

PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN NIGERIA AND THE IMPERATIVES OF QUALITY BRAND IMAGE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Abstract

Good governance on its own cannot operate in an atmosphere that is devoid of accountability. Good governance is anchored on truth, openness, justice and equity, without which its tenets cannot but exist. The study was aimed at analyzing the need for a robust brand image for ministries, departments, agencies and organisations alike to engender public comprehension and acceptability. Regardless of the fact that most government policies are initiated and driven with the intention of development in all spheres, these same intentions could be misconstrued in an atmosphere of absence of quality public image and perception of leaders and government. The research relies on the descriptive method of research. Information is therefore sourced from books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, government publications and online sources. The research is anchored on the Theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour and the Diffusion of Innovation theory. The theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour provides a framework to study attitudes

toward behaviors. The theory suggests that performance of a given behaviour is primarily determined by the intention to perform that behaviour. Findings reveal that an organization cannot actually control its own reputation but it can only operate in a sound and ethical way and work to communicate this to stakeholders. Thus, the common term reputation management is misleading because you cannot directly manage your own reputation. You can only act to strengthen your standing in the areas that you consider important to your reputation. The research recommends that a Public Relations cadre be established by law, there should be increased funding of Public Relations departments in the Public and Private sector and Public Relations professionals should be the sole image makers of government and none other.

Key Words: Accountability, Brand Image, Good Governance, Public Relations, Public Image

Introduction

Governance and accountability remain the hallmark of every nation that means well for its people in all spheres and strata of public life. The implementation of good governance and everything it represents cannot be devoid of accountability by public officers who are saddled with the responsibility of managing public resources in line with extant constitution and global best practice. Jasseff (2019) postulates that "Accountability consists of restraining the power of a certain authority that gives an account of its actions, motivations, procedures and outcomes." Since modernity, the Hobbesian and Machiavellian authority embodied by a ruler or a group of people started to be connected to the authorization to execute power in the name of the subjects in a certain territory (Koppell 2010). That means, not only authority reported to divine entities but also needed to consider the citizens as sources and targets for power. In secularized contemporary democracies, the base of authority moved

to a form of power that represents the willingness of the people, a power based on the citizenship in order to be legitimate.

Good governance on its own cannot operate in an atmosphere that is devoid of accountability. Good governance is also anchored on truth, openness, justice and equity, without which its tenets cannot exist. This is why El-Nafaty (2019) posits that "accountability is answerability which refers to the obligation of the government, its agencies and public officials to provide information about their decisions and actions and to justify them to the public". He also asserts that "accountability is a disclosure system and access to information, openness to public participation and absence of undue secrecy, readiness to face and accommodate legitimate scrutiny and humility by leaders to answer questions raised by those governed". The inference of the aforementioned statement behooves on leadership at all levels to maintain an open door policy and pay attention to disparate opinions and constructive criticisms by those who are affected by policies and actions of same leaders, devoid of sentiments and any ethnic or parochial interest.

The justification of leadership and accountability are anchored on the premise of quality public image that

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endears followers to repose trust and reliance on leaders who have made good of their words and actions. This brings to bear the variables of effective leadership. Giving credence to this type of leadership, Cabeza-Erikson, Edwards, and Van Brabant, (2008) see effective leadership as one of most essential parts of the overall method for an organization to sustain their business in the face of problems caused by the rapid growth of the economic environment. Leaders are the ones who control and take charge of the operation of an organisation and good leaders are able to set optimistic goals and objectives while steering the operation of the company towards those goals through effective strategies. Other than that, good leaders can also influence their employees and motivate them by strengthening a positive organisation culture and through generous employee benefits, for instance health care insurance, worker compensation, leave benefit and others.

In addition to the issue of accountability, good public image and quality assurance, leadership that engenders good governance can also be said to be anchored on strategic communication initiatives that accentuate the imperative of quality public image. According to Williams (2017), strategic communications is not propaganda, nor psychological operations, nor information ops, nor spin- all of which involve an intention to mislead in some way. Strategic communications is about strategic impact through credible narrative. In complex situations, where reasonable people can hold different views or see the problem from different angles, strategic communications is an honest attempt to frame the way people around the world understand what is at stake.

