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Public Relations and Image Management Strategies of Nigeria Security & Civil Defence Corps After the Infamous “Oga at the Top” Incident

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This paper evaluates the place of public relations in the image management strategies of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) particularly after the infamous “Oga at the Top” interview by the Lagos State Commandant of the Corps. The paper uses questionnaire and the interview schedule as instruments to gather data from members of the public who are familiar with the “Oga at the Top” incident and the public relations officers (PROs) of the NSCDC respectively. From the data gathered, we conclude that the NSCDC adopted different image management strategies to salvage the corporate image of the Corps; that the image management strategies have engendered a cordial relationship between the media and the Corps; and that the infamous “Oga at the Top” incident brought some fame to the Corps as free advertisement as well as questioned the capacity of its officials to discharge their duties effectively. As a fallout of this evaluation, it is recommended that NSCDC management should endeavour to engage only professionals in the field of public relations who would understand and implement public relations objectives and functions in the organisation and that all ranking officers of the NSCDC should endeavour to involve the public relations unit in all their engagement with the external publics to avoid a repeat of the “Oga at the Top” incident that affected the Corps’ image negatively.

Keywords: image management strategies, “Oga at the Top”, publics, corporate image, NSCDC, public relations

Introduction

The image management strategies of an organisation can help to make or mar the organisation’s corporate image. Organisations that relate well with their publics tend to have positive corporate image while those that do not relate well with their publics tend to be perceived negatively. How organisations are perceived by their

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publics therefore helps to determine the degree to which publics cooperate, support, and patronise such organisations. Therefore, it is pertinent for organisations to design and implement image management programmes in ways that impress their target publics.

Public relations herein after referred to as PR, since its inception has been a much talked about discipline, but not necessarily for right reasons. Everyone uses PR, but criticizes others for using it to gain undeserving mileage (Jethwaney & Sarkar, 2009, p. 1). The importance of public relations to organisations and in different human endeavours cannot be overemphasized, hence its use across many organisations is a critical component of the organisation-publics linkage.

Many scholars and authors have different perspectives to the meaning of public relations. In any case, there is no universally accepted definition of public relations because it is and does mean many different things to different professionals in the discipline. However, we shall consider public relations here as a management function that focuses on the relationship and communications that individuals and organisations have with other groups (called publics) for the purpose of creating mutual understanding and goodwill between that organisation and its identified publics.

According to Kotler and Amstrong (2008, p. 441),

Public relations entails the building of good relations with the companies or organisation public, by obtaining favourable publicity, building a corporate image, and handling unfavourable rumours, stories or events. Public relations as the name implies, is used to promote mutual relationship among people, place, ideas, goods, services, nations, activities, and even organisations and their publics.

As humans, we interact with the society, hence we use public relations to build and maintain our status. Organisations have always used PR strategies to rebuild interest in declining image, commodities, and service. Harlow (1976) as cited in Uka (2008, p. 4) stipulated that:

Public relations is the distinctive management function which maintains mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its public, involves in the management of problems or issue, help management to keep informed and responsive to public opinion defines and, emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest, helps management keep abreast at and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principle tools.

The public of an organisation is an individual group or another organisation that has a relationship with the organisation. The publics could also be referred to as stakeholders, and are characterised by their capacity and tendency to impact upon the organisation and vice versa (Lawrence, 2014, p. 1 cited in Koko, 2017). The success of every organisation is largely dependent on the public perception of such organisation, and as such to aim at a good public perception from both internal and external publics will boost the image of that organisation. The way an organisation is being perceived by its various public may be positive or negative. Thus, organisation or government agencies are expected to strive to be portrayed positively because the positive image of every organisation or agency provides for patronage and positive media reportage which in turn gives positive perception to the agency involved.

Image management of an organisation is inevitable because the image of any organisation depends solely on public perception of that organisation. Image is a mental picture of the thought of how something looks or might look. Therefore, the image of an organisation may be an assumption depending on the perception of individuals or the organisations involved. Thus, every organisation has a primary role of monitoring public

perception of its image, and management of that image through good Public relations strategies. Good image management strategy can also serve as a panacea for negative media reports and negative public perception. Image management of any organisation should be solely aimed at gaining positive perception for the organisation; the implication may be that, by so doing, the organisation may gain good image and patronage from its publics.

Public relations are a management function that has its goal to persuade and inform various publics on behalf of a client. This often seeks to change a negative image into a natural or positive image of the organisation. Thus, the management functions of PR should be the priority of every image maker of an organisation, so as to be able to advice management on policies that will build positive image for that agency or organisation.

When the practice of PR is ineffective in an organisation, the organisation loses credibility in the eyes of its publics. Thus, the effective implementation and application of a good public relations strategy in Nigeria Security and Civil Defence may enhance the corporate image management and positive public perception of the Corps.

