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Role of Diaspora Advertising and Public Relations Practitioners in the Management of Nigeria Image and Reputation Abroad

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Abstract

This work examines the role of advertising and Public Relations in managing Nigeria's image/reputation abroad. Essay approach was adopted in discussing the study. There were revelations of facts and figures that Nigeria's image is damaged and needs serious and professional approaches to manage it so that international community can accept Nigeria back as a nation with soul and values. The challenges of image laundering have remained a Herculean task for every successive government. So, the objectives of the study include to find out whether international community has noticed the significant improvements in Nigeria's corporate governance since 1999. In the course of that discussions generated from extensive literature and interaction with people on the facts and figures about Nigeria's bad image, causes, efforts to correct it and current challenges were analyzed. The result of the analysis confirms that Nigeria's image before international community was bad; and currently effort is being made to manage it for a better understanding. The researcher therefore concludes that more efforts are needed to ensure total redemption of the damages on Nigeria's image/reputation globally; using advertising, PR strategies and Diaspora approaches.

Keywords: *Advertising, Disapora, Image making, Public Relations, Reputation.*

Introduction

Anyone who has followed the history of Nigeria since independence will appreciate how this country's image and national power have been modified for better or worse by the leadership given by its government at various times. The country's image began to attract criticism when the military took over a legitimate government in a coup in 1966 and introduced illegitimate governance with it attendant corrupt practices. Bad leadership, corruption, fraud and gross indiscipline were introduced into public life and those in government institutionalized these virtues and vices. According to Soremekum and Obi (1994) "Nigeria's political, social and economic crisis cannot be divorced from both the character of the Nigeria state and the manner of its leadership in public offices".

Since 1966 till date, the task of creating and maintaining a viable and legitimate state that is accessible, efficient, accountable, transparent, equitable and acceptable has become one of the most critical and complicated challenges of the transformation process that Nigeria at all times has continued to face. In the views of Sambe (2007:56), the military destroyed the basis of dialogue and elevated the use of force and the culture of impunity. It introduced torture, extra-judicial killings by the security forces, arrests and detention without trial, crackdown on press freedom, forced eviction of people from their homes, prolonged closure of schools, state of sponsored terrorism and corruption.

Collaborating such bad situation, Egwu (1999) observed that the “Abacha era (1993-1998) remains in the annals of Nigerian history as the most damaging in terms of economic mismanagement and corporate failure”. Abacha was not alone in such act of abuse of public office. There is corruption in all levels of government, in public and private lives. Sambe cited the views of Centre for Democracy and Development, Lagos (2003). There is high level of insecurity, inter-communal and inter-ethnic clashes, religious violence, armed robbery, assassinations, poverty, failure of the state and its institutions, manipulation of religions and politics of exclusion.

As various governments seemed to have failed to establish purposeful agenda and framework towards addressing these many challenges facing the country, the current issue today is the Niger Delta problem. The recent publication by UNDP, titled: “Niger Delta Human Development Report 2006”, painted a very damaging image of the Nigerian government and indeed Nigerians. According to the report (2006:1). The Niger Delta produces the oil wealth that accounts for the bulk of Nigeria’s foreign earnings. But analysis of poverty and human development points a dismal picture of the core area in the region, especially when the region is compared with other oil-producing regions of the world. In fact, social instability, poor local governance, competition for economic resource and environmental degradation have taken a toll. The Delta today is a place of frustrated expectation and deep-rooted mistrust.

The Niger Delta issue has a historical antecedent to military shortfalls in governance. Long years of neglect and conflict in the area have fostered a siege mentality among the youths who feel they are condemned to a future without hope and so see conflict and violence as strategies to escape deprivation. The current happenings in the region paints bad picture of the Nigeria’s image abroad. In order to achieve the targeted production of four million barrels per day (bpd)

by 2010, the problem of Niger Delta should be confronted with every honesty it deserves Frazer (2007). A critical area of concern to the US is the Niger Delta, the home of the black gold... it is the genuine interest of the US therefore to work directly and bilaterally to secure the region since it is largely true, Nigerian security services are outgunned, outperformed, undermanned, underfunded to challenge the militant groups. This is the verdict of failure of the government to address the emergence situation in the region.

