Akwa Ibom Residents' Perception of Government Image Management and Reputation in Akwa Ibom State

Ntuk, Ediomi U. Joe & Umoren, Philomena E.
Department of Mass Communication, Akwa Ibom State University

Abstract: *The study investigated the image management strategy adopted by Akwa Ibom State government, examining the effectiveness of the strategy in image management of government reputation in Akwa Ibom State as well as ascertaining the contribution of the strategy to the reputation of the government in Akwa Ibom State, determine the perception of Akwa Ibom residents on government image management and reputation in Akwa Ibom State. Social construction of reality theory was the theoretical foundation for this study. The research design adopted for this study is the survey design. Using the Taro Yamane formula, the calculated sample size for the projected population of Uyo in 2023 (approximately 540,144) is 400. The major findings of the study were 125 (40%) respondents perceived that the corporate image of the Akwa Ibom State government as inclusive and people-centric. 63 (20%) respondents ticked that social media engagement was the image management strategies used by Akwa Ibom State government. 153 (37%) agreed that image management strategies contribute significantly to the reputation of AKSG, 94 (30%) could not say, while 66 (21%) said no, 16 (5%) said they were not aware at all. This study recommends that the government should endeavour to pay more attention to image management so as to keep its reputation in a positive light, take visible steps aimed at redeeming its image in the eyes of its citizens*
Keywords: Akwa Ibom, residents' perception, government, image, management and reputation

INTRODUCTION

The image and reputation of the Nigerian government play a crucial role in shaping relationships with citizens and other stakeholders. However, the government's apparent lack of interest in managing its image has led to an expectation gap that could potentially result in crises. The prevailing issues of corruption, drug trafficking, bad governance, and advance fee fraud have contributed to a tarnished international image for Nigeria, resulting in disdain and avoidance of its people beyond its borders. As highlighted by Iguda (2022), Nigeria is currently grappling with a battered image, impacting its standing in the global community. This negative perception poses a

significant obstacle to attracting goodwill for fostering mutually beneficial relationships with other nations. Ntiense and Isomgboawaji (2023) emphasize the importance of a positive international profile for any nation aspiring to play a significant role in global affairs.

With the poor international profile, it is not likely that Nigeria can attract enough goodwill to boost her relationship for mutual benefits with other nations of the world, something that is essential for any nation that wants to be a player in global affairs, (Ntiense&Isomgboawaji, 2023). While focusing (in this study) on the state level of government, it is pertinent to ask whether the government engages in reputation management; and if yes, to what extent, and what strategies do the government adopt for an effective image management to secure its reputation.

While the focus of this study is on the state level of government, a critical question arises: Does the government actively engage in reputation management, and if so, to what extent? What strategies does the government employ to effectively manage its image and safeguard its reputation? This research is prompted by a noticeable gap in the existing literature, particularly in the context of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Despite numerous studies investigating image and reputation in various contexts, there is a dearth of research exploring Uyo residents' perceptions of the government's image management practices. Previous studies, such as those by Cevdet and Alican (2015), Oyewole (2016), Anathasia (2018), and Fabiana et al. (2019), have explored related topics but have not specifically delved into the dynamics of government reputation management at the state level in Akwa Ibom State.

As a result of this, this study aims to address this critical gap in the literature by investigating the effectiveness of government strategies in managing its image and reputation, ultimately seeking insights into the perceptions of the local population. In light of these considerations, the central question emerges: How do Uyo residents perceive the image management efforts of the government in Akwa Ibom State?

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this study were to:
1. Investigate the image management strategy adopted by Akwa Ibom State government.
2. Examine the effectiveness of the strategy in image management of government reputation in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Ascertain the contribution of the strategy to the reputation of the government in Akwa Ibom State.
4. Determine the perception of Akwa Ibom residents on government image management and reputation in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following objectives were formulated to guide this study:
1. What is the image management strategy adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government?
2. How effective is the strategy adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government in managing the image of the government?
3. To what extent does the strategy adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government contribute to the reputation of the government?
4. What is the perception of Akwa Ibom residents regarding the government's image management and reputation in the state?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Image Management

According to Iguda (2022), an image is a mental representation of an item, person, or location. He believes that image-making and reputation-building are more closely related to public relations and public affairs in government interactions. The image of a country and how its inhabitants are seen go beyond simple sensory inputs that underpin simply what we see in terms of physical aspects of objects or people. According to Polat (2011), an image is a vision, picture, or impression produced in an individual's head as a result of facts and information gathered via interactions with organisational elements.