NSCDC in Retrospect

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) was prior to year 2003 a voluntary organisation. The Corps was established in 1967 as Lagos Civil Defence Committee mainly for the purpose of guiding and informing the residents of Lagos and its environs on how to react and behave during the Civil War. Ade (2006, p. 4) stated that “Civil Defence is a joint act of protection of life and properties in peace time and to carry out rescue, relief and rehabilitation duties before, during and after war or in other emergencies, like man-made disaster in any environment”.

The Act No.2 establishing the Corps as full fledge paramilitary outfit of government was signed into law by the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the then president and commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on June 2003 and since then, the NSCDC has been saddled with enormous security responsibilities which include but not limited to the following:

(1) Assist in the maintenance of peace and order and also in protection and rescue of the civil populace during the period of emergency.

(2) Recommend to the minister, the registration of private guard companies and keep a register for that purpose.

(3) Maintain a 24-hour surveillance over infrastructure, site, and projects of government at all levels.

(4) Institute legal proceedings against anybody in the name of the Attorney-General of the Federation. In accordance with the provision of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, against any person who is reasonably suspected to have committed an offence under the Act or is involved in any:

- Criminal activity;
- Terrorism;
- Chemical poisoning and oil pipeline vandalism, oil spillage, and nuclear waste poisoning;
- Industrial espionage or fraud, riot, civil disorder, strike or religious unrest, or activities aimed at frustrating any government policy or programme, and evacuating civilian population during period of emergency.

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (Amended) Act 2007, ACT No.6, further increased the responsibility of the NSCDC to include the following as amended. The Corps shall:

- Recommend to the minister the registration of private guard companies;
- From time to time, inspect the premises of private guard companies, their training facilities and approve same if it is up to standard;
- Supervise and monitor the activities of all private guard companies and keep a register for that purpose;
- Periodically organize workshop and training courses for private guard companies;
- Seal up any private guard company which operates without a valid license.

(5A) Enter and search any premises and seize any material suspected to have been used in the vandalization of suspected proceeds;

(5B) Enter and search premises of any suspected illegal dealer in petroleum product or material. These are some of the areas amended in the 2007 Civil Defence Act.

Statement of the Problem

In 1992, the Federal Government of Nigeria rationalised the departments in its ministries. Each ministry was to have eight departments, one of which was public relations (Akpan, 2011, p. 8). As federal policies in Nigeria are usually applicable in the ministries and departments, agencies such as the NSCDC are supposed to maintain their public relations units with objectives, vision, and mission in order to portray good image and positive public perception of the organisation.

Given about two decades of maintenance of public relations department in Nigeria, it would be expected that this department would have built a positive image for its agency and thus, facilitate a good relationship between the Corps, the media, and their various publics, but researches by Agim (2004, p. 6) show that the government of Nigeria and its agencies are negatively portrayed by the media. Second, the regimented nature of the NSCDC that has made image management issues seems to be treated as secondary, and by so doing, the implication may be that the management is always reactive instead of being proactive in management of its corporate image.

This study was inspired by the unfortunate incident that took place at the Lagos State Command of the NSCDC, where the State Commandant, Mr. Shem Obafaiye, in an interview with the *Channels Television* morning programme *Sunrise Daily* on the 2nd of April 2013, was unable to say the website of the organisation, but rather said he did not want to say one thing, while his “Oga at the top” says another. That statement “Oga at the Top” became the news of the day for weeks and both comedians and musicians took advantage of it. The utterance by the commandant ridiculed the organisations corporate image and gave negative public perception of the NSCDC. Now, the slogan “My Oga at the Top” is commonly used by the public to address officials of the Corps. It is not certain whether the corporate image of NSCDC is still negatively affected by the “Oga at the Top” incident.

It is worrisome that in spite of the existence of a public relations unit, with a public relations officer (PRO), the Corps has continued to experience negative media coverage which is worsening its corporate image. Thus, to what extent do public relations influence the image management strategies of NSCDC and how does this affect the Corps’ corporate image?

Objectives of the Study

This paper generally aims to evaluate the place of public relations in the image management strategies of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) particularly after the infamous “Oga at the Top”

interview by the Lagos State Commandant of the Corps. The specific objectives of the paper include, to:

- (1) find out the image management strategies adopted by NSCDC after the infamous “Oga at the Top” incident;
- (2) find out the extent to which NSCDC utilise public relations in its corporate image management of the Corps.

Research Questions

This study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the image management strategies adopted by the NSCDC after the infamous “Oga at the Top” incident?
- (2) To what extent does the NSCDC utilise public relations in its corporate image management of the Corps?

Research Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were tested in this paper thus:

- H₁: There is a significant relationship between the image management strategies of the NSCDC and the corporate image of the Corps;
- H₂: Corporate image of the NSCDC is positively affected by the public relations practice of the Corps.