The preemptory quest for good governance and accountability in Nigeria today appears to be inundated with several deficiencies relating to imagery and public perception in most government circles within the nation. Regardless of the fact that most government policies are initiated and driven with the intention of development in all spheres, these same intentions could be misconstrued in an atmosphere of absence of quality public image and perception of leaders and government. This glaring trend could lead to lack of trust and general public misconception on policies and initiatives that could in the long run, metamorphose into public apathy in general.

Research Objectives

1. Ascertain the imperatives of brand image for public acceptability by ministries, departments, agencies and organisations alike.
2. Explore the importance of public relations

professionals in organisational branding.

3. Establish the relevance of good governance and accountability in line with target organisational branding.

Statement of the Problem

It appears that most ministries, departments, agencies and organisations today desire goodwill at all cost from their target publics. This desire seems to be obstructed when performance and communication are at contrast from the get go. A successful harmonization of the two factors could hold strong potentials for a desired public image, hitherto referred to as branding. The certainty of this claim is what this research paper sets out to establish.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications Public Relations

Public relations is better described than defined. It is an applied professional practice and an academic field, and both order communication centered and research based ways to understand, inform, and intervene to adjust relationships between ideas, individuals, groups, and societies. The practice seeks to influence the building, maintenance, and restoration (or, on occasion, destruction) of reputations and also to integrate different perspectives and groups, particularly through its enactment of activities such as issues management, crisis resolution, and risk communication (David & Krishnamurthy 2017).

Brand Image

Brand image can be defined as the observations around a brand as reflected by the brand association held in consumer's memory, (Keller 1993) cited in Anwar (2011). It additionally can be defined as a consumer's sentiments and thought regarding the brand (Erfan & Kwek 2013). As such, brand picture portrayed as a summary of brand relationship in a shopper's mentality; that outcome in brand recognition and brand relationship alongside brand state of mind, brand advantages and brand characteristics. In addition, according to Aaker (1996) cited in Hsiang-Ming (2011), these associations could indicate to a few aspects of brand in the memory of a consumer. He further explained brand image as a set of customer's beliefs towards the brand.

Good Governance

According to Sahni & Uma (2003), good governance implies a high level of organisational effectiveness in relation to policy-formulation and the policies actually pursued, especially in the conduct of economic policy and its contribution to growth, stability and popular

welfare, implying accountability, transparency, participation, openness and the rule of law. By implication, good governance portrays good management, good performance and good stewardship of public money. From this perspective, it suffices that good governance is an indeterminate term that describes how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. The concept pays attention to the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. The attention paid to the process of decision making and its implementation is in cognizance of abuse of human rights, corruption, lack of transparency, lack of responsiveness, and lack of accountability that pervade Africa and Nigeria is not excluded. These variables, Kalbaq (2015) regard as elements of bad governance which are the root causes of all evil and suffering within our societies and are the complete opposite of the elements of good governance.

Managing Public Image

The image of an organisation can be considered as the representation that people form about an object, person, an individual of a well-defined population, an organisation or a government, according to the information they have regarding them, the type of visibility – direct or intermediated, the own NADA (needs, expectations, wishes/desires, aspirations; 'nada' in Romanian language means bate for fish), experienced emotional condition, old knowledge. In short terms, the image of an individual refers to a phenomenon, object, which has tangible or intangible dimensions. From a psychological approach, the used term is perception and range of perceptions (Rivera, Arms-Chavez & Zarate, 2012). The image, as social representations of the government or organisations, is formed due to:

1. The influence of the messages sent, directly or indirectly, in the public space they act;
2. The influence of roomers;
3. Through the client's satisfaction correlated with the quality of the products and services and the power of purchasing.
4. The quality of the managerial act, based in the positive results attained in the primary reality during a full cycle of management;
5. The impact of governmental messages on different target groups with strong power of influence;
6. The messages that come from third parties, seen as other pressure groups or interested groups like stakeholders, depending on their own interests;
7. The messages coming abroad the country.