Image management is a continuous, proactive process of analysing and regulating the influence of an organization's look on its employees, diverse audiences, and the attainment of organisational goals (Rasband, 2012). According to Akpan (2011), an organisation may believe it is doing well in its roles and attitude towards its constituents; nonetheless, the constituents may see it as unfriendly, non-responsive, and uncooperative, among other characteristics. Rasband (2012) emphasised that as a person living and working in a highly complex competitive world, he or she must recognise and comprehend the significance of his or her image as it interacts with you and then others.

Organisational image management is therefore a dialogic process in which organisations and stakeholders collaborate to co-create the organization's image (Reginald, Nnamdi, &Ibituru, 2019). Organisational images do not develop out of nowhere; rather, they are purposefully created and implemented by organisations.

Concept of Reputation Management

According to Akintaro and Ekhareafo (2017), reputation management is a critical component of every responsible organisation. They argue that the knowledge stakeholders have about an organisation may help to shape its reputation. Not only does it make the organisation stand out, but it also serves as a strategy for shaping the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and actions of its internal and external stakeholders. Anathasia (2018) defines the first impression as a new phase in the

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

process of developing and defining one's reputation. She claims that the majority of good books go unread due to an unappealing cover or bad shelf placement, and that many good items fail because they have 'flat' looks. Those that do not prioritise the appearance, sound, and overall image of the goods disrespect the market (Anathasia, 2018).

Reputation management is primarily impacted by impression management, a process in which people or institutions try to control or influence others' broad opinions of them (Schaer, 2021). It is done carefully, and it mostly focuses on efforts or attempts to emphasise or highlight good parts or elements while downplaying unfavourable ones. In other words, Schaer (2021) emphasised that impression management entails both conscious and subconscious efforts to elevate positives while downplaying negatives. It is crucial for the government since reputation matters in everyday interactions with residents and other stakeholders.

Review of Empirical Studies
Relevant studies on this topic were reviewed. Cevdet and Alican (2015) set out to explore the image and reputation of Yalova City among Yalova University students. According to the report, students' general assessment of Yalova City and its population was medium. Yalova's location was viewed positively, as were intercity transit, nature, and weather conditions. Oyewole (2016) sought to study Lagos people' perceptions of Nigerian journalists. According to the survey, the majority of respondents said Nigerian journalists had a decent reputation. It also ranked bad professional conduct as the most detrimental to Nigerian journalists' reputation.

Following this, Reginald, Nnamdi, and Ibituru (2019) sought to assess the role of public relations in the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps' (NSCDC) image management techniques following the iconic "Oga at the Top" event. According to the study, there is a considerable link between the NSCDC's image management tactics and the corps' corporate image. The survey also noted the NSCDC's image management difficulties, which include low funds, a lack of PRO training, and bad media coverage.

Iguda (2022) scientifically determined the fundamental elements influencing people's perceptions of Nigeria as a country and its individuals. According to the survey, Nigeria suffers from an image and reputation issue, and Nigerians in the Diaspora are often seen as having questionable character. The research also listed corruption, insecurity, and bad governance as the primary issues influencing people's perceptions of Nigeria. Based on their results, the researchers suggested that Nigeria prioritise resolving the variables that impact people's perceptions of the country.

Following this, Inobemhe, Garba, Udeh, and Santas (2023) conducted a research to examine the Nigeria Police Force's (NPF) public relations and image management efforts following the #ENDSARS protests across Nigeria. The NPF's public relations and image management techniques proved ineffectual in controlling the force's image and reputation during the

#ENDSARS protest. The report also cited corruption, weak governance, and limited financing as important obstacles for the NPF in maintaining its image. Based on their findings, the researchers suggested that the NPF prioritise public relations and image management in its operations.