Review of Concepts

Public Relations

It is not easy to formulate a universally acceptable definition of public relations. This is because of the ubiquitous nature of the discipline, which has made it an object of many interpretations and meanings (Akpan, 2011). However, in order to understand what public relations are and do, a few definitions will suffice. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985, p. 3) defined public relations as “The management function which evaluates public attitude, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with the public interest, and plans and executes programmes of action to earn public understanding and acceptance”.

Cutlip et al. (1985), after the review of numerous definitions of public relations, came out with a common notion and ideal public relations functions that help them to frame their conceptual definition of public relations. The common notion conveyed in the various definitions is that public relations:

Is a planned and sustained programme conducted by an organisation’s management that deals with the relationship between the organisation and its various constituent publics. And also monitors awareness, opinions, attitude and behaviours inside and outside the organisation, analyse the impact of organisation policies, procedures and actions on various publics. Public relations also helps to adjust those policies, procedures and actions found to be in conflict with the public interest and organisations survival, counsels management on the establishment of new policies, procedures and actions that will be mutually beneficial to the organisation and its publics, establish and maintain two-way communication between the organisation and its various publics, and also to produce specific changes in awareness, opinions, attitudes, and behaviours inside and outside the organisation. Finally, to maintain relationship between an organisation and its public. (Cutlip et al., 1985, p. 4)

Based on this notion of public relations, Cutlip et al. (1985, p. 4) defined public relations as the “management function that identifies, establishes, and maintain mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and the various publics”. Hassan (2013, p. 513) stated that “Public relations is the business,

organisational philanthropic, or social function of managing communication between an organisation and its audience". He further argued that public relations are a separate career option that came into existence when lots of private or government companies and institutions felt the need to market their products, service, and facilities. Public relations are important to all organisation and prominent personalities.

Hassan (2013, p. 513) also described that public relations as the art and science of managing communication between an organisation and its key constituents to build, manage, and sustain its positive reputation. George (2006, p. 366) defined "public relations as the art and science of establishing and promoting a favourable relationship with the public". Public relations are a planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication (Sietel, 2011, p. 36). He further states that "Around the world, the practice of public relations has grown enormously. The international public relations Associations boasted a strong membership, and the practice flourished from Latin America to Africa to Europe to Russia to China" (p. 37). In 1988, the public relations Society of America formally adopted the following definition of public relations that public relations help organisations and its publics adapt mutually to each other. From the above definitions, public relations are about establishing and maintaining goodwill, and mutually beneficial relationship through effective communication among individual, organisation, and its various publics.

Image Management

Image management is an ongoing, proactive process of evaluating and controlling the impact of the organisation appearance on its staff, their various publics, and the achievement of the organisational goals (Rasband, 2012, p. 3). An organisation may see itself as doing well in its roles and attitude towards its publics but the publics may see it as not friendly, non-responsive, uncooperative, etc. (Akpan, 2011, p. 1). Rasband (2012) further stressed that as an individual living and working in a highly complex competitive society, you must recognise and understand the impact of your image as it communicates to you and then others. Organisations must sustain an effective image with their stakeholders in order to maximise their chances for success (Joseph, 2003, p. 3).

Organisational image management is therefore a dialogic process in which organisations and stakeholders communicate with one another to co-create the image of the organisation. An organisation image is the "shared meaning attitude, knowledge, and opinions" of organisational stakeholders, influenced at least in part, by strategic communication emanating from the organisation (Moffitt, 1994, p. 166). Moffitt's work provides support for the argument that image management is a dialogic process, indeed she argues that sometimes organisations have little influence over the image held by stakeholders. Ginzler, Kramer, and Sutton (1993, p. 248) further clarified the dialogic process of organisational image management thus:

An organisation image represents a collaborative social construction between organisation's top management and the multiple actors who comprise the organisational audiences. A particular interpretation of an organisations image may be proposed by top management. But the interpretation must in turn be endorsed, or at the very least not rejected, by their various audiences if it is to persist.

Organisational image does not just appear; rather, they are strategically thought-out and planned for by organisations. Likewise, the development of organisations images is an ongoing process that includes communication with organisational stakeholders (Joseph, 2003, p. 7). Joseph further argues that organisational images are therefore created and sustained by both organisations and stakeholders; while the organisation is

actively attempting to project a particular image of itself (i.e., identity), stakeholders are forming perceptions of the organisation. According to organisational image management theory, an organisation's image is built upon the perception that the stakeholders have about the organisation (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

The NSCDC is confronted with various image challenges, ranging from poor recruitment process, allegations of corruption during promotion, poor investigation of cases before sending them to court, illegal detention of suspected offenders, to poor auction process of trucks which were exhibits in court. These image problems have been attributed to the weight of bad publicity, negative public perception, and erroneous impression created by the few officials of the agency that engage us such unwholesome practices. This situation is corroborated by the public relations officer of the Corps.

