
Re-Engineering the Reactive Public Relations Practice of the Nigerian Police for National Security

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Abstract

This study examines Re-engineering the Reactive Public Relations Practice of the Nigeria Police for National Security using the Lagos State Police Command as a model. Over the years, the Nigeria Police have experienced public scorn and apathy due to unprofessional conducts, delayed and poor response to distress calls from the citizenry, extra judicial killings and extortion amongst others. It becomes necessary therefore to put in place mechanisms that will address the inadequacies in the force particularly as it affects public perception of the institution. The study reviews scholarly writings and theoretical frameworks relevant to the subject of inquiry. Survey and key informant interview methods were used for three study population (50 members of the police, 150 civilians and 5 Professionals, two crime reporters, two public relations consultants and deputy police public relations officer, Lagos command). Several analytical techniques were used to examine relationship among variables under investigation. Findings from the research work indicate that the Nigeria Police Public Relations Department (NPPRD)'s reactive approach should be replaced by a sustainable public relations campaign and perhaps NPF needs to recruit external public relations consultants. The study recommends centralized digitalization of police data base and activities across the country. With this in place, all accidents, riots, intelligence reports, robberies, bombings, and other social vices can be digitally reported, uploaded and collated from the point/state of occurrence thus granting on the spot access to information to key police officers across the country irrespective of their area of jurisdiction. This will militate against Police Public Relations Officers (PPROs) and key police officers maintaining an alibi during emergencies and will ultimately reduce the institution's reactive approach to issues/crisis. Also, hiring external public relations professionals for expertise strategic communication should be embraced. Such effort will achieve unprecedented success when backed by adequate funding by necessary authorities.

Keywords: *Image: Public, Perception, Public Relations, Nigeria Police, Repositioning.*

INTRODUCTION

The term national security in everyday parlance is simply a collective term that refers to the defense and protection of a country's interest including the subjects contained therein. From this seemingly simple definition of national security, it can be clearly stated that national security is a serious concept that requires attention, ingenuity, strategic planning and implementation because it affects practically all the major divisions of a country :- political , social, economical, cultural and even religious. As a matter of fact, the law enforcement agency in Nigeria; the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Nigerian Army, other state apparatus in charge of peace building and national security must really wake up to defend the nation's national security and peaceful co –habitation especially in the wake of boko haram insurgents, Niger Delta avengers, Fulani herdsmen brutalities and some other religious

fundamentalists activities.

The inability of the Nigeria Police Force to deliver to the Nigerian populace the core mandates of the institution coupled with the corrupt practices, of course aided partly by some institutional inadequacies led to the poor public image and perception of the Police by Nigerians, home and abroad. In short, the public have lost their trust, respect and support for the Police because of the force's ineffectiveness. It is noteworthy to say that the relationship between the public and police is like that of cat and dog embedded in great mistrust and hatred. Apparently, the inability of the force to have a people friendly approach to issues has affected public relations practice and public perception. Disturbed by the image of the Nigeria Police Force, a former Inspector General of police: Mohammed Abubakar during his tenure like a number of his predecessors advised police officers not to harass Nigerians and journalists in the face of criticism on police's response to distress calls for protection from criminal activities.

This was corroborated by *The Punch* in its editorial of August 5, 2005 titled: "Police and Rights Violations" when it adumbrated the brutal activities of police against members of the public. For instance "The Police mobile force is nicknamed "Kill and Go" because its members are notorious for extra-judicial killings. For refusing to part with a ₦20 gratification, they have sent many commercial drivers to their early graves while on daily basis, Policemen harass law abiding citizens and boast that they can "waste you and nothing will happen". When the police arrest bandits or illegally raid streets, drinking parlors and joints, most of those arrested, who could not bribe their way to freedom are often tortured and dumped in the prison for years in holding charges without any credible evidence to prosecute them."

Hence, the need arose to, as a matter of urgency devise a professional way of managing the crisis of reactive public relations practice of the Nigerian Police Force to strategically position the institution for wholesome national security and stability.