The images have an important role in the process of influencing opinions, attitudes and behaviours and, alongside empathy and knowledge of desirable image management; they can influence the collective perception of the masses (Baeza, Lao, Meneses & Roma, 2009). That is why mass communication specialists are wanted (Frunza, 2012). It is neither bad, nor good; it is an old, ancestral problem, of the difference between purpose and objectives. When a visionary leader follows the general evolution interest of the consciousness and not to seize it, based on power conservation interests. Actually, any group which wishes to gain the power, whether it is a political, economic, technological, cultural, or religious group, has a normal reaction from the social and political perspective. The way this group communicates with the masses is decisive, because a communicational war is more desirable than a tangible aggressive one. And, after winning this battle against the collective mind, it is easier to enjoy the tangible success of a victory. The "heavy artillery" was the messages, the targets were the individual minds, the results were new ways of a PRO thinking of these masses, but in synchronicity with the centers of interest that control the means of communication; here, mass media play an important part (Slantchev, 2006).

Reputation management professionals emphasize clear and strong identity as fundamental for seeking one's positive reputation. The focus on identity lowers risk of grappling between image created and institutional reality; environment analysis encourages proactivity. Identity represents who we are and what we do. It is tightly related to institution's mission in the public, its vision and implementing the mission in practice. Identity should be integrated in practical standards and embodied in every day actions. Consequently, seeking sustainable image and reputation cannot be a function of institutional leaders or some department alone: every public organisation's member or public officer should be considered as reputation ambassador making an impact on institutional reputation through their eye-to-eye contacts, corresponding, communication, etc. Integrating some desirable image standards into all institution's everyday work can, of course, be interpreted as some manifestation of implementing holistic reputation management which can be illustrated by existing regulation of ethic and behavioural rules in some public institutions.

Understanding Public Image

Originally, the degree of correspondence between an image and its underlying reality was the primary factor in distinguishing a good image from a bad image. Plato, for

instance, compared an image to a shadow cast on the wall, and Walter Lippman in *Public Opinion* said images were "pictures in our heads." Both believed that the more closely and more accurately an image portrayed external reality, the better and more meaningful it was (Michael 2000).

1. An image which did not match reality, whether by design or by accident, was a bad image.
2. The further it was from reality, the worse it was.

Today, when we label an image as good or bad, its correspondence with reality may not even be considered. When we refer to someone having a good or bad image, we're hardly ever implying anything about how well their image reflects their real personality or their actual behaviour. Instead, we're talking about how positively or how negatively the public responds to their image.

1. A person who is liked or approved of by the public is said to have a good image.
2. Someone who is disliked or disapproved of is said to have a bad image.

The terms "good image" and "bad image" as used today rarely reveal anything about the relative amounts of fact or fiction in an image. They do not even represent an ethical or moral value judgment. They simply reflect how positively or how negatively people who are exposed to the image respond to the person or organisation represented by the image.

Insofar as public relations is able to help people or organisations project "good images," it can help them receive favorable public responses whether they deserve them or not.

The simple fact that someone's image and public appearance can be consciously constructed, projected, and manipulated is very disconcerting and troubling for some people. They consider it improper and unethical behaviour, and have used it as the basis for many of the most damning and recurring criticisms of public relations. Among other things, they assert that public relations is all window-dressing, that it lacks meaningful substance, that it deals only with images and not with reality, that it relies on deception and misrepresentation, and that it is inherently fraudulent and manipulative.

Such critics claim public relations' images create facades for people and organisations that are no more real than the false-front sets movie makers use to re-create theatrical stages. And, just as movie makers want, and expect, audiences to perceive their sets as reality, public relations practitioners want their audiences to believe the images presented to them are real. But, the critics argue, images are never real. They are artificial, not natural, and

because they are artificial, they are false by definition. So, these critics conclude, images and the public relations practitioners who use them are inherently deceptive and misleading rather than helpful and informative.

As much as we might want to defend public relations, we have to admit that the critics are right about some images, some practitioners, and some public relations activities. There have, in fact, been and probably will be more fraudulent, immoral, unethical, and even illegal uses of images by some public relations practitioners. But, they are the aberrations. A few instances of misbehaviour do not mean that all images, all image-making, or all public relations activities are inappropriate.

An organisation's image is strongly linked to its vision and mission and is considered a manageable resource. Abratt and Mofokeng (2001) argue that as the vision and mission guide most government agencies in their daily interaction with external actors, those principles will logically be reflected in the corporate image. Because the corporate image is believed to be the visible element of an organisation's image, the organisation has the ability to create and manipulate a desired picture of itself in the minds of the external actors. To achieve a desired image, an organisation must encourage and facilitate constant two-way communication with their target audiences. Thus, organisations must be fully aware of the image they are sending to both their external and internal audiences (Grunig 2006). Image affects not only the perceptions that the external observers have of an organisation but also the employee's perception of that organisation or corporate body (Johnstone and Zawawi 2004).

