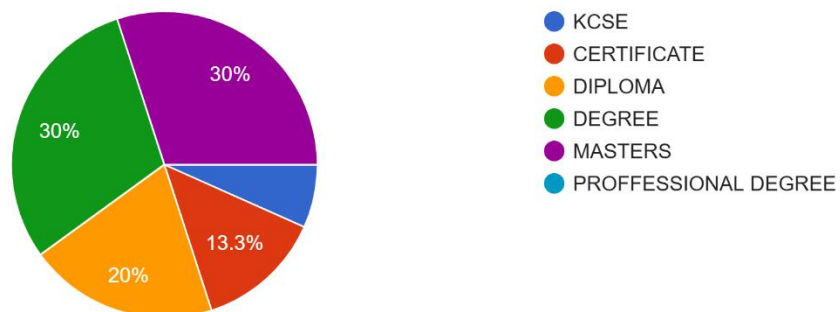
Geographic location

30 responses

The respondents were majorly from the peri-urban set up.

Education level

30 responses

The majority (78%) hold a Degree or Masters qualification, and 83% reported a 'Proficient' digital literacy level, indicating a digitally-savvy demographic.

Detailed Findings

4.1. Objective 1: Digital Platforms Used and Influence on Customer Engagement

This objective aimed to examine the types of digital platforms used by KPLC and their influence on customer engagement on their products and services.

Platform Awareness & Usage:

SMS alerts were the primary platform used for transactional communication (billing, payments, and outage notifications). It was also observed that social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook play complementary roles in information dissemination and customer queries. Web portals and WhatsApp for Business are emerging but less widely utilized by the respondents.

Objective 1 "to examine the types of digital platforms used by KPLC and the influence they have on customer engagement on their products and service... for interactions? (You can select more than one)
30 responses
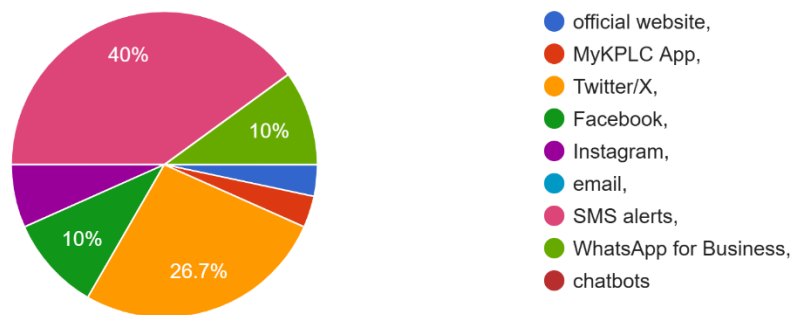
Specific Needs Addressed by Platforms:

The platforms are primarily used for: Getting updates, Reporting outages, Checking bills, and Making payments. Other needs include General inquiries and Service applications.

Observation: SMS is a dominant channel for transactional needs (payments, bills, updates), while social media and websites handle a broader scope including reporting and inquiries.

1.   For what specific needs do you as a customer turn to these platforms? (You can select more than one)
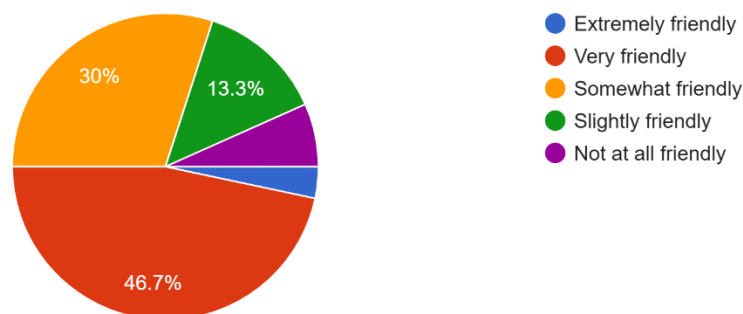
30 responses
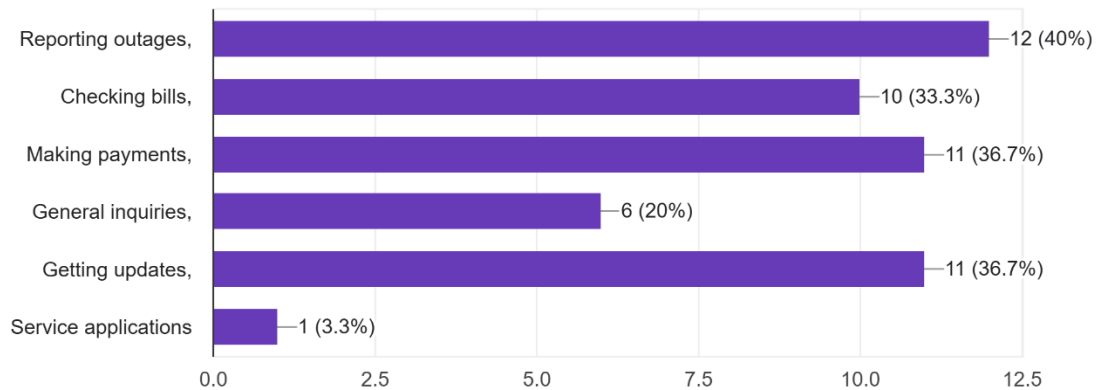
User-Friendliness and Accessibility:

Perceptions are mixed: 33% found platforms "Very friendly", 33% "Somewhat friendly", 11% "Slightly friendly", 6% "Not at all friendly". The remaining 17% had no explicit rating.

How user-friendly and accessible are these platforms to you as a customer? Rank is 5 extremely friendly- 1 Not at all friendly

30 responses

Content Fostering Information & Value:

Responses varied significantly, from "No extent" to "Great extent". The most common responses were "Moderate extent" (39%) and "Satisfactory extent" (28%).

u

To what extent does the content foster a sense of being informed and valued 5- Great extent 1- No extent

30 responses

Great extent	6 (20%)
Satisfactory extent	9 (30%)
Moderate extent	12 (40%)
Low extent	3 (10%)
No extent	0 (0%)
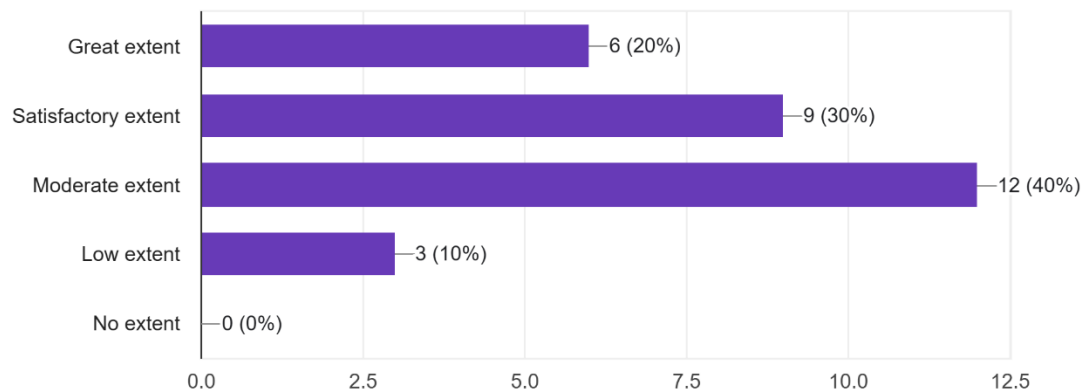
Facilitating Two-Way Communication:

Similar to content, feedback on two-way communication ranged widely. "Moderate extent" (33%) and "Satisfactory extent" (17%) were common, but "Low extent" (28%) was also significant.

To what extent Do these platforms facilitate meaningful two-way communication 5- Great extent 1- No extent

29 responses

Great extent	3 (10.3%)
Satisfactory extent	9 (31%)
Moderate extent	8 (27.6%)
Low extent	8 (27.6%)
No extent	1 (3.4%)
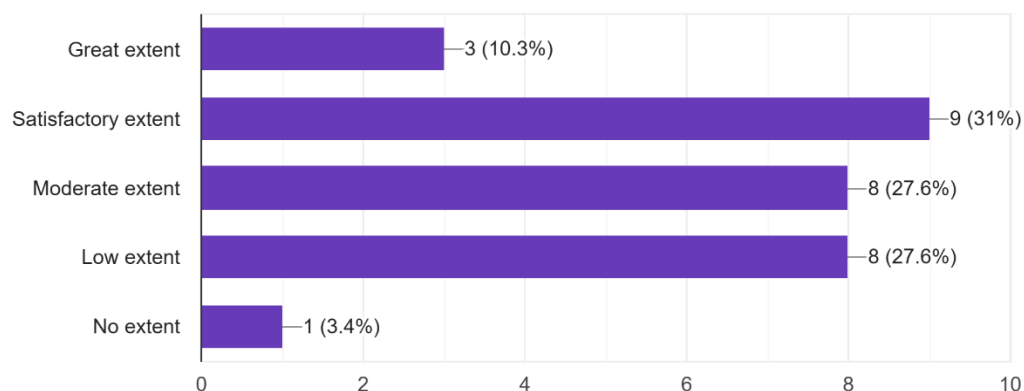
Relevance, Timeliness, and Benefit of Information:

Again, a mixed picture: "Moderate extent" (39%) and "Satisfactory extent" (33%) were most frequent, indicating room for improvement in consistency.