THE PROBLEM

The Nigeria Police Force has failed in her statutory duties and functions to the Nigerian citizenry. The increasing huge complaints of laggardness in attending to distress calls from the citizenry, institutional inadequacies, numerous media reports on various vices, eye witnesses' accounts are all pointers to the insensitivity, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the force. Public relations consultants, media personnel, and the citizens all complain that the Nigeria police are usually reactive in their approaches to statutory operations and national security issues. Besides, the NPF reactive PR approach has left many families heart broken when faced by life threatening security issues. These, have in no small measure affected the public perception and image of the institution. As such, the relationship between the Police and the public is generally hostile in spite of the popular saying that the 'Police is your friend'. Consequently, Nigerians' confidence in the police as a law enforcement agent has been eroded over the years. This is against the backdrop of the rising state of insecurity in states accross the nation. This study therefore attempts to assess the public relations practice of the Nigerian Police vis a vis pressing national security issues.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In view of the aforementioned, this study provides answers to the following:-

- How effective is the current public relations practice of the Nigeria Police Public Relations department?
- How can the Nigerian Police improve on its public relations practice for improved National Security?
- Of what significance is professional public relations expertise execution in rejuvenating

the battered image of the Nigerian Police?

- Will improved Media relations practice by the Police improve public perception vis a vis reduction in bad publicity?

At this juncture, it will be important to review relevant literature on the topic of inquiry.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: A DEFINITION

According to Keegan, Moriarty and Duncan (1992), public relations focuses on activities that build image, promote goodwill and understanding between an organization and its stakeholders.

Public relations are a management function. It involves counseling management at all levels in the organization with regards to policy decisions, stated company goals and objectives, courses of action and communication, taking into account the company's social and citizenship responsibilities.

A popularly adopted definition of public relations is the one given by the British Institute of Relations as cited in Adebayo (1998:2). The institute defines public relations as "a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and goodwill between an organisation and its publics".

Whatever the perspective, the underlining message of every definition still remains building a relationship that must be beneficial to all parties. Public relations emphasize strategic planning, policies formulation, effective crisis management which involves overcoming misconceptions, prejudices and telling the truth at all times.

APPROACHES TO PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

Every organization, whether big or small has a reputation either good or bad. Center and Jackson (1995:13) confirm this when they opine that "the managerial challenge is whether something is consciously done to face the fact of reputation". In essence, the practical approach that an organization's public relations department adopts in attending to issues can either make an organization's reputation good or bad. To this end, some companies are proactive while some are reactive in their PR practice.

PROACTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS: To Center and Jackson (1995) practitioners using this approach are often analyzers/prospectors. They explain that such practitioners always project into possible future occurrences and therefore earmark effective plans and programmes to handle such forecasts and subsequently evaluate results.

REACTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS: This describes the conduct of public relations practice in response to external influences. It deals typically with changes that have negative consequences on an organization. As such, reactive public relations approach attempts to repair an organization's reputation, manage crisis outburst, prevent market erosion and regain lost sales. While it is advisable for PR practitioners to be proactive, it also needs to be pinpointed that there may be unanticipated occurrences that need reactive responses. Be that as it may, it is only those who prepare ahead that will be able to make their reactive situation a success. Succinctly put, there is need for strategic and adequate planning against unforeseen but envisaged developments that could crop up in the future.

Since public relations is about image building, this therefore translates that every form of communication and whatever action is taken or done (whether verbal or non-verbal) all contribute to the image people hold about an institution. This then leads into defining corporate image and its management.

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ORGANISATIONAL IMAGE MANAGEMENT

The supreme advantage of using public relations plans and programs for image management and reputation is of course, well-planned effort to make a desirable impact on organization's image. Imperfections arising from using public relations as a method of image management are largely attributed to lack of holistic approach and extreme focus on communication. In essence, every available public relations tool suitable for use for such an organization's image must be used which includes the emerging digital public relations tools combined with other traditional tools; press-releases, advertising, press conferences, sponsorships, open door meetings with community or some stakeholders, organizing shows and so on.

Since public relations is about creating favourable image, Massey (2003:16) citing Treadwell and Harrison (1994), signaling the importance of Public Relations posits that organizational image management is important for two reasons; first images determine stakeholders' cognitive, affective and behavioural responses towards the organization. Second; shared images make possible the interdependent relationships that exist between organizations and stakeholders. In a nutshell, image management should be tackled by a holistic public relations approach since the organization's reputation is driven by behavior, communication, visual appearance, result/performance as well as exogenous factors (such as media messages, gossips, other stakeholders review and appreciations).

MEDIA RELATIONS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

Researchers and authorities alike have stressed the need for a good working relationship between the media and public relations personnel in order to serve public interests well.