Public relations specialists establish and maintain relationships with an organisation's target audience, the media and other opinion leaders. Common responsibilities include designing communications campaigns, writing news releases and other content for news, working with the press, arranging interviews for company spokespeople, writing speeches for company leaders, acting as an organisation's spokesperson, preparing clients for press conferences, media interviews and speeches, writing website and social media content, managing company reputation (crisis management), managing internal communications, and marketing activities like brand awareness and event management. Success in the field of public relations requires a deep understanding of the interests and concerns of each of the client's many publics. The public relations professional must know how to effectively address those concerns using the most powerful tool of the public relations trade, which is publicity (Bowen, 2009).

Developing a Strategy for Public Image for Good Governance

Public relations is not only found in the corporate environment, but also in government institutions. The government or government referred to includes all state organisations that carry out state sovereignty. The government has a main task, namely in the fields of security, order, justice, social welfare, economy, public works, and maintenance of natural resources and the environment. Basic public relations is based on two basic facts. First, the public has the right to know; therefore, government officials have the responsibility to explain to the community. Second, there is a need for officials to receive input from the community about new and social pressure, to gain community participation and support.

An organisation cannot actually control its own reputation but it can only operate in a sound and ethical way and work to communicate this to stakeholders. Thus the common term reputation management is misleading because you cannot directly manage your own reputation. You can only act to strengthen your standing in the areas that you consider important to your reputation. Stakeholders' attitudes towards your organisation and their relationships with you and hence your reputation in their eyes can be influenced by stakeholder relationship management activities especially when the activities are conducted on a two-way symmetric basis which involves treating them with respect. Reputation is also affected by the actions and attitudes of others, for example, a competitor launching breakthrough products or making greater profits and by comments from industry observers.

According to Boyi (2016), a US study showed that there are seven main components of corporate reputation used in reputation measurement systems such as the most admired companies in America. These are under listed as follows:

1. Ethical consideration: the organisation behaves ethically, is admirable, and is worthy of respect, is trustworthy.
2. Employees workplace: the organisation has talented employees, treats its people well, is an appealing workplace.
3. Financial performance: the organisation is financially strong, has a record of profitability, and growth prospects.
4. Leadership: the organisation is a leader rather than a follower" is innovative.
5. Management: the organization is well managed, has high quality management, and has a clear vision for the future.
6. Social responsibility: the organisation recognizes

social responsibilities, supports good causes.

7. Reliability: the organisation stands behind its products and services, it provides consistent service to its public.

The Inspectorate of Government (2019) provides a framework for organising and implementing government's communication and public relations activities, informed by evidence about the perceptions, needs, and expectations of government institution's internal and external stakeholders. The goal of this strategy is to strengthen public and stakeholder confidence in and support for the government's mission of promoting good governance, accountability and the rule of law in public office. Among the strategies they proffered are:

1. Internal communication: Foster an organisational culture that positions communication and stakeholder engagement at the center of the government's mission.
2. External communication and public relations: Clear and consistent messaging about the government's mandate and activities.
3. Media relations and publicity: Maintain constructive relations with the media to give journalists and the public better access to information about governments activities.
4. Branding and visibility: Disseminate dynamic and user-friendly public information products to highlight, convey, and raise the visibility of the governments' brand/image.
5. Advocacy and Social Mobilization: Empower citizens with information and opportunities to demand accountability and better service delivery, as well as participating in anti-corruption efforts.
6. Partnerships and Networking: Harness synergies and comparative advantages from stakeholders and facilitate information sharing.

Image is the physical representation of who we are and what we are all about - our attitudes, appearance and actions. Everyone projects an image, consciously or subconsciously. We may possess a variety of skills, knowledge and good intent but others evaluate us on the basis of what meets the eye, based on which impression is formed within the first few seconds. Hence, image does matter and therefore there is the need to manage it.

Image management is an art and science of projecting an appropriate and powerful image consistently. It teaches us how to maximize the impact we have on others, so that long after a personal, professional or social meeting is over, we are remembered and recalled with

admiration and purpose.