To what extent Do you find the information shared relevant, timely, and beneficial to you as a customer? 5- Great extent 1- No extent

30 responses
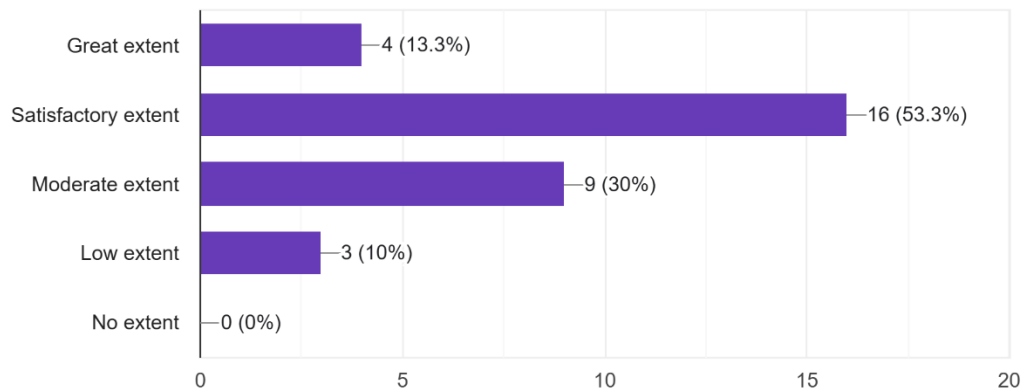
Generally, the key takeaway for Objective 1 is that while SMS remains a crucial and widely used channel for core services, the overall experience with engagement on other platforms is inconsistent. There is a clear need to improve content quality, foster a stronger sense of being informed and valued, and enhance genuine two-way communication across all digital touchpoints. The dominant role of SMS underscores the necessity of robust basic communication channels for utilities. However, multi-platform strategies are essential for broader engagement, requiring standardization and enhanced content strategies.

4.2. Objective 2: Impact of Digital Communication Strategies on Customer Satisfaction

This objective aimed to find out the impact of the digital communication strategies used by KPLC on customer satisfaction.

Timeliness of Updates (Outages, Maintenance, Billing):

A significant pain point: 39% reported receiving updates "Occasionally", and 28% "Rarely". Only one respondent said "Very frequently".

Objective 2 "to find out the impact of the digital communication strategies used by KPLC on customer satisfaction."   How quickly do you receiv... Is the information provided accurate and reliable?
30 responses
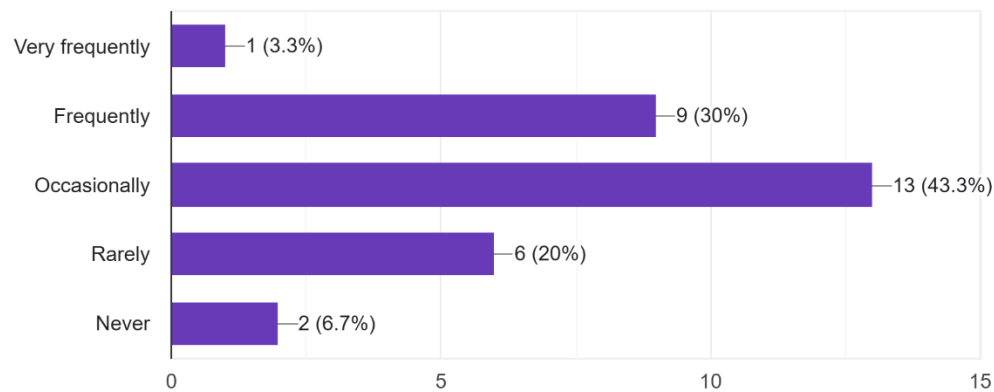
Accuracy and Reliability of Information:

Mostly positive: 39% found information "Very often" accurate, and 28% "Always" accurate. However, 28% reported "Sometimes" accurate.

