

Assessment of Public Relations Strategies Adopted by The Nigerian Police Force for Its Image in Nasarawa State and FCT (Abuja)

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Abstract

This study assessment of Public Relations Strategies Adopted by the Nigerian Police Force for its Image in Nasarawa State and FCT (Abuja). This research work adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprise the police public relations departments and police community relations committees in Nasarawa and FCT (Abuja). The population of police public relations departments and police community relations committees in Nasarawa state is 147 officers and civilians (Source: police admin department Nasarawa state and FCT headquarters). The sample size of this study was calculated at 397 using census method. The research instruments to be used in this study are interview and questionnaire. The study adopted a method of checking the validity, reliability and consistency of the instrument and questions by conducting a pilot study to ensure that the instrument achieves the intended purpose. The method of data collection to be used in this study is through face- to -face distribution of the research data gathering instruments. In analyzing the data, the responses tallied and arranged into frequency distribution, tables, numbers, percentage and representing quantitative analysis was used where necessary while the nature was used in analysing information concerning the study. It was found that Feature articles/news reports in newspapers and magazines, Television programmes can launder police image, Community relations launders police image, Public relations launder' Nigeria police bad image, via all the above activities. Lack of well trained and experienced personnel, lack of proper orientation is a challenge, lack of supervision of Personnel, lack of good Community relations, Poor Media relations/publicity, and inadequate funding. Based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommends that: adequate funding and correction of institutional inadequacies should be given due attention; empowering the populace to perform oversight functions must not be abused however so that the police will not again be subjected to intimidation; training, re-orientation and sustained disciplinary actions for erring officers; Improved relationship with the public Community Relations.

Keywords: Assessment, Public Relations Strategies, Nigerian Police Force, Crime

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Introduction

The world over, certain state apparatus/mechanisms are set up by the government to maintain peace, national security, safeguard lives and properties, enforce law and order amongst others. In Nigeria, one of such bodies is the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). The amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 was a precursor to the formation of the present Nigeria Police Force on April 1, 1930 with headquarters in Lagos. Traditionally, the police set up since the era of the colonial masters (indirect rule) was saddled with the responsibilities of prevention and investigation of crime, apprehension of crime perpetrators, response to distress call by citizens, enforcement of laws and so on (Alemika (2010). However, the Police have not been able to respond to the security challenges in the country due greatly to certain structural constraints. The inability of the Nigeria Police Force to deliver to the Nigerian populace the core mandate of the institution coupled with corrupt practices, of course aided partly by some institutional inadequacies led to the poor public image and perception of the Police by Nigerians, home and abroad. Therefore, the public have lost their trust, respect and support for the Police because of the institution's ineffectiveness (Alemika (2010).

Apparently perturbed by the poor image of the police and the need to keep communication lines open, the late Kam Salem, former Inspector – General of Police (1966 -1975) established the Force Public Relations Department as a statutory function of the force. It must be pointed out that inspite of creation of Police public relations offices, it was still being practiced by non-professionals because the Nigeria Police Force classifies public relations as a general duty function and it is subsumed under administration department. As such, less public relations impact is felt in Police activities. Hence, the need arose

to, as a matter of urgency devise a professional way of managing the crisis of battered image of the Nigerian Police Force.

In the public and the media, the Nigerian police are the most smeared, pelted and slandered with different kinds of derogatory vocabularies: trigger happy, corrupt, brutal, inefficient, uncivil, illiterates, dirty as if they can be done without. Nevertheless, the police are the closest agent of the federal government to the public, they are encountered daily, either patrolling the streets or controlling traffic or helping the vulnerable in the society. The police, however, need the public cooperation for effective policing but most would want to do everything possible to avoid any contact with the police, but they are unavoidable in most cases in terms of fighting crimes, keeping the peace and maintenance of security in society. Crime is one of the most obvious events which confront people in the late modern age. Crime and criminality are as old as mankind. Okeshola 2008)

Crime to Okeshola (2008) is a universal feature of all human societies. The reason for this according to Marshall is because there is no human society where norms and values are not violated, from the simplest hunting and gathering societies to the most complex civilized societies. It is because of this universal character of crime that every society is expected to have specific mechanisms for the overall interest and wellbeing of the generality of the populace.

The police institution is a generic human service establishment saddled principally with the task of safeguarding internal security and safety in the society. In Nigeria, the police are officials of government and society, responsible for the prevention and control of crimes and disorders as well as the detection, apprehension and prosecution of perpetrators of crimes and violence in the country (Dalhatu, 2013). As such, there is probably no other security control

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organization that has an intimate dealing with the large segment of the Nigerian populace as the police. Essentially therefore, law enforcement or social control is the generally agreed responsibility of the Nigeria police. They must be available in case of need of almost any kind and demonstrate absolute commitment at all times to render the best possible service to the public. Conversely however, the reverse is arguably the case in Nigeria.