Once there is crisis in the oil industry, like the current situation in the Niger Delta, it is a crisis which ultimately generates tremor in the entire economy, politics and governance. We shall recall the event of February 2007 when the CNN reporter and Africa Correspondent. Jeff Koinange interviewed militants in the Niger Delta, in their creeks. The report showed 24 Filipino hostages being held by masked gunmen in the remote mangrove area of Niger Delta, all dressed weapons into the air, and the hostages appeared immobilized by fear. You can image such language of reportage, and its implication on the image and reputation of Nigeria abroad.

Statement of the Problem

The observations in the historical background reveal that foreigners especially those from the Western World have seen, written and believed Nigeria was bad, and have so reflected that in their media works: books, journals, magazines, newspapers and even films, or in their broadcasting media. They have portrayed Nigeria's image and reputation very badly. Such negative portrayal was captured by Egwu (2001:3). According to a BBC Programme on Africa broadcasting on 21st April 1996 by 7.45am, "for many years the image and perception of Africa in the Western World and her media have been that of primitively, corruption, instability incapability and woes".

In fact, foreign media projections of Africa are packaged in such a way that responses from Africa are at least lame reactions. According to the author, "Africa is suffering from media crisis which borders on identity confusion". In all foreign media, the image and reputation of Nigeria is that of a developing nation with developed and sophisticated crime of all sorts ranging from fraud, cheat, corruption, armed robbery, political assassination, electoral fraud, bad leadership and mismanagement of resources, among others. In deed, foreign media, including their books and films, have so negatively painted Nigeria and Nigerians that even Nigerian in Diaspora are treated with arms-length, suspicion and fear, which often resulted in

not exhaustively concluding any case involving Nigerians in foreign lands before passing unpleasant judgement on them. Nigerians living and doing businesses in Europe and America, including South Africa often suffer extra-judicial killings, unwarranted deportation and other inhuman treatments not as a result of what they committed, but as a result of what was being perceived about them based on wrong judgement as being portrayed in most of the foreign mainstream media.

All these accusations about Nigeria as a nation is never peculiar to Nigeria alone. Even in the so called advanced countries, there are crimes of all magnitudes here and there on their streets, banks and other important places like worship centres, school etc. their nationals often engage in highly unprofessional activities like drug trafficking, robbery, kidnapping fraud and others, and heaven has not been let lose.

In fact, Nigeria is a nation, with a very high national power. It has all the components of national power which include its geography, population, economy, military organization, and government at various levels, social, cultural and psychological elements. Ukpabi (1987). National power depends to a very large extent upon the economics resources which a nation possesses. The possess of these economic resources does not qualify a nation as a powerful one, unless such resources are harnessed fully.

Therefore, the intangible elements which can affect national power include people's will, morale, national power image and character, culture, nationalism and ideology. The fear of this paper is that the image and reputation of Nigeria have suffered abroad, and will continue to suffer if not properly and appropriately managed by professional image launderers. Something must be done now to save Nigeria and Nigerians from further embarrassments in the hands of foreigners and their governments. In order to pursue this onerous task of managing Nigeria's already battered image and reputation, we have to adopt the suggestion put forward by Obiora (2011:51). The application of marketing concept philosophy in the business of governance is based on the simple proportion that it is essential for government to win and woo public acceptance in a democratic society, for nothing can succeed without the approval of the people.

We, therefore have to apply global and export marketing advertising approach in tacking our image management. Like the suggestion of Nwosu and Nkamnebe (2006:240) in order to achieve active success in marketing Nigerian products abroad using advertising, we must be

aggressive in positioning our products in the minds of target buyers. Our target buyers in our image/reputation as products are foreigners and foreign governments who do business or relate in one form or another with Nigerian and Nigeria government.

Objectives

Citing Ogundipe, Okiyi (2004:24) “corporate organization like governments are realizing that a good business citizen is one which strikes the balance between what it owes society and what it expects from the society”. Therefore, Nigeria as a corporate entity must realize that it is within a global village. Inhabitants of the global village are watching it closely, so it has a lot of social responsibilities to perform. Like Theodore Levitt (1998) quoted by Okiyi, “social responsibility ensures that corporate would eventually invest its will, including all embracing duties, obligations and finally powers”. In trying to fulfill and perform social responsibilities, every nation, according to Ilba (2007:112) “should look for its corporate identity”. This is because without proper identification of a country’s corporate identity it can be difficult to manage unidentified identify, image or reputation. For anybody who does not know his worth and what he is in the society would go around messing himself up, so is a nation. We must all realize that “Nigeria” is our “monolithic identity”, as a nation, and we do not have any other country. Our country is “Nigeria”, and we are “Nigerians”. So, corporate identity, as already discussed, deals on who you are, what you do, how you do it and how people around you see, interpret and regard you.