Is the information provided via digital channels easy to understand, comprehensive, and accurate
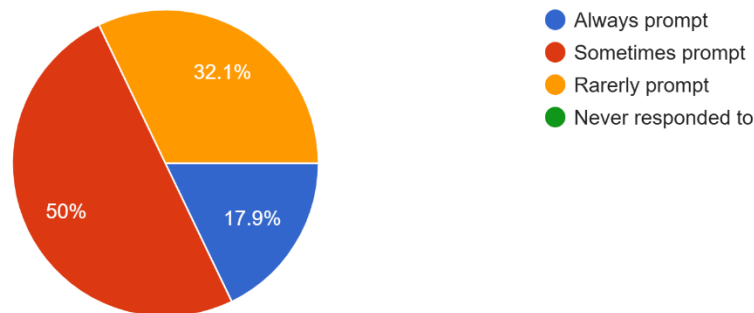30 responses
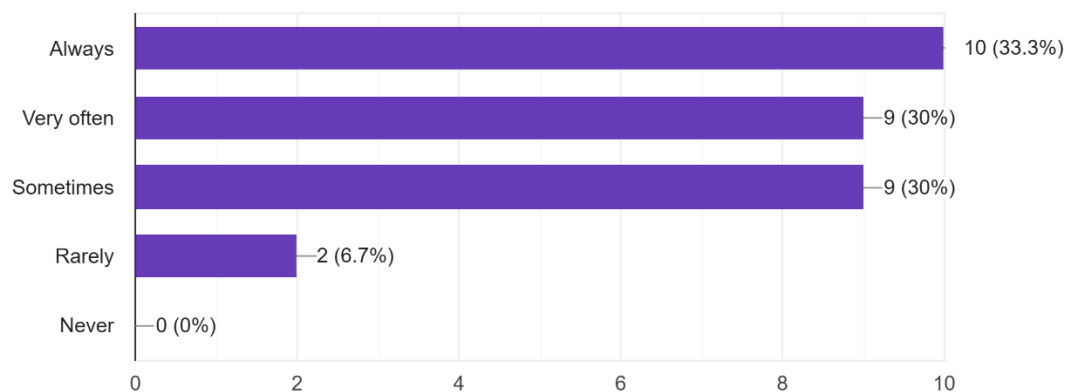
Promptness and Helpfulness of Digital Responses:

Another major area for improvement: 44% stated responses were "Rarely prompt", and 39% "Sometimes prompt". Only one respondent found responses "Always prompt".

When you initiate contact digitally (e.g., through a tweet, a message on the app, or an email), how prompt and helpful are KPLC's responses?
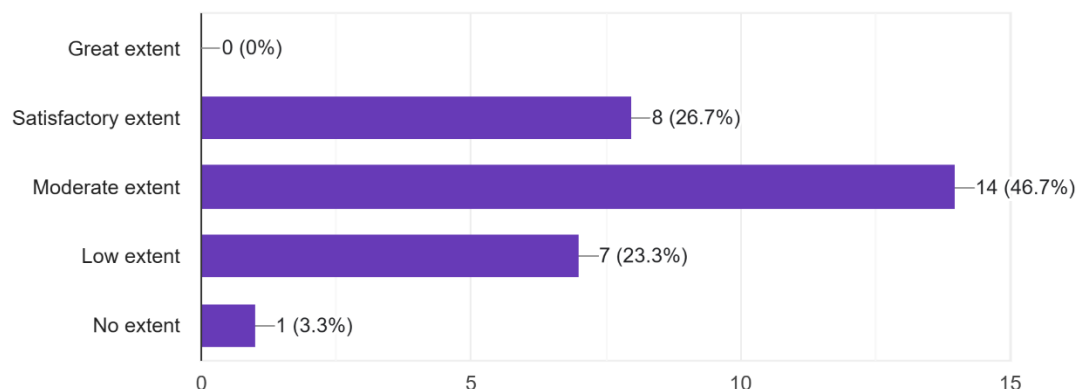
28 responses

Satisfactory Resolution of Issues:

Resolution rates are moderate: 39% reported "Moderate extent", 28% "Satisfactory extent", and 22% "Low extent".

To what extent do these interactions on the digital platform lead to satisfactory resolution of your issues
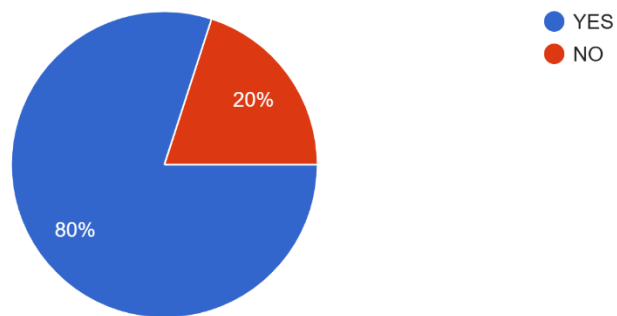
30 responses

Fostering Transparency:

A relatively strong point: 72% (13/18) of respondents felt KPLC's digital strategies foster transparency ("YES").