Centre and Jackson (1995:259) maintain that the opportunity and capability possessed by journalists and public relations practitioners to shape public opinion places on them an obligation of cordiality, truth and accuracy. "A high degree of ethical responsibility involving moral standards and integrity is implicit in serving the ultimate best interest of the public", they stress.

In the words of Ajala (1993), cordial media relationship could be an asset which will be very useful during corporate crisis. This, she opines can be felt in positive reports by the media during the crisis.

The researcher however frowns at the submission above. It must be pointed that positive media reports about a crisis that involves mass loss of lives like the Bellview, Dana and Sosoliso airlines plane crashes will only portray the media as well as the company as being insensitive and irresponsible. To even do that means operating against the practice of good public relations which is all about relationship building and telling the truth.

Center and Jackson (1995:260) therefore highlight a number of guidelines that should be put in place by practitioners in order to cultivate good media relations. These include:

- Assurance that the organization has a designated spokesperson available on short term notice.
- Being as candid as possible in response to enquiries within the limits of obvious competitive and national security and of compassionate consideration for those hurt by the news.
- Generating good news situations as a track record to offset instances of undesired news. Do not simply wait defensively for bad news.
- Continuously educating and training employees and spokespersons on how to handle themselves when in contact with the media.
- Expecting the unexpended and being prepared for it, that is have a crisis management committee in place.

In all, practitioners should attempt to have a prompt, honest, cordial, direct and two-way communication between themselves and the media.

THEORISING THE STUDY

Public Relations Communication Models and/or Theory

Public Relations researches suffer from lack of theoretical grounding. For instance, the public relations theory book of Carl baton and Vincent Hazlehm (1989) cited in Massey (2003:3) argue that there has been little of public relations research that is theory driven. Such scholars believe that the diffusion of innovation, systems' theory, agenda setting theory and so on cited by public relations scholars as theories are organizational, media and/or communication theories borrowed by public relations researchers and teachers in an attempt to explain, predict and manage organization – stakeholders relationships.

Regardless of these submissions, there are a number of models that provide good background to public relations practice. To this end, relevant models to the subject of inquiry are discussed as follow;

- Public Relations Transfer process model
- Two – way symmetrical model and

PUBLIC RELATIONS TRANSFER MODEL

Of utmost significance to this research work is the public relations transfer process model propounded by Frank Jefkins in 1986. The transfer process model is about turning negative situations to positive ones within and outside an organisation. This theoretical assumption expatiates that when the negative situation is converted into positive achievements through knowledge, the result predictably, is the primary objective of public relations practice— understanding (Jefkins (1988) cited in Olumuyiwa (2012:41)).

The model is premised upon four basic processes. It explains how practitioners can use and apply public relations tools and strategies towards changing; (1) hostility among an organisation's target publics to sympathy so as to be in a better position to convert (2) prejudice into acceptance, replace(3) Apathy with interest and then, be able to communicate effectively to achieve (4)knowledge where there is ignorance.

From the foregoing, it means that organizations can use Jefkins' public relations transfer process model to win the goodwill of the public so as to reduce crisis. Through effective and strategic communication, the public relations practitioner can convert the four negative attitudes of the public into four positive attitudes – ignorance to knowledge, hostility to sympathy, prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest.

The transfer process model is considered relevant to this study in that, perfection is something humanity cannot attain but, always strive towards. Based on this premise, organizations are bound to experience hostility, apathy and prejudice from members of their publics, and once an organization experiences any of these, the transfer process model comes in handy.

Two-way Symmetrical Model: This model to its proponents Grunig and Hunt (1984) is one that stresses a two-way information dissemination process between an organization and its publics. In other words, it has a two-way balance communication effect. From an organization to its public, from the public back to the company in form of feedback. The organization in turn notes, works on and responds to the public's feedback and get the action(s) taken across to the public again. Companies that adopt this communication model often act as socially responsible organizations.

Theoretical Framework on Organisational Image Management

➤ Organisational Image Management Theory

Aptly relevant to this research work is the organizational image management theory expounded in an attempt to develop a working theory in public relations practice.

Massey (2003) propounds this theoretical model based on the processes of organizational management and theories of image management. Anchored on the cross-examination of key concepts of organizational image namely: credibility, identity, image and reputation, he formulates the theory of organizational image management.

The theory, argues that the primary goal of public relations is the creation and maintenance of an organisation's image noting that organizations communicate strategically with stakeholders to encourage desirable image and discourage undesirable ones.