Corporate Image Management of an Organisation

Public relations and image management scholars including Formbrun (1996), Villanova, Zinkhan and Hyman (2000), Bromley (2003), Rayner (2003), and Adeniji and Osibanjo (2012) are of the view that organisations are understandably concerned with managing their corporate image. Accordingly, there is a strong positive correlation between how people perceive an organisation and the pro-corporate supportive behaviour. Corporate images are perceived as the mental pictures of an organisation. It is the sum total of these perceived characteristics of the corporation that we refer to as the corporate image. Every organisation has its image whether the organisation does anything about it or not. Corporate image is formed based on the stakeholders' perceptions of specific company actions as well as associated industry and nation issues.

Formbrun (1996) defined corporate image as the overall estimation in which a company is held by its constituents through perceptual representation of an organisation's past actions and future prospects when compared with other leading rivals. According to Rayner (2003), corporate image confers clear-cut advantages and privileges on companies. It proves difficult to imitate, at the same time, it creates responsibilities. Whereas, the obligations that managers and the organisation owe must meet the personal standards of the employees, the quality standards of customers, the ethical standards of the community, and the profitability standards of the investors. Therefore, organisations sustain their corporate image by building strong and supportive relationships with all of their constituents, i.e., customers, suppliers, investors, community, government, etc. (Formbrun, 1996).

According to Bromley (2003), corporate image is the summary of the impressions or perceptions held by its external stakeholders. Similarly, Villanova et al. (2000) noted that corporate image is an overall perception of the company held by different segments of the public. Corporate image includes information and inferences about the company as an employee, employer, customer, community, supplier, and corporate citizen.

Adeniji and Osibanjo (2012) emphasised that since an organisation's corporate image affects stakeholders' behaviour, they strive to develop and manage their image for many reasons among which are; promoting favourable relationship with the community in the environment they operate, else it may experience difficulty in recruitment, selection, and maintaining the employee morale; influencing investors and financial institutions, and partnerships; establishing a corporate goodwill for the organisation; creating good identity for the employees thereby leading to their satisfaction; and promoting good relationship with the government, opinion leaders, and various interest groups. Hsieh and Kai (2008) referred to good corporate image as a major promotional tool which refers to building good relationships with the company's public by obtaining favourable publicity and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories, and events.

In comparison to organisational reputation, organisational image is a much less stable concept and therefore much more amenable to change. Some argue that organisational image is therefore so ephemeral that to consider it at all is a waste of time, and to consider its management is foolish at best. Scott Cutlip, professor and author of public relations research and teaching materials, has been quoted as saying, "I loathe the word image" (Gottsi & Wilson, 2001. p. 27 cited in Koko, 2017). The researcher argues, however, that the concept of organisational image is very important to public relations researchers and practitioners. An organisational image is the "shared meanings, attitudes, knowledge, and opinions" of organisational stakeholders, influenced, at least in part, by strategic communication emanating from the organisation" (Moflitt, 1994, p. 166). An image is "something projected" by the organisation, and "something perceived or interpreted by others". Organisational image is therefore created and sustained by both the organisation and its various stakeholders; while the organisation is actively attempting to project a particular image of itself, stakeholders are forming perceptions of the organisation. Every organisation strives to be perceived in a good light, because public perception of an organisation determines the level of patronage and success of the organisation.

Theoretical Framework

The importance of a good theory or combination of theories in any research cannot be overemphasised. Theory and research are inseparable (Osuala, 2001, p. 5). A good theory is the most practical useful tool at the disposal of the researcher as such, theoretical framework establishes a vantage point, a perspective, a set of lenses through which the researcher views the problem. As indicated early, the management of organisational image is inevitable to the growth and development of such organisation. This study, therefore, is guided by the Organisational Image Management Theory and Image Repair Theory.

Organisational Image Management Theory

The theory of Organisational Image Management argues that the primary goal of public relations is the creation and maintenance of an organisations' image. Organisations communicate strategically with stakeholders to encourage desirable image and discourage undesirable ones. Organisational Image Management Theory is developed from theories of image management and self-presentation of the level of the individual (Gottman, 1959). Although organisations are different from individuals in important ways, organisations can be, and are treated in the way as individuals by many theorists and practitioners.

According to Organisational Image Management Theory, an organisation's image is the perception that the stakeholders have about the organisation, so it is aligned most closely with the "communicated image" (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). This is an important distinction that suggests that dialogue is necessary for the creation of an organisational image; specifically, an organisational image is developed dialectically by the organisation and its stakeholder's overtime.