Empirical Review

Isoraite (2018) in his study on brand image analyses the brand image concept, brand development stage, and the brand image importance. He contends that in order to create a strong brand image, the user must be provided with the structured information, which is stored in its memory and awareness shape and enhance the brand associations. To create a user emotional attachment to the brand, it is necessary to use the trademark emotional stimuli. The source operating user creates the brand image: the user experience (product use), friends and acquaintances assessments, information in mass communication media and brand advertising. It is important that all the listed sources to provide the same information and continually add more hints about the brand.

Lenka and Petra (2020) in their research on the role of public relations in branding, assert that public relations are increasingly about communicating credibly with key audiences who affect businesses results. They further contend that all elements of corporate brand, from tone and personality, functional and emotional benefits, core message and end goal, to its reputation- if fully leveraged with internal and external audiences can help raise performance and credibility. Enhancing the awareness understanding and commitment to a brand through public relations is usually an essential part of any overall strategy aimed at sustaining and raising standards of performance and credibility.

Methodology

The research relies on the descriptive method of research. Information is therefore sourced from books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, magazines, government publications and online sources. Descriptive research is a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied. This methodology focuses more on the "what" of the research subject rather than the "why" of the research subject. In other words, descriptive research primarily focuses on describing the nature of a demographic segment without focusing on why a certain phenomenon occurs (Sri 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The research is anchored on the Theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour provides a framework to study attitudes toward behaviours. It suggests that performance

of a given behaviour is primarily determined by the intention to perform that behaviour. In other words, the most important determinant of a person's behaviour is behaviour intent. The individual's intention to perform behaviour is a combination of attitude toward performing the behaviour and subjective norm. The individual's attitude toward the behaviour includes; Behavioral belief, evaluations of behavioural outcome, subjective norm, normative beliefs, and the motivation to comply. If a person perceives that the outcome from performing behaviour is positive, she/he will have a positive attitude forward performing that behaviour. The opposite can also be stated if the behaviour is thought to be negative. If relevant others see performing the behaviour as positive and the individual is motivated to meet the expectations of relevant others, then a positive subjective norm is expected. If relevant others see the behaviour as negative and the individual wants to meet the expectations of these "others", then the experience is likely to be a negative subjective norm for the individual. Attitudes and subjective norm are measured on scales using phrases or terms such as like/unlike, good/bad, and agree/disagree. The intent to perform a behaviour depends upon the product of the measures of attitude and subjective norm. A positive product indicates behavioural intent (Glanz & Rimer 2007).

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory deals with the spread of social change. It describes the process by which social change and the various factors that influence either positively or negatively the change. Rogers (2001) defines diffusion as the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. Diffusion is a special type of communication concerned with the spread of messages that are perceived as new ideas. The main element in the diffusion of new ideas is innovation which is communicated through certain channels overtime among the members of a social system. An innovation as perceived by Orr (2003) as an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. The characteristics of an innovation as perceived by the members of a social system determine its rate of adoption. There are five attributes of adoption which are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trial ability and observance. These attributes determine the degree to which an innovation is changed or modified by a user in the process of its adoption and implementation (Wejnert, 2002)

Conclusion

The research finds that there is no organisation that does not need public relations, thus public relations is a form

of communication that applies to all types of organisations, both commercial or profit-seeking or non-commercial companies that are not looking for profit. It does not matter whether the organisation is in the government or private sector. The findings of the study reveal that public relations is now increasingly being recognised in people's lives, especially in various companies and agencies that have a direct interest in public relations, even now the public relations division is considered a necessity that must exist in an organisation in order to build relationships with the community and stakeholders (stakeholders). The main duties and obligations of public relations are to act as communicators to assist success in implementing government development programmes, have the ability to build positive relationships, work concepts that are well planned, to be able to create a good image for the institutions they represent and build positive public opinion.

Recommendations

The research hereby makes the following recommendations:

1. A public relations cadre should be established by law to be impressed on Ministries, Departments, Agencies and Private organisations alike in order to entrench professionalism in practice of the profession in principle.
2. There should be increased funding of Public Relations departments in the public and private sector to enable practitioners carry out extensive research and investigations on public opinion and public policy matters.
3. Public relations professionals should be the sole image makers of government and none other. This is to engender quality image making of Public Officers which should not be left in the hands of mere political appointees.
4. There should be a research unit in every Public Relations department across the board in order to create room for extensive public opinion and audience research in matters of public concern.

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