Nigeria’s image and reputation have been negatively portrayed, exhibited and perceived abroad, the objectives of this study shall therefore include:

- i. To find out whether foreigners and foreign governments have noticed significant improvement in Nigeria’s corporate governance in the recent time.
- ii. To find out whether foreigners and foreign governments are aware that Nigeria has since put in place all the economic and financial crime laws, for example, Advance Fee Fraud (419), Money Laundering Act, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act, Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) Act AND Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, in order to check bribery, graft, corruption, advance fee fraud and nepotism in both Nigeria’s and Nigerians’ lives, ie in both public and private lives of Nigerians.

Nigeria is also signatory to various international and regional conventions, pacts, treaties, etc. For example, extractive industries transparency initiatives, United Nations Combating Against Corruption, convention for the Suppression of the traffic in persons and of the Exploitation of the prostitution of others, and so on.

Using Public Relations and Advertising Concepts in Managing Nigeria's Image and Reputation

There is no gain saying the fact that Nigeria's image in the eyes of the international community is bad, smelling and stinking. There is no doubt that bad leadership, corruption, bribery and fraud exist in Nigeria and are practiced by Nigerians, to the extent that the canker worms have eaten deep into the people's bone marrows. At public and private lives, one perceives monumental height of corruption. Tile and Wafure (2000:3): in Nigeria, cases of failed bank, fraud, 419 and other financial crimes and misappropriates in government ministries, parastatals, etc. exist up to consequences of corruption are adverse because a corrupt society is not a free society.

In fact, corruption in Nigeria has contributed to the collapse of some key industries, government parastatals, banks; it equally had led to injustices, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without trials as well as abuse of fundamental human rights of many Nigerians. But, Nigeria is not alone in the act of corruption; it is found in all nations as and in all human beings, especially in capitalist nations. Thomas Hobbes, the 16th century English social scientist observes that corruption is "ego-driven" and is found in human nature. For international community to categorize Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations, is nothing but to paint a dog black in order to kill it. The rising profile of Nigerian in all works of life is becoming a threat, so by calling Nigeria bad names is the only weapon to discredit it and dampens its morale and emerging credentials. Corruption exists in Europe, America, and other advanced countries.

The exaggerated size of corruption in Nigeria is causing conflict and misunderstanding between Nigeria and the peddlers of such image destroying rumours. Therefore, the PR/Advertising practitioners in collaboration with the government should identify such groups sponsoring the Nigeria's character assassination. Owumalam (2004:174) "the group with any destructive tendencies against other group must be identified, analyzed and classified according to their interest". The strong belief of this paper is that the most problem confronting Nigeria

stems from lack of understanding of its peculiar situation by the international community. Take for example, America invaded Iraq on the pretext that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, and went on to castigate Iraq in the “International media” as preparing to destroy the world. But could not justify the claims after investigation which shows that such castigation has an interior motive. That could be likened to the Nigeria’s situation. Since the interested international communities in Nigeria oil wealth could not physically and openly attack Nigeria, they resulted to character assassination.

In order to counter such evil intensions, Public relations experts have to design effective information strategies capable of presenting issues aptly and interpreting meaning clearly for the world to understand the underlining motives of those enemies of Nigeria. Nigeria PR practitioners could adopt what Professor Ikechukwu Nwosu calls “Total Quality Management (TQM) and Total Quality Public Relations Management (TQPRM) techniques” in managing Nigeria’s already dainted image, Nwosu (2004:189). TQM is a practical management strategy that combines older and new management strategies or approaches such as management by objectives (MBNO), marketing management (MM) and public relations blended into cohesive, formidable and functional management strategy.

In furtherance to this suggestion, this paper posits that, managing Nigeria’s image/reputation abroad, is a crisis management arising as result of interest. Salu (1993) “conventional method in crisis management is seizing the initiative, taking control of what happened before it engulfed the system or society (like Nigeria), planning for a crisis as the key to corporate survival”.