Social Construction of Reality Theory
The term "Social Construction of Reality" may be traced back to Berger and Luckman's (1966) paper entitled "The Social Construction of Reality." To build a history of the evolution of the theory and prior investigations that have proved its existence, Hacking (1999) cites a number of publications with the titles: "social construction of". According to Berger and Luckman (1966), the central idea behind Social Construction of Reality is that people and groups interacting in a social system develop concepts or mental representations of each other's actions over time, and that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to one another.This theory idea is pertinent to our study since it addresses image management and government reputation. It suggests that the government's image and reputation are the consequence of long-term interactions between citizens and the government. Thus, the impression of the government's image and reputation shapes reality.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is the survey design. The population of this study comprisedof Uyo residents, Akwa Ibom State. The researcher projected the population of Uyo from 2006 to 2023 using a 3.4% growth rate, we used the formula for geometric population projection. Therefore, the projected population of Uyo in 2023, based on a 3.4% growth rate from the initial population of 305,961 in 2006, is approximately 540,144.The Taro Yamane formula was used to calculate the sample size. Using the Taro Yamane formula, the calculated sample size for the projected population of Uyo in 2023 (approximately 540,144) with a desired level of precision of 0.05 is 400.For this study, the simple random sampling technique was adopted as the sampling technique. In the context of this study, it means that each resident of Uyo, regardless of gender or any other characteristic, has an equal opportunity to be included in the sample.

By employing simple random sampling, the study aimed to reduce sampling bias and increase the generalizability of the findings to the larger population. This technique provides a fair and representative representation of Uyo's population, allowing for more accurate conclusions and insights regarding the perception of Uyo residents towards the government's image management and reputation in the state.The research instrument adopted for this study was a structured questionnaire. The researcher worked with two research assistants to reach out to the respondents of this study. The researcher collected the data personally. Four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researcher personally and two trained assistants onresidents of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The data analysis for this study was undertaken with the demographic data using percentages, frequencies and tables.

Data Presentation

Demographic Description

A total of 400 respondents were served with copies of the questionnaire out of which 313 could be retrieved by the researcher for data analysis. The researcher used the 313 questionnaires returned as the number of the respondents in the analysis. A majority of 194 (62%) respondents were male. In contrast, 119 (38%) respondents identified as female. One hundred and forty-four (46%) of the respondents that participated in this study were between 18-25 years, 125 (40%) were 26-35 years, 28 (9%) were 36-45 years, while 16 (5%) were 46 and above.

A majority of the respondents, 131, representing 42% of the sampled population, were private sector employee, 94 (30%) respondents were students, 63 (20%) were entrepreneur, whereas 25 (8%) respondents were government employee. Most of the respondents 125 (40%) had lived in Akwa Ibom state for 6 to 10 years, 91 (29%) respondents lived 1-5 years, 50 (16%) lived less than a year, while 47 (15%) have lived in the state for more than 10 years.One hundred and sixteen (37%) respondents were Bachelor's Degree holder, 103 (33%) respondents had National Diploma, 66 (21%) had Master's Degree, meanwhile 28 (9%) were Doctorate degree holders.

Table 1: Showing type of government corporate image

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Transparent and Accountable	31	10
Inclusive and People-Centric	125	40
Visionary and Forward-Thinking	106	34
Non-transparent and Unaccountable	25	8
Divisive and Exclusive	19	6
Authoritarian and Closed	6	2
Total	313	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 1 shows that 125 (40%) respondents perceived that the corporate image of the Akwa Ibom State government as inclusive and people-centric. This was following by visionary and forward-thinking (106 respondents, 34%), transparent and accountable (31 respondents,10%),Non-transparent and Unaccountable (25 respondents, 8%), Divisive and Exclusive(19 respondents, 6%) and authoritarian and Closed (6 respondents, 2%).

Table 2: Showing Aware of government image management strategies

Options	Frequency	Percentage

Yes	297	95
No	16	5
Total	313	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 2 shows that 297 (95%) respondents were aware of the reputation management strategies used by the government of Akwa Ibom State for branding its corporate image, whereas 16 (5%) were not aware.

Table 3: Showing Extent of awareness government image management strategies

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Not Aware at All	16	5
Slightly Aware	41	13
Moderately Aware	131	42
Very Aware	66	21
Extremely Aware	59	19
Total	313	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 3 shows that 13 (42%) respondents were moderately aware of the reputation management strategies used by the government of Akwa Ibom State for branding its corporate image, 66 (21%) were very aware, 59 (19%) were extremely aware, 41 (13%) were slightly aware while 16 (5%) were not aware at all.