Organisations must sustain an effective image with their stakeholders in order to maximise their chances for success (Garbett, 1998). Although failure is not inevitable when an organisation's image is tarnished, it is more likely, as many studies have demonstrated (Baum & Oliver, 1992; Brinson & Benoit, 1999; Dacin, 1997; All references cited in Koko, 2017). What is effective, however, is constantly influx changes in the organisation's environment, and changes in the organisation itself make image management challenging. The concern of both organisation and stakeholders are affected by a host of variables, including market dynamics, technology, and contemporary social and political issues, among others. The challenge for organisations lies in being able to understand these changes and continually adjust the organisation's image in anticipation of and

response to environmental changes. Furthermore, the multiplicity of organisational stakeholders demands a strategic approach to image management in which the organisation attempts to present itself in terms relevant to all stakeholders, both internal and external (Garbett, 1998).

Although challenging, organisations must engage in image management in order to be successful. Organisations image management is important for at least two reasons. First, image determines responses toward the organisation. Second, shared images make possible the independent relationships that exist between organisations and stakeholders (Treadwell & Harrison, 1995, as cited in Joseph, 2003). Although each person's perception of an organisation is subject to idiosyncrasies, the collectively shared image of an organisation held by most stakeholders, when managed properly, allows for coordination of organisational activity that is consistent with stakeholder expectations. To this extent, the organisational image management theory is relevant to this study because it gives a guide on how the image management of NSCDC can be maintained for positive media reportage.

However, since the Organisational Image Management Theory manages image situations and sustains positive image for the Corps, there is a need to look at a theory that takes care of urgent image management needs, like that of the incidence of the "Oga at the Top". Hence, the inclusion of the Image Repair Theory to the study, which proffers strategies that could urgently handle image issues, like the one the NSCDC had with the "Oga at the Top" incident.

Image Repair Theory

Image Repair Theory in public relations has its root embedded in both rhetoric, mostly political rhetoric and social science. Social science has a long history of development in public relations. Five image repair strategies with sub-categories have emerged from this line research: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective actions, and mortification (Benoit & Pang, 2008, pp. 247-251).

When using denial, a communicative entity can either use simple denial by claiming that it did not perform the act, or shift the blame by saying someone else is responsible. In evasion of responsibility, the communicative entity can argue it was provoked and responded to the act of another, argue defeasibility due to a lack of information or ability, and claim the event was an accident or it has good intentions. Communicative entities can also aim to reduce the offensiveness of an act through bolstering (stress its own good traits), minimisation (the act is not as serious as presented), differentiation (act is not as offensive as other similar ones), transcendence (there are more important considerations), attacking the accuser, or compensating the victims. When using corrective action as an image repair strategy, the communicative entity offers a plan to solve or prevent a problem. When apologizing, the communicative entity (organisation) practices mortification.

Image repair strategies are seldom used in isolation. When an organisation uses a combination of bolstering, shifting blame, and corrective action, it uses separation as an image repair strategy. The image repair theory is relevant to this study, because it provides for solutions of image management problems like the one face by Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps after the "Oga at the Top" incident.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey method to investigate image management strategies of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, after the infamous "Oga at the Top" interview. The survey method is appropriate for obtaining opinions of people in large population setting, and allows for standardised, quantified, and qualitative data (O'Leary, 2005). The survey methods therefore lend itself to this study by virtue of the large population

and the aim/objective of the study; the survey method was used to ascertain opinions and dispositions of respondents on the subject matter.

The population for the study was drawn from the Abuja Municipal Area Council in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. The Abuja municipal area council was appropriate for the population of this study, because it is the largest and most developed council area in Abuja, at the same time, it plays host to the headquarters of most of the federal agencies, including the national headquarters of the NSCDC, NSCDC Academy, and all the military and paramilitary agencies in Nigeria. The national population census of 2006 puts the population of Abuja Municipal Area Council at 776, 298 and, as projected in 2017, 1,040,239. However, since the population was too large for the study, Taro Yamani Yard's statistical formula was applied to get the required sample for the study.

The sample size for this study was 400 respondents. This was derived from using the Taro's statistical formula, where " n " is sample size sought; " e " represents the level of significance $(0.05)^2$, and " N " is the population size. The choice of Taro was informed by the virtue of its suitability in the determination of sample from heterogeneous and finites population.

The multistage sampling technique involving cluster, and purposive and simple random sampling was used for this study. The Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) which is the area of the study was clustered into two zones. Zone A includes: Asokoro 55 streets, Maitama 71, Lugbe 56, Gariki 97, Utako/Jabi 55, while Zone B has Nyanya six streets, Gwarinpa nine, Central Business Area 16, Wuse 406, and Kabusa\Gwagwa 31. In total, Zone A has 334 streets while Zone B has 468 streets. The cluster sampling technique is used when "natural" but relatively heterogeneous groupings are evident in a statistical population.