In your view, Do KPLC's digital communication strategies foster transparency?
30 responses

Value Added to Overall Experience:

Responses were varied, with "Moderate extent" (44%) being the most common, followed by "Great extent" (17%) and "Low extent" (17%).

To what extent Do you feel that KPLC's digital efforts add value to your overall experience as a power consumer?
30 responses
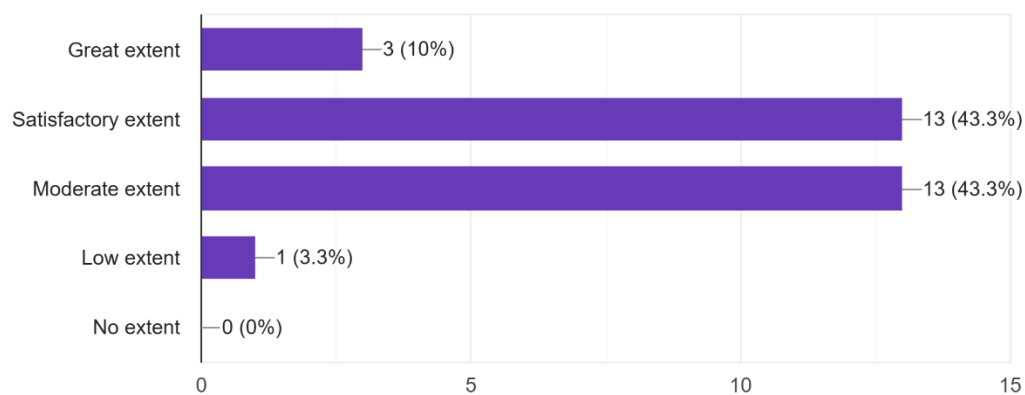
Generally, the key takeaway for Objective 2 is that despite a general perception of transparency, customer satisfaction is significantly hampered by the lack of timely updates and slow, inconsistent responses to digital inquiries. This directly impacts the satisfactory resolution of issues and, consequently, the overall value customers perceive from KPLC's digital efforts. This lack of satisfaction has the potential to undermine the organization's digital communication strategies, and an erosion of trust.

4.3. Objective 3: Digital Communication Reach and Customer Experience

This objective aimed to assess the digital communication reach of KPLC communication channels and the influence it has on customer experience.

Effectiveness in Disseminating Critical Information:

Perceptions are mixed: 39% found it "Somewhat effective", 33% "Very effective", and 22% "Slightly effective".

Objective 3 To assess the digital communication reach of KPLC communication channels and the influence it has on customer experience."   How ef...various geographical locations and demographics?
30 responses
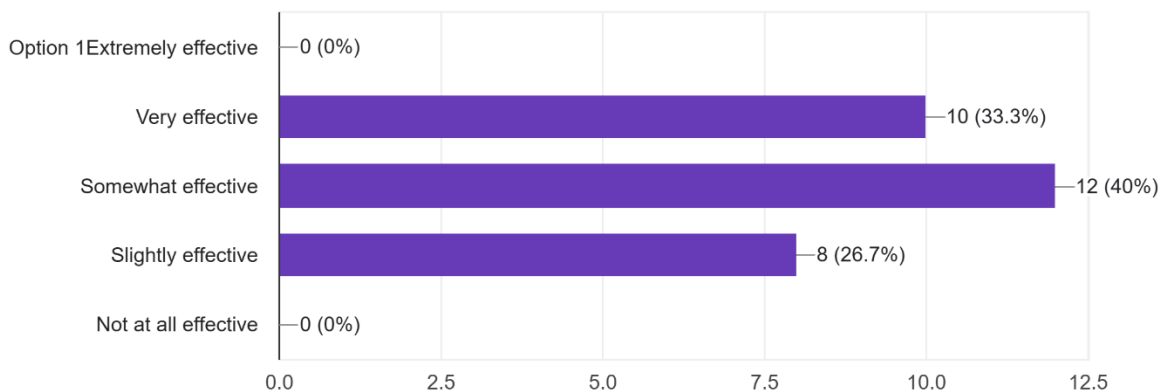
Awareness of Full Range of Services:

Awareness is fair but not universal: 39% are "Somewhat aware", 33% "Aware", and 17% "Unaware". Only one respondent was "Very aware". This indicates a gap in promoting the full

spectrum of digital services. This lack of universal awareness has the potential to lock out a section of customers from enjoying the convenience of the organization's digital communication platforms.