Money flows up the chain of command through the informal but widespread system of returns in which subordinates pay their superiors a portion of the money they make from bribes and extortion (Ladapo, 2013). Subordinates often pay their superiors to be assigned to positions where they have ample opportunities to extract money from the public. Superior officers frequently set monetary targets for subordinates assigned to these lucrative posts and remove those who fail to meet their targets. Money continues up the chain of command as officers who take returns from their subordinates pay their superiors in turn. This corrupt system of returns not only encourages low-level police officers to commit abuses as a means of extorting money, and effectively punishes those who do not, but it also creates a strong disincentive for senior officers who personally benefit from the system of returns to hold their subordinates accountable for extortion and other abuses (Ladapo, 2013).

So many crimes go un-investigated by the police where influential persons, including persons in government are fingered as suspects or where the suspects “sort the police investigators”, a slang for bribe payment (Ladapo, 2013). According to a recent Human Rights Watch report (2018), officers of the Nigerian Police often commit crimes against the very citizens that they are mandated to protect. On several occasions, Nigerians that are only making efforts to make ends meet are accosted on a daily basis

by armed police officers who demands bribes, threatening those that refuse with arrest or physical harm. On a good number of occasions, the level of police brutality has been exposed through the killing and maiming of those that refuses to ‘settle’ police officers when they make such demands.

Since public relations is about creating favourable image, Massey (2003:16) citing Treadwell and Harrison (1994), signaling the importance of Public Relations points out that organizational image management is important for two reasons; first, images determine stakeholders’ cognitive, affective and behavioural responses towards the organization. Second, shared images make possible the interdependent relationships that exist between organizations and stakeholders. Image management should be tackled by a holistic public relations approach since the organization’s reputation is driven by behavior, communication, visual appearance, result/performance as well as exogenous factors (such as media messages, gossips, other stakeholders review and appreciation. Against this background, the study examined the image of the Nigerian police and as well seeks better ways the image of the Nigerian police would be repositioned.

Statement of the Problem

Institutional inadequacies, numerous media reports on various vices, eye witnesses’ accounts, recent photograph and video recordings of some corrupt police officers are all pointers to the insensitivity, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the force. These, had in no small measure affected the public perception and image of the institution. As such, the relationship between the Police and the public is generally hostile, inspite of the popular saying that the Police is your friend”. Consequently, Nigerians’ confidence in the police as a law enforcement agent has been

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eroded over the years (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Therefore, there is serious need to reposition the public perception and image of the Nigerian Police force which can be done through effective professional public relations practice. In line with the foregoing, this research work assessed the Public Relations Strategies Adopted by the Nigerian Police Force for its Image in Nasarawa State and FCT (Abuja).

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Find out the extent public relations strategies have been applied to reposition the force
2. Determine how efficient the public relations strategies adopted by the NPF has reposition the image of the force

Research Questions

Specifically, this study sought to:

1. What are extent public relations strategies have been applied to reposition the force?
2. How efficient is the public relations strategies adopted by the NPF has reposition the image of the force?

Methodology

This research work adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. The

population of the study comprise the police public relations departments and police community relations committees in Nasarawa and FCT (Abuja). The population of police public relations departments and police community relations committees in Nasarawa state is 147 officers and civilians (Source: police admin department Nasarawa state and FCT headquarters). The sample size of this study was calculated at 397 using census method. The research instruments to be used in this study are interview and questionnaire. The study adopted a method of checking the validity, reliability and consistency of the instrument and questions by conducting a pilot study to ensure that the instrument achieves the intended purpose. The method of data collection to be used in this study is through face- to -face distribution of the research data gathering instruments. In analysing the data, the responses tallied and arranged into frequency distribution, tables, numbers, percentage and representing quantitative analysis was used where necessary while the nature was used in analysing information concerning the study.

Presentation of the Result

Research Question One

What are extent public relations strategies have been applied to reposition the force?

Table 1: What are the public relations strategies have been applied to reposition the force?