Nigerian PR and Advertising Practitioners can equally embark on what (Nwosu & Nkamnebe, 2006) call international, global and multinational advertising. According to the authors, this type of advertising is aimed at promoting sales of p products, services, ideas, nations etc, beyond national frontiers, borders or boundaries. They further suggest that to achieve success in marketing Nigerian products abroad using advertising, “we must be aggressive in positioning and re-positioning our products in the minds of our target audiences through careful planning”. The authors are not alone in such suggestion, Field (1990:73) “media planners in Advertising and Public Relations organizations are responsible for determining exactly what the clients will end up with if they utilize certain advertising/PR strategies”. So, PR/Advertising planners should develop as we can understand, is not easy, but no PR and Advertising Strategy can

succeed without careful and adequate planning. Kaghku (2007:8) “Public Relations success is based on optimism, a wellspring of ideas and much thoughtful planning”. Therefore, the analysis of any Public Relations is to determine the ways its practitioners approach their work; the philosophy, attitude, ethical stand and knowledge of technical skills.

The new concept in Public Relations, proposed by Nwosu (2007:2) emerged on the fact that no one can practice Public Relations successfully without touching or drawing from other management, mass communication, liberal and fine arts, the social sciences and others. So, modern practitioners in PR must acquire broad-based knowledge in these relevant disciplines to enable them plan very adequately in executing their strategies in image/reputation management and good governance. According to Onah (2007:174). “the role of Public Relations in sustaining Yar’Adua’s envisaged new brand Nigeria include to advertise and market Nigeria for international acceptance”. Public relations practitioners must use advocacy and private dialogue as important tools to influence the policy reforms of the Federal Government.

It is imperative to pay attention to the New PR and Advertising concepts if the much talked about marketing the “New Brand Nigeria” abroad is to be achieved. PR as a matter of fact, must embrace these new concepts in this onerous task of image and reputation management function.

The Role of Disapora in Nigeria’s Image and Reputation Management

The setting up of diaspora committee in the National Assembly shows the importance Nigerian government attaches to image/reputation management abroad. The committee in both chambers severally and occasionally organize diaspora for a wherein Nigerian of all works of life living and doing business abroad were either invited home or made to gather at interactive moment with members of the diaspora committee from both chambers of the National Assembly.

Such interactive meets have a lot of role in the Nigeria’s reputation/image management. According to News Watch (March, 2008), such meetings afford members of the National Assembly the opportunity of educating and enlightening Nigerians abroad about the true position of things at home. With such education, information and enlightenment, the diaspora would be appealed to take such good messages back to their respective countries of abode. Not

only that the for a urge Nigerians living abroad to carry pout and spread good messages, information and data-facts and figures-about Nigeria to and in there host countries, the for a are also used to caution Nigerians abroad to be mindful of the kinds of life they live and the types of business they engage themselves in.

In fact, diaspora initiative is one of the most effective Public Relations and Advertising Processes techniques aimed at managing Nigeria's image/reputation abroad. The initiative uses Nigerians in diaspora as both Public Relatives Officers (PROs) and Advertising Practitioners (Aps) who preach and market Nigeria to the outside world. The diaspora's attitude, behaviour and speeches speak volumes about Nigeria at their resident countries.

Banjo (2008) "diaspora initiative by the National Assembly is a new concept in the Nigeria's image management abroad". It has added to the PR job our ambassadors and other top government officials who carry out various assignments on behalf of the federal government do abroad. Collaborating this view, the Minister of Information and Communication, Prof. Dora Akunyili during the 2009 National Broadcasting Commission Interactive Forum in Enugu, observes that unless Nigerians themselves in character and speeches began to tell the world that Nigerian is good and her people are well behaved, foreign media would never stop painting Nigeria in bad light. She further observed that Nigerians were not as bad as they were being painted. In comparative terms, the minister remarked, number of crimes committed in a day cannot match with the no of crimes committed in one state in the United States of America on daily basis, still Americans were very proud of their country.

We have to adopt this concept of loving our country, Nigeria. Tell other nationals that Nigeria is good and that Nigerians are not as bad as the foreign media have made the worlds believed. If every Nigerian living abroad preaches this "good news" about Nigeria, the task of using PR and advertising to manage Nigeria's image/reputation would have been made simple.