What is your level of awareness of the full range of services available through KPLC's digital platforms (e.g., online application for new connections, self-service portals, energy-saving tips
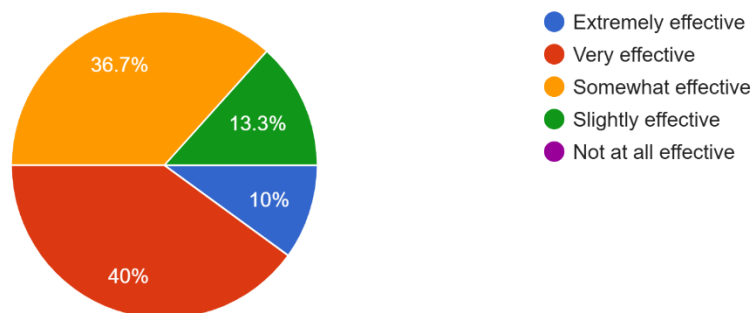30 responses
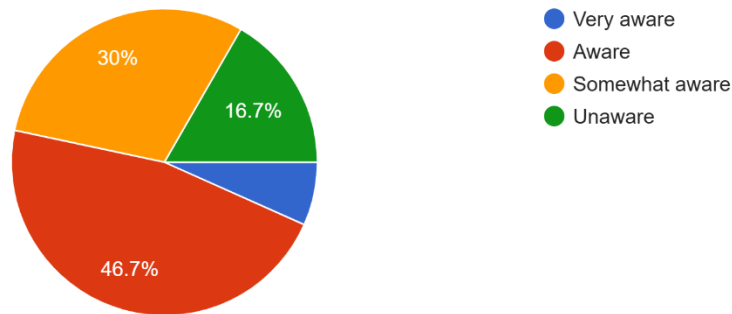
Effectiveness in Shaping Overall Perception & Experience:

Digital interactions generally have a positive, or at least moderate, influence: 39% found them "Somewhat effective", 33% "Very effective", and 11% "Extremely effective".

Are digital interactions effective in shaping your overall perception and experience as a customer with KPLC?
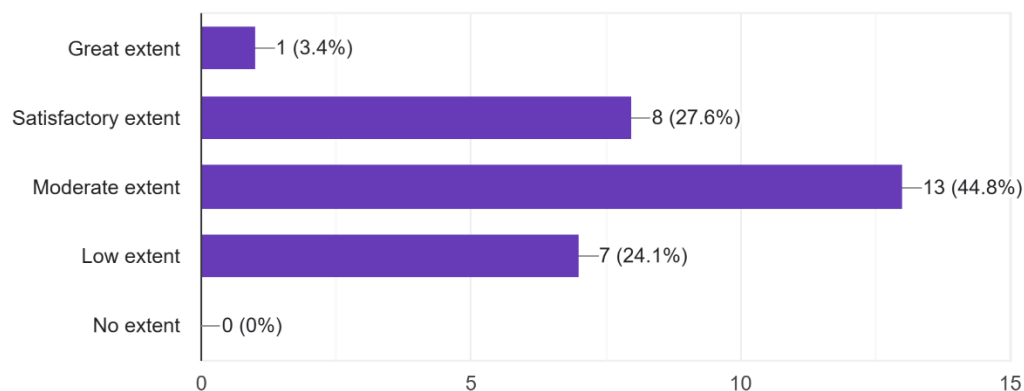30 responses

KPLC's Utilization of Digital Feedback:

A significant weakness: 44% believe KPLC utilizes feedback to a "Moderate extent", but 33% believe it's to a "Low extent". Only one respondent felt it was to a "Great extent". This suggests customers don't feel their feedback is actively used for improvement.

To what extent Do you feel that KPLC actively seeks and utilizes digital feedback to improve its services?
29 responses

Extent	Count (Percentage)
Great extent	1 (3.4%)
Satisfactory extent	8 (27.6%)
Moderate extent	13 (44.8%)
Low extent	7 (24.1%)
No extent	0 (0%)

The key takeaway for Objective 3 is that while digital channels have a moderate reach and influence on overall perception, there's a clear need to improve awareness of the full scope of KPLC's digital services. Crucially, KPLC is not perceived to be effectively leveraging digital feedback for service improvement, which is a missed opportunity for building trust and shaping a positive customer experience as well as shaping public perception.

4.4. Additional Insights (Qualitative Feedback)

Respondents provided valuable qualitative feedback, which clustered around several key themes:

Improved Responsiveness & Timeliness: Calls for "Prompt and accurate responses," "Timely engagements when issues or changes arise," and to "Keep the clients updated oftenly."

Information Accuracy: Demand for "accurate information on Bills."

Service Delivery Issues: A significant concern raised was regarding core service delivery: "Power connections take forever, when one has a service interruption it takes time to get a team on the ground and when you do there's expectation of 'chai' (bribe). This is very unprofessional." This highlights that digital efforts can be undermined by fundamental operational failures.