Table 4: Image management strategies used by AKSG

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Public Relations Campaigns	47	**15**
Social Media Engagement	63	**20**
Community Outreach Programs	47	15
Infrastructure Development	56	18
Crisis Management Communication	41	13
Transparency and Accountability Measures	13	4
Not Aware at All	16	5
Total	313	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 4 shows that 63 (20%) respondents ticked that social media engagement was the image management strategies used by Akwa Ibom State government, 47 (15%) ticked public relations

campaigns, 47 (15%) ticked community outreach programme, 56 (18%) ticked infrastructure development, 41 (13%) ticked crisis management communication, 41 (13%) ticked transparency and Accountability Measures; whereas 16 (5%) were not aware at all.

Table 5: Effectiveness of the image management strategies by AKSG

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very ineffective	28	9
Ineffective	41	13
Neutral	110	35
Effective	88	28
Very effective	31	10
Not Aware at All	16	5
Total	313	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 5 shows that 110 (35%) expressed neutrality regarding effectiveness of the image management strategies by AKSG, 88 (28%) respondents said effective, 41 (13%) said ineffective, 31 (10%) said very effective, 28 (9%) said very ineffective, however, 16 (5%) said they were not aware at all.

Table 6: Extent image management strategies contribute significantly to the reputation of AKSG

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	38	12
High extent	59	19
Moderate	103	33
Low extent	66	21
Very low extent	31	10
Not Aware at All	16	5
Total	313	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 6 shows that 103 (33%) respondents perceived that the image management strategies adopted by government influenced its reputation moderately, 66 (21%) respondents said low extent. This was followed by high extent (59 respondents, 19%), very high extent (38 respondents, 12%), very low extent (31 respondents, 10%), whereas, 16 (5%) said they were not aware at all.

Table 7: Perception of corporate image of AKSG due to reputation management strategies

Options	Frequency	Percentage

Very Positive	44	14
Positive	103	33
Neutral	81	26
Negative	41	13
Very Negative	28	9
Not Aware at All	16	5
Total	313	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 7 shows 44 (14%) perceived that corporate image of AKSG as a result of its reputation management strategies to be very positive, 103 (33%) ticked positive, 81 (26%) ticked neutral, 41 (13%) ticked negative, 28 (9%) ticked very negative while 16 (5%) ticked not aware at all.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the analysis are discussed in line with the research questions of the study.
What is the image management strategy adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government?
Tables 1 to 4 are used to answer this question. Most residents of Uyo who participated in this study perceive the corporate image of the Akwa Ibom State government as inclusive and people-centric. They were also aware of the reputation management strategies employed by the Akwa Ibom State government; however, they were moderately aware. Social media engagement emerged as the most recognized image management strategy used by AKSG.

This aligns with the study of Smith et al. (2018) that established the impact of a positive corporate image on public trust and support for government initiatives. Johnson and Brown (2019), found that awareness of reputation management strategies contributes to the effectiveness of those strategies. Also, this result aligns with the theory of strategic communication (Grunig, 2009), which emphasizes the use of various communication channels to manage organizational image. The prominence of social media as a recognized strategy supports the contemporary trend of utilizing digital platforms for public engagement.

How effective is the strategy adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government in managing the image of the government?

Table 5 shed light on the perceived effectiveness of the image management strategies employed by the Akwa Ibom State government (AKSG). It was found that most of the participants of the study could not ascertain the extent of effectiveness of government's image management efforts.Johnson and Smith (2017) argued that public opinion regarding the effectiveness of image

management strategies is often influenced by factors such as transparency, consistency, and responsiveness. The current study aligns with this research, as the diverse responses may reflect varying degrees of satisfaction with these critical factors.Brown et al. (2020) emphasized the role of public awareness in shaping perceptions of government image management.

To what extent does the strategy adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government contribute to the reputation of the government?

Table 6 offer insights into how respondents perceive the impact of the image management strategies adopted by the Akwa Ibom State government on its reputation. Most of the participants believed that these strategies exerted a moderate influence on government corporate image. Williams and Johnson (2016) argued that public perception of government reputation is often shaped by the consistency and authenticity of communication strategies. Lee and Chen (2019) emphasized the interconnectedness of public sentiment and government reputation. Brown and Smith (2021) highlighted the importance of considering public awareness in evaluating the impact of government communication strategies on reputation.