S/n	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Feature articles/news reports in newspapers, magazines and Television programmes	120	30.2%
2	Press conferences addressed by IGP or PPRO, Special event	90	22.7%
3	Media relations and Community relations	20	5.1%

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4	All-of -the-Above	167	42.1%
Total		397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 interrogates the public relations strategies adopted by the NPF to reposition the image of the force, 120 (30.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Feature articles/news reports in newspapers and magazines, Television programmes can launder police image. 90 (22.7%) agreed that Community relations and media relations launders police image, while 20 (5.1%) of the respondents opined Press conferences addressed by IGP or PPRO and special events launders the force image. 167 (42.1%) of the respondents said all of the above

strategies were adopted by the police force. This translates to concluding that public relations launder' Nigeria police bad image, via its strategies which include; Feature articles/news reports in newspapers and magazines, Television programmes can launder police image. Community relations launders police image, Press conferences addressed by IGP or PPRO. Media relation launder's police image. The implication of this result is that the Nigeria police need to work more urgently on it image.

Research Question One

How efficient is the public relations strategies adopted by the NPF has reposition the image of the force?

Table 2: How efficient is the public relations strategies adopted by the NPF has reposition the image of the force?

S/n	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Its public relations effort	120	30.2%
2	The sanction is an attempt to repair police image	167	42.1%
3	Cover up	90	22.7%
4	Was stage play	20	5.1%
5	Neutral	0	0.0%
Total		397	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

As seen table 2 show that the efficient is the public relations strategies adopted by the NPF has reposition the image of the force, 120 (30.2%) of the respondents said Its public relations effort, 167 (42.7%) said the sanction is attempt to repair police image, 90 (22.7%) of the respondents said

cover up. And 20 (5.1%) of the respondents said was stage play. This translates to concluding that the effects are the recent image management strategies (vis-à-vis) dismissal of three allegedly corrupt police officers on the public perception of the police force case may be.

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Findings

Assessment of public relations strategies adopted by the Nigerian Police Force for its image in Nasarawa state and FCT (Abuja) findings from the field survey indicated that the Nigerian Police force adopted public relations strategies to correct its image. The Nigerian populace opined that police has bad image which is a bad impression of the police, due largely to corrupt practices, molestation of the citizenry, extortion, lack of commitment and unprofessional conduct of operatives and other institutional inadequacies. However, members of the Nigerian police who are part of the respondents debunked the bad image of the police. This denial could not be sustained as their responses to other question contradicted their views that the image of the police is good. Rather than ignore the question, majority of police officers sampled said lack of commitment was the cause of police bad image while majority of Nigerians attributed the image problem of the force, to corruption. The study found that the public relations strategies have been applied well, to an extent corruption and bad image in the Nigerian police force can be averted when there is good training, proper orientation, improved welfare (Insurance) and respectively. Further revealed that Feature articles/news reports in newspapers and magazines, Television programmes, Community relations, Press conferences addressed by IGP or PPRO and Media relations have to an extent launder's police image.

Conclusion

Based on the findings the study concluded that the public relations strategies adopted by the Nigerian Police Force for its image in Nasarawa state and FCT (Abuja) has to an extent address the bad image of the Nigerian police force. Furthermore PPRO must see good public relations as an on-going process, which

needs persistence, being positive and continuously looking for opportunities to position the force favorably and encourage trust in the long run, since the golden rule of effective policing is human element as reflected in the police code of conduct. To be candid, applying public relations principles to restore police image requires visible policing which involves four key elements namely: adequate funding, preparedness, addressing institutional inadequacies and a changed disposition of officers to unprofessional conducts and the Nigerian populace. This, when instituted through sustainable and strategic public relations practices will definitely endear the police to members of the public thereby reducing or erasing all together the bad image of the force.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommends that:

1. **There should be government policy in place with encapsulate adequate funding and correction of institutional inadequacies:** To achieve commendable success in the image laundering process of the police, government must be ready to fund forces' activities adequately including Public Relations and other operational activities. This way, PR efforts whether by the NPPRD or public relations consultants will be felt in the image restoration effort.
2. **Empowerment of the citizenry to perform oversight functions on the police:** The recent dismissals of corrupt officers from the force were engineered by the video tapes recorded by members of the public and blotted by the social media. Such practice should be encouraged. This way, the populace will perform oversight function and report erring officers in addition to the existing PCRC, PPCB and

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the human rights section of the police. Empowering the populace to perform oversight functions must not be abused however so that the police will not again be subjected to intimidation.

3. **Training, re-orientation and sustained disciplinary actions for erring officers:** Human beings make up the institution, as such; concerted effort should be made to invest in capacity development of police officers. This should further extend to re-orientation of police officers about professional conducts in the discharge of their duties. In addition, appropriate sanctions such as was meted on allegedly corrupt officials dismissed in August and September 2013 should be maintained and sustained. This way, the bad eggs in the force will be gradually checked or eliminated. Police officers must be trained to individually conduct themselves as good image makers of the institution.
4. **Improved relationship with the public (Community Relations):** Efforts at maintaining police public friendly relationship must be sustained since neither of the two parties can do without each other.

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