Within the Zones A and B clusters, the researcher for the purpose of the research simple randomly selected five streets in each of the zones. Making it a total of 10 streets from the two clustered zones, simple random procedure works with the proportion of the population needed for the research (Ohaja, 2003). The sampling starts by writing everything in the frame on a piece of paper, and initiated a draw after they were placed in a container. Using the hand drawing method, any street picked from the draw was deemed to have been selected. The drawing was done without replacement and continued until the five streets from each cluster were selected. However, the actual selection of the 400 respondents was done purposively. The researcher first asked potential respondents, if they are residents or workers in the selected streets and if they are familiar with the NSCDC. A further bias was to find out if they knew about the "Oga at the Top" incident. Those who answered in the affirmative were selected for the study, and they did not exceed the required 40 respondents from each street.

The major instrument of data collection for this study was the questionnaire and the interview schedule. The questionnaire was used to gather information from the respondents while the interview schedule was used to elicit information from the public relations officers of the NSCDC.

The second instrument, which is interview schedule, has eight major questions that are directed to the public relation offices of the Corps at the national headquarters, Rivers State Command, and Akwa Ibom State Command. Apart from the National Headquarters that was purposively selected as the hub of PR policies and practices of the Corps; the other two state commands were randomly selected to complement the response from the national headquarters.

The respondents were purposively sampled because of their knowledge about the NSCDC and the "Oga at the Top" incident. In total, 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents living or working in those selected streets. Purposive sampling technique includes subjects or elements selected for specific

characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Babbie (2011, cited in Koko, 2017) also argued that it is sometimes appropriate and valid to select a sample on the basis of knowledge that such a sample meets the purpose for the investigation.

Forty respondents which were purposively sampled from each of the 10 streets of Asokoro, Maitama, Wuse, Gariki, Utako/Jabi, Lugbe, Gwarinpa, Central area, Nyanya, and Kabusa/Gwagwa all in Abuja Municipal Area Council were administered the questionnaire. Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire distributed, 371 (92.75%) were retrieved, correctly filed and used for the analysis in this study. The remaining 29 copies of the questionnaire (7.25%) were either not retrieved or not correctly filled and could not be used for the analysis. Data gathered through the questionnaire are presented in frequency tables and simple percentages, while those from the interview are presented in the third person point of view narrative and explanation building approach.

On the image management strategies adopted by the Corps to tackle its image challenges after the “Oga at the Top” incident, data in Table 1 show that majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategies were effective.

Table 1

The Image Management Strategies Adopted by NSCDC After the “Oga at the Top” Incident Were Effective

Option	No. of respondents	% of respondents
SA	50	13.5
A	176	47.4
N	38	10.2
D	97	26.1
SD	10	2.7
Total	371	100

Also, this study sought to find out if the NSCDC can reclaim positive image for the Corps after the “Oga at the Top” incident. Data in Table 2 show that majority of the respondents, (58.8% and 25.3%) representing 218 and 94 respondents, strongly agreed and agreed respectively that NSCDC can reclaim positive image for the Corps after the “Oga at the Top” incident. Details are as presented in Table 2:

Table 2

NSCDC Can Reclaim Positive Image for the Corps After the Oga at Top Incident

Option	No. of respondents	% of respondents
SA	218	58.8
A	94	25.3
N	38	10.2
D	21	5.7
SD	0	0
Total	371	100

Three respondents were billed and actually interviewed for this study. They were the civil defence public relations officer, national headquarters, Abuja, and two commands public relations officers in the South-South Geopolitical zones of Nigeria—Rivers and Akwa Ibom States. These interviews were necessary to gather adequate information to answer specific research questions that centre on the image management strategies adopted by NSCDC and the utilisation of PR in NSCDC to provide for effective image management. Data gathered from the transcribed interviews showed that the concept of public relations is not an accidental affair

but a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort meant to polish the image of the Corps. Therefore, on the image management of the NSCDC, the national headquarters PRO noted that the image management strategies of the Corps include: carrying out public enlightenment programmes, organising workshops and seminars for media operatives and correspondents, engaging top show talks by bringing in experts to talk about the Corps, cultivating friendship with professional groups that can project the image of the Corps at different fora, and engaging different editors for editorial comments, articles, and features.

In a corroborative view, the PRO of Akwa Ibom and Rivers States noted that in order to better manage the image of the organisation; their commands subdivided the image management strategies of the Corps into different sub-headings. For the Akwa Ibom State Command public relations officer, he mentioned:

1. Wish image: Reflecting the image the NSCDC wants;
2. Mirror image: What it assumed to be the image of the NSCDC;
3. Multiple images which entails achieving a consistent image using different means, such as newsletter, bulletin, and magazine among others.