Facts and Figures about Nigeria's Situation

Opinions and views generated in the course of this study show that a lot of damage has been done on Nigeria's image/reputation abroad. Such damage is both historical and psychology. Historical in the sense that most of the history or commentary books about Nigerian are written by the foreigners, who used such media of communication to create primitive, under development, corruptive, mismanagement and bad leadership impressions about Nigeria. The

results of such biased and public affairs analysts, to say the least, affect the psyche and psychology of many Nigerians. Many of us hold the erroneous beliefs that since it has been written and recorded in various print materials books, journals, magazines and newspapers many years ago, that Nigeria is corrupt. Nigeria thrives in bad leadership and poverty, therefore, it could be part of our culture or inheritance from the ancestors. Many people see and believe so, and then indulge in such vices without re-thinking of its implication in our corporate image as a nation. We forget the remark made by Ilba (2007:112). One of the things many new African nations did immediately after independence process was to “Africanize” their countries, themselves and their ways of life.

Africanization would have erased the stigma created by foreign authors and foreign media about Nigeria. In fact, our inability to Africanize or Nigerianise early, created most of the image identity problems we are facing today. Sambe (2007:56) carefully observed that at independence, Nigerian’s thought wore most of colonial characterization which include authoritarianism, misrule and master-servant attitude, and non-challant attitude towards changing the thought and that brought untold hardship to the citizenry. That authoritarian inheritance that centralizes government and governance in the hands of very few further concentrated wealth in the purse and generated mass poverty. Poverty is a major course of corruption, misrule and other vices plaguing Nigeria and other third world countries. The perceived corruptive tendencies in the first indigenous leaders after self-government (independence) brought in the military into governance, as a corrective corrupt and fraudulent administration Nigeria ever had. To worsen the matter, its long stay in governance created monumental image destruction at home and abroad and that is why we are suffering today. The battered image and reputation we are trying to launder is mostly caused by the military. The military destroyed corporate governance and alienated majority of the populace from government.

The above gloomy picture was captured by the African Peer Review Mechanism Report, (no.8 of May 2008:10). Nigeria is characterized by systemic governance problems, ineffective implementation of laws, highly uncompetitive economy; large informal economy, high levels of unemployment etc.

The book specifically noted weakness in the legislative arm of government in its oversight functions, including overlapping regulatory powers and conflicting jurisdictions. No doubt,

these are existing problems that need to be tackled so that our image and reputation within, and outside Nigeria will be cleansed.

In this regard, media have a serious role to play here, using the services of both PR and advertising practitioners and organization/agencies. But our media is weak too in this area because of over concentration on politics and lack of interest in investigative journalism.

Nigerian media and their operators including Public relations and Advertising Practitioners should pay much attention to issue management. Cited by Nwodu (2007:97), Mackey (2004) defines issue management as maintaining the viability and reputation of the organizing or industry by anticipating, understanding and keeping in touch with significant current of thought in society. Managing Nigeria's image/reputation abroad demands issue management approach from the stakeholders. Obasi (2007:85) insists that mass media have power to foster critical changes in image campaigns. Advertising is a powerful auxiliary in the positioning process and image laundering (Agbakoba, 1997:262). But, Nwosu (2006:80) posits that positioning function links advertising and Public relations together, quoting Kotler (1990) who defines positioning as the "act of designing the company's image and value offer so that the segment's customers understand and appreciate what the company stands for". Although both PR and Advertising play significant role in brand or image positioning, the view of Klepper (1973:89) is that advertising adds perpetual value to image of a product, company, organization or society in the minds of those whom the advertisement is directed at, and so creates positive image of the product before the customers.

Conclusion

There are facts and figures to show that Nigeria has bad image/reputation as a result of bad leadership that bleeds corruption, bribery, poverty, fraud (419) and other similar vices like the emerging trend of kidnapping in the Niger Delta region. Much have equally been written by foreigners and Nigerians about Nigerian depicting bad image to the extent that virtually all those who have come across such record books and read them, see Nigeria as a corrupt nation. Not only in record books, on daily basis some foreign media and independent media in Nigeria spoken of the Nigeria's questioning image, even in the present 21st century. Therefore, there are evidences (facts and figures) to confirm some of the allegations of corruption, bad

leadership, mismanagement of national resources, poverty, crisis in the Niger Delta area and similar vices capable of bringing disrepute to the image of Nigeria.

But the opinion of this paper is that with time, especially with the current approach to governance in Nigeria, most of such tendencies that course corruption will go. Therefore, we conclude that using effective and efficient Public Relations and Advertising plus the Diaspora initiative tools we can begin to educate the international community of the laudable efforts being put in place to re-position the image of Nigeria.

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