Channel Enhancement: Suggestions to "Make use of other digital platforms like whatsapp" and "support regional communications and complaints."

Customer Education: Need for "civic education to the customer's on their digital platforms" and "create more awareness of its digital platforms."

Feedback Mechanism: Emphasized the need to "Get feedback on their processes to understand their pain points."

5.0 Discussion

Leveraging Digital Platforms for Enhanced Engagement

The findings demonstrate that SMS remains a vital communication channel for Kenya Power customers, aligned with global trends in utility sectors where rapid transactional updates are essential (Heath, 2020). However, modern customer engagement requires a more diversified platform strategy embracing interactive social media, mobile apps, and enhanced web portals (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The uneven user experience across channels suggests a gap in integrated digital communication management, echoing literature advocating for a unified digital customer service framework to enhance satisfaction and trust (Malthouse et al., 2013).

Digital Communication's Impact on Customer Satisfaction and Trust

Consistent with Social Exchange Theory, customers weigh communication timeliness, accuracy, and responsiveness heavily in their overall satisfaction with KPLC (Blau, 1964). The reported delays and inconsistent responses thus represent key friction points that diminish perceived benefits and erode trust. Transparency efforts appear somewhat effective but remain insufficient without aligned operational excellence. Similar studies in public utilities reflect these dynamics,

where communication trustworthiness is undermined by perceived service delivery inefficiencies (Tang & Qiu, 2016).

Digital Reach and Feedback Utilization

Limited awareness of comprehensive digital services and the sense that feedback is underutilized indicate missed opportunities for participatory engagement and co-creation with customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Feedback empowerment is a driver of relational trust and loyalty, which can be cultivated by closing the communication loop and visibly acting on customer inputs (Grunig, 2002).

Contextual Challenges: Operational Shortcomings

The significant qualitative feedback regarding core service delivery challenges, including delayed fault resolution and bribery, highlight a critical tension. Digital communication strategies cannot substitute for or mask fundamental operational deficiencies (Men & Tsai, 2012). Without improvements in service reliability and ethical conduct, digital trust efforts will struggle to gain full traction.

6.0 Study Conclusions

This study underscores the pivotal yet complex role of digital corporate communication at Kenya Power and Lighting Company in fostering customer engagement and trust. While digital platforms, especially SMS, effectively deliver core transactional communication, significant gaps in responsiveness, information accuracy, platform usability, and feedback utilization persist. These deficiencies constrain customer satisfaction and weaken trust, highlighting the interplay between digital communication and operational performance.

The application of Uses and Gratifications Theory and Social Exchange Theory provided a nuanced understanding of customer motivations and the cost-benefit calculus that underpins engagement and trust. For KPLC to progress from basic information dissemination toward genuine customer relationship building, a strategic overhaul of digital corporate communication is essential — one that harmonizes platform quality, responsiveness, customer education, and feedback integration while anchoring changes in improved service delivery ethics and operations.

From the data analyzed therefore, the following general observations can be made:

SMS Dominate for Core Tasks: SMS alerts are critical for essential transactional needs but are not sufficient for comprehensive engagement.

There exists a responsiveness Gap: A major deterrent to customer satisfaction is the perceived slowness of updates on issues (outages, billing) and unprompted responses to inquiries across digital channels.

There was an Inconsistent Engagement Quality: While some find platforms friendly and content valuable, many report inconsistent experiences, indicating a lack of standardized engagement quality.

It also shows an awareness deficit: Customers are not fully aware of all services offered digitally.

The data also shows some perceived lack of feedback utilization: The low perception of KPLC actively using digital feedback is a critical trust-building and improvement blocker.

Digital Undermined by Operational Failures: Despite digital efforts, core service delivery issues (e.g., slow connections, bribery) significantly and negatively impact customer experience and perception.

7.0 Key Study Recommendations

Based on the research findings, KPLC should consider the following recommendations to enhance its digital corporate communication strategies and improve customer engagement, satisfaction, and trust:

Prioritize Real-Time, Accurate Updates

This can be done by implementing robust systems for immediate and accurate dissemination of information regarding outages, maintenance, and billing via SMS and other preferred digital channels. The organization needs to ensure all information is consistent across platforms. Feedback should be prompt and must be to a good satisfaction degree to customers. This will go a

long way in building public trust, creating better engagements with consumers and improving stakeholder relations.

Enhance Responsiveness and Resolution

Establish clear service level agreements (SLAs) for response times to digital inquiries (social media, app messages, emails). This can be done collaboratively with operations and maintenance teams tasked with resolving electricity related issues like outages, safety incidents, faulty meters, among other complaints.