The Rivers State counterpart, on the other hand, added five more sub-headings to include:

1. Stereotyped image: Having the image of an organisation (NSCDC, NPF, FRSC, etc.);
2. Current image: The reality of how the organisation is perceived;
3. Positive image: What you are paid to achieve;
4. Negative image: What you are paid to avoid;
5. Corporate image which entails how the organisation is perceived to be.

The establishment of public relations Unit in any organisation is basically to ensure a positive image for the organisation. To this end, this paper sought to find out how the NSCDC utilises public relations to provide for effective image management. On this, the PRO of Rivers State Command stated that he might not be able to give an honest assessment of the situation holistically owing to the fact that not all the commandants know, equip, empower, position, or place the PRO in its rightful place. He noted that, in some states that he had served before, the PRO is grossly underutilised or reduced to a mere “errand boy”. He also noted that most of the PROs in Corps are grossly underfunded but expected to perform optimally. Ordinarily, he said the Rivers State Command utilises public relations effectively through the strategies which includes but not limited to: carrying out public enlightenment programmes, organising workshops and seminars for media operatives and correspondents that cover the Corps activities.

Similarly, the Akwa Ibom State counterpart corroborated this view adding that utilising public relations for effective image management by the NSCDC is basically in line with the strategies well spelt out for the public relations Unit of the Corps. The NSCDC utilises public relations to achieve goodwill and public acceptance of the Corps. In a supportive view, the national headquarters PRO stressed that besides other considerations in achieving a positive image for the Corps, the NSCDC creates an enabling environment for the public relations officers to operate and carry out their statutory duties effectively.

In a similar response, the PRO of Akwa Ibom State Command noted that NSCDC had taken critical steps, some of which are on-going to redeem the image of the Corps. He noted that the Corps engaged some experts and opinion leaders who disabused the minds of people from the perceived damage done to the image of the Corps after the “Oga at the Top” incident, swiftly responded to calls from the media circle, and utilised every possible opportunity to disabuse the minds of people who had already formed a negative perception about the Corps.

On his part, the Rivers State Command PRO noted that the “Oga at the Top” incident opened a page on general image and reputation management in the history of the PR practice in the Corps; saying that a timely reaction would have solved the problem. While saying that the delay in correcting the mistake generated the scandal; he noted that as the bridge between the organisation and the media, he tried to build a better relationship with the media so as to minimise further damage.

In his own concluding remarks, the national headquarters PRO noted that the Information Units of the Corps had taken steps, some of which are still on-going, to redeem the image of the agency. He said the Corps had granted interviews, released some publications, and featured prominent personalities in interaction media-public engagement to disabuse the minds of the people by making them to see that the “Oga at the Top” analogy connotes respect for a superior master in the paramilitary and military parlance and not ignorance.

Test of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis One

Hypothesis 1: There is a no significant relationship between the image management strategies of the NSCDC and the corporate image of the Corps.

Table 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship between Image Management Strategies of NSCDC and the Corporate Image of the Corps

Variable decision rule	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	<i>r</i> -cal.	<i>r</i> -crit.	<i>df.</i>	<i>p</i> < 0.05
Image management strategies of NSCDC	2,898		2,545	0.135	0.098	369	Reject null
Corporate image of the Corps	936	2,762					

Note. Significant at 0.05 alpha level, *df.* = 369.

Test of Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis 2: Image management of the NSCDC is not positively affected by the public relations practice of the Corps.

Table 4

Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship Between Image Management of NSCDC and Public Relations Practice of the Corps

Variable decision rule	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	<i>r</i> -cal.	<i>r</i> -crit.	<i>df.</i>	<i>p</i> < 0.05
Image management of NSCDC	936	2,762					
Public relations practice of the Corps	1,139	4,023	2,743	0.284	0.098	369	Reject null

Note. Significant at 0.05 alpha level, *df.* = 369.

Result of the analysis on Table 3 shows that the calculated *r*-value for the relationship between image management strategies of NSCDC and the corporate image of the Corps is 0.135 which is higher than the critical *r*-value of 0.098 at 0.05 level of significance and 369 degree of freedom. Since the calculated *r*-value is higher than the critical *r*-value, the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between the image management strategies of the NSCDC and the corporate image of the corps is hereby accepted while the null is rejected. Hence, we conclude, on the basis of the data gathered and tested for

significance, that there is a significant relationship between the image management strategies of the NSCDC and the public corporate image of the Corps.