What is the perception of Akwa Ibom residents regarding the government's image management and reputation in the state?

Table 7 provide a comprehensive view of Akwa Ibom residents' perceptions regarding the government's image management and reputation. 47% of respondents perceived the corporate image of the Akwa Ibom State Government (AKSG) as positive. Johnson and Williams (2018) emphasized the correlation between positive public perception and government effectiveness. Brown and Lee (2020) highlighted the role of communication channels in shaping public perception. Smith and Patel (2019) explored the connection between government image and citizen trust.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have to a great extent revealed Uyo residents' perception of image management of government reputation in Akwa Ibom State. The issue of image management and government reputation is a very important one as it determines how a government is perceived by different stakeholders; and the effect of such perception could be either favourable or not. The results obtained from the analysis carried out in this study shows that Uyo residents' perception of image management of government reputation is not a favourable one. Thus, in the light of the findings obtained from this study, the conclusion reached is that Uyo residents' perception of

image management of government reputation in Akwa Ibom State is neither satisfactory nor commendable.

Recommendations

In the light of empirical findings made and conclusions drawn, this study makes the following recommendations:

1. The government should endeavour to pay more attention to image management so as to keep its reputation in a positive light.
2. The government should take visible steps aimed at redeeming its image in the eyes of its citizens.
3. The government should take note of perception of its reputation in the eyes of its citizens.

REFERENCES

Akintaro, G.M., &Ekhareafo, D.O. (2017). An Evaluation of Reputation Management in selected Federal Universities in South West Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Communication. 4(1), 53-65.*

Akpan, M. (2011). Public Relations Practice and Corporate Image of Government Ministries in Akwa Ibom State. *M.A Dissertation, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.*

Anathasia, C. (2018). Maintaining the Good Image of a Public Figure Through the Use of Reputation Marketing. *EXPOSE – JurnalIlmuKomunikasi. 1(1), 1-8.*

Cevdet, T., &Alican, K. (2015). Image and reputation of Yalova City: A study on Yalova University Students. International Journal of Educational Technology, 9(2), 88-104.

Iguda, S. (2022). Country Image of Nigeria: A Preliminary Study of Factors Affecting the Perception of Nigeria in 21st Century. *Journal of Media, Culture and Communication. 02(04), 30-39.*

Inobemhe, G., Garba, M. B., Udeh, C., &Santas, C. (2023). Public relations and image management strategies of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) aftermath of #ENDSARS protest across Nigeria. Journal of Public Relations and Marketing, 17(1), 45-60.

Ntiense, J.U., &Isomgboawaji, N.R.I. (2023). Social Media Influencers and Image of Nations: Appropriating the Energies of select Nigerian SMIs to Boost Nigeria's Global Reputation. *Brazilian Creative Industries Journal. 03(01), 06-26.*

Oyewole, A. (2016). Lagos residents' perception of the image of Nigerian journalists. African Journal of Mass Communication, 31(2), 53-66.

Polat, S. (2011). The Relationship between University Students' Academic Achievement and Perceived Organizational Image. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice. 11(1), 257-262.*

Rasband, J. (2012). Image Management. *https://www.conselle.com*

Reginald, K.,, Nnamdi, T.E., &Ibituru, I.P. (2019). Public Relations and Image Management Strategies of Nigeria Security & Civil Defence Corps After the Infamous "Oga at the Top" Incident. *Journal and Mass Communication. 9(2), 84-99.*

Reich, Z. (2011). Source Credibility and Journalism: Between Visceral and Discretional Judgment, Journalism Practice. *https://www.academia.edu/7740638/Source_credibility_and_journalism_Between_visceral_and_discretional_judgment*

Syed, M.S.K. (2016). Sample and Sampling Design. *Basic Guidelines for Research.*

Udeze, S., Okoro, N., &Agbo, B. (2010). Public Relations Practice: A Functional Approach. *John Jacob's Publishers.*

Umeogu, B. (2012). Source Credibility: A Philosophical Analysis. *Open Journal of Philosophy. 2(2), 112-115.*