Invest in expanding and training customer service teams dedicated to digital channels to ensure prompt, helpful, and satisfactory resolution of issues.

Strengthen Two-Way Communication and Feedback Loops

Actively solicit customer feedback through digital surveys, polls, and dedicated channels. These can be done periodically and can be conducted by both KPLC or an independent third party. The feedback collected can be shared with the organization's top leadership for action to be taken.

Crucially, communicate to customers how KPLC is acting on this feedback to foster a sense of being heard and valued.

Implement mechanisms for customers to view the status of their reported issues digitally. This will create a sense of trust with customers and accountability on the side of KPLC.

Expand and Diversify Digital Channels (Strategically)

Explore formal integration of popular platforms like WhatsApp for Business and WhatsApp Chat Bot for quick inquiries and updates, especially supporting regional communications. This will create more communication channels and options for customers to explore.

Improve Content Strategy and Awareness

Develop targeted campaigns to educate customers about the full range of digital services available (e.g., online application for new connections, self-service portals, energy-saving tips). This can be

carried out during public barazas, both above the line and below the line media campaigns, public events and meetings.

Regularly share relevant, timely, and beneficial content that genuinely informs and adds value to the customer experience. The information can be shared using the various digital tools employed by the organization.

Consider "civic education" initiatives to improve digital literacy among customers regarding KPLC's platforms. This has the potential to ensure universal awareness of the existing digital tools and create inclusivity.

Address Core Service Delivery Issues

Recognize that digital communication cannot compensate for fundamental operational deficiencies. Parallel efforts must be made to address issues like slow connections, delayed fault resolution, and unethical practices (bribery) within physical service delivery. These issues directly undermine digital trust. This means strictly adhering to the organization's Customer Care Charter.

Standardize User Experience:

Conduct UX/UI audits across all digital platforms to ensure consistent user-friendliness and accessibility, irrespective of the channel.

By focusing on these areas, KPLC can move beyond basic digital presence to cultivate a truly engaged, satisfied, and trusting customer base.

References

Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. Wiley.

Borden, S. L., & Scheufele, D. A. (2001). Communication strategies for public utility crisis management. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13(3), 179-200. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1303_02

Brodie, R. J., Hollebeek, L. D., Jurić, B., & Ilić, A. (2011). Customer engagement: Conceptual domain, fundamental propositions, and implications for research. *Journal of Service Research*, 14(3), 252-271. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670511411703

Communications Authority of Kenya. (2024). *Quarterly Sector Statistics Report Q1 2024*. Nairobi: CAK.

Cornelissen, J. (2017). *Corporate communication: A guide to theory and practice* (5th ed.). Sage.

Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 874-900. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602

Gefen, D. (2002). Customer loyalty in e-commerce. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 3(1), 27-51.

Grunig, J. E. (2002). *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Routledge.

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Heath, R. L. (2020). Strategic communication in power utilities: Best practices and lessons. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 14(2), 101-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1589921

Hollebeek, L. D. (2011). Demystifying customer brand engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7-8), 785-807. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2010.500132

Homans, G. C. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(6), 597-606.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges an opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509-523.

Kenya Energy Regulatory Commission. (2023). *Annual Sector Report*. Nairobi: KERC.

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241-251. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005

Malthouse, E. C., Haenlein, M., Skiera, B., Wege, E., & Zhang, M. (2013). Managing customer relationships in the social media era: Introducing the social CRM house. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 270-280. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.008

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 709-734.

Men, L. R., & Tsai, W.-H. S. (2012). How companies cultivate relationships with publics on social network sites: Evidence from China and the United States. *Public Relations Review*, 38(5), 723-730. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.04.003

Ou, C. X., & Sia, C. L. (2010). Uncovering the role of intermediaries in social interaction-based diffusion. *Information Systems Research*, 21(3), 565-587.

Prahalad, C.K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5-14.

Rawlins, B. L. (2008). Measuring the relationship between organizational transparency and trust. *Public Relations Journal*, 2(2), 1-21.

Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 3-37. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02

Sashi, C. M. (2012). Customer engagement, buyer–seller relationships, and social media. *Management Decision*, 50(2), 253-272. https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741211203551

Tang, W., & Qiu, L. (2016). Digital communication strategies and service recovery in utilities. *Journal of Service Management*, 27(5), 609-628.

Van Doorn, J., Lemon, K. N., Mittal, V., Nass, S., Pick, D., Pirner, P., & Verhoef, P. C. (2010). Customer engagement behavior: Theoretical foundations and research directions. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 253-266.