Result of the analysis on Table 4 shows that the calculated r -value for the relationship between image management of NSCDC and the public relations practice of the Corps is 284 which is higher than the critical r -value of 0.098 at 0.05 level of significance and 369 degree of freedom. Since the calculated r -value is higher than the critical r -value, the alternate hypothesis which states that the image management of the NSCDC is positively affected by the public relations practice of the Corps is hereby accepted while the null is rejected. Hence, we conclude here that, based on the data gathered and tested for significance, there is a significant relationship between the image management of the NSCDC and the public relations practice of the Corps.

Discussion of Findings/Implications of the Results

Discussion of the study/paper findings attempts to mirror the implications of the result to the objectives, statement of the problem, theoretical framework, and the literature related and reviewed for the study. Based on this understanding, the two objectives we earlier set out to fulfil will guide our discussion of the results in this section.

Image Management Strategies Adopted by the NSCDC After the Infamous “Oga at the Top” Incident

The data used to analyse this particular expectation were gathered via the in-depth interviews we conducted with NSCDC public relations officers in three commands of the agency. From the available data, it was gathered that the NSCDC adopted different image management strategies to deal with the situation. Prominent among these strategies include: carrying out public enlightenment programmes, organising workshops and seminars for media operatives and correspondents, engaging top show talks by bringing experts to talk about the Corps, its activities and the capacity of its officials in discharging their functions, cultivating friendship with professional groups that can project the image of the Corps at different fora, and engaging newspaper editors for editorial comments, articles, and features.

The data gathered also revealed that the image management strategies adopted by the Corps have engendered a cordial relationship between the media and the Corps. Available data show that the relationship between the NSCDC and media has been very cordial and is still improving daily. This current relationship is largely due to the Corps' constant collaboration and engagement of the media and other relevant stakeholders in showcasing the core mandates of the Corps.

This finding is in line with the Organisational Image Management Theory which holds that organisations must sustain an effective image with their stakeholders in order to maximise their chances for success. Similarly, Garbett (1988) noted that organisations must sustain an effective image with their stakeholders, in order to maximise their chances for success.

Extent the NSCDC Utilise Public Relations in its Corporate Image Management of the Corps

From the available data gathered through the in-depth interview, we conclude that the Corps utilises public relations in order to provide for effective corporate image management. Although in some states' command of the agency, it was discovered that the public relations officers were grossly underutilised or reduced to a mere “errand boy”, grossly underfunded, and still expected to perform optimally in such adverse circumstances. In most other states' command, the NSCDC creates an enabling environment for the public relations officers to operate and carry out their statutory duties effectively.

This finding is very essential for the maintenance of good image of the organisation. According to Treadwell and Harrison (1995) as cited in Joseph (2003), “although challenging, organisations must engage in image management in order to be successful” (p. 46). They emphasise that organisations image management is important for at least two reasons. First, image determines responses toward the organisation. Second, shared images make possible the independent relationships that exist between organisations and stakeholders.

In essence, the data gathered, analysed, and discussed in this paper align with the related literature reviewed and the theoretical framework for the study. The argument here therefore supports existing conclusions on the subject. In other words, we can conclusively argue that public relations are a critical variable for any organisation wishing to build and sustain a positive corporate image for itself in the public domain. Without public relations, corporate image management in organisations will be wasted efforts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Building and sustaining positive corporate image for an organisation is a process that is systematic, continuing, and consistent. Any break in this process affects the public perception of the organisation. This is why public relations are a critical variable in corporate image management. In conclusion, therefore, we reiterate the age-long argument that an effective public relations practice within an organisation is essential in building and sustaining a positive corporate image for such an organisation. Based on this argument, it is recommended that the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps should strengthen the public relations Unit within the agency and ensure that only trained PR practitioners and/or experts are employed to manage the Unit. This will help nip in the bud circumstances, such as the infamous “Oga at the Top” incident that nearly marred the corporate image of the Corps beyond repair.

It is our informed view that the infamous interview by a senior official of the agency in the person of the Lagos State Commandant, presented the Corps officials as a crop of incompetent and poorly trained officials with low intelligence quotient. This is not the case but when critical and seemingly simple questions are answered the way and manner the Lagos State Commandant of the Corps answered them, then there is need to understand the public perception and possibly give it some credibility. However, our major concern here is to reiterate the fact that if the public relations unit of the Corps was involved in prepping the commandant for the interview as well as being part of the entire process leading to the interview, the outcome would have been different. We therefore recommend that the commandants and other high-ranking officers of the Corps should endeavour to involve the public relations officers (PROs) in their external engagements, and NSCDC through its public relations unit should try to maintain and possibly improve on its relationship with the different media establishments within their Command for mutually beneficial relationship to thrive.

It is also recommended that NSCDC should ensure periodic seminars and enlightenment programmes for men and officers of the Corps, to avoid activities and actions that would portray the Corps negatively. It is further argued that the public relations Unit should be involved in drawing up and executing such periodic seminars and enlightenment programmes so as to maximise the potential benefits.

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