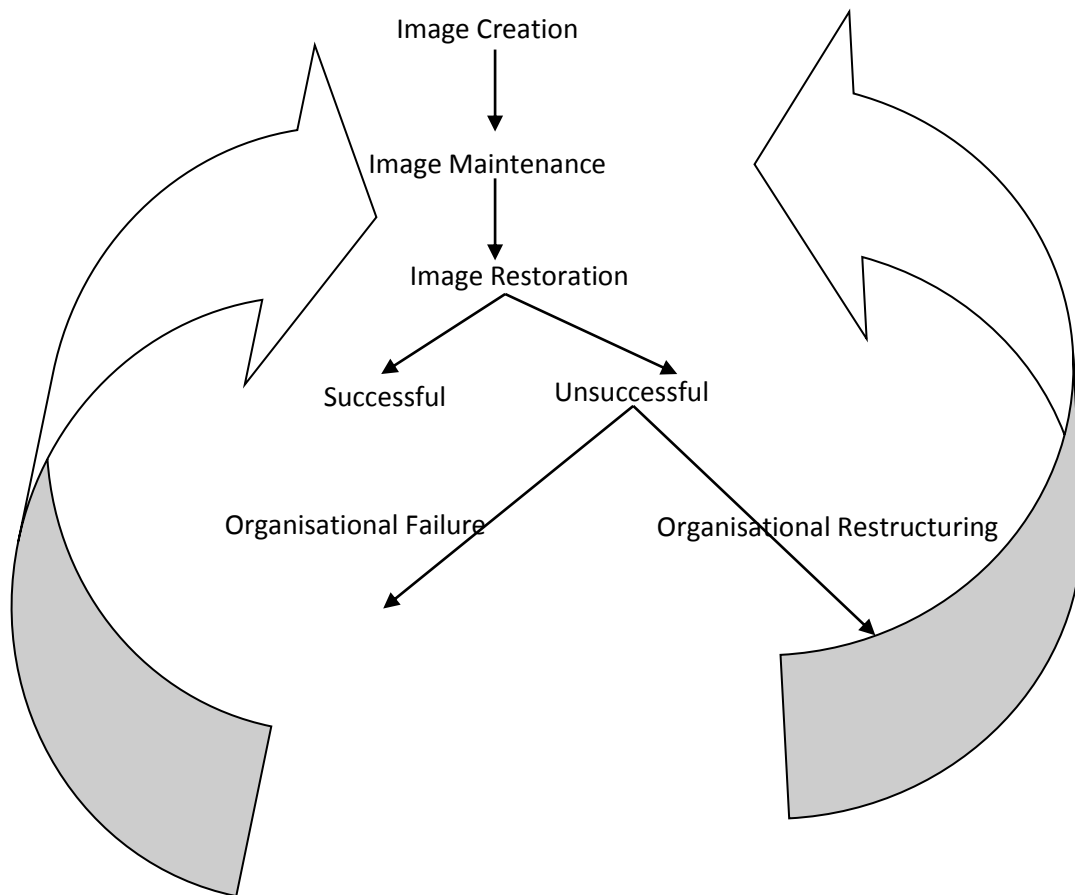
He submits that organizational image management is a three-stage process that involves creating, maintaining and in some cases regaining an effective organizational image. **First stage**, when an organization starts operation, it must create an image for itself. **Second stage**, having successfully created an image, efforts must be made to maintain it.

It must be noted that image-maintenance is an on-going process that requires communication with stakeholders on regular basis. Part of successful image maintenance he points, is to engineer an effective mechanism for feedback from stakeholders and adjust communication strategies accordingly. **Third stage**, he adumbrates, is restoration and usually occurs when the organization has experienced some sort of crisis. However, not all organizations experience this stage.

If the restoration effort is successful, then the organization having regained the image will move to the maintenance stage of the image management theory. However, if restoration is unsuccessful, the organization could fail or be forced to restructure itself. At a minimum, organizational restructuring involves the development of a new identity and in extreme cases can result in merger, name change and other actions that require name change. This requires the company to move back to the image creation stage of the process.

A graphical illustration of this will provide a clearer understanding.

Figure Two: A Model of Organisational Image Management



Source: Massey (2003:29).

From the above, it could be safely deduced that organizational image management is therefore a cyclical rather than a linear process.

In the case of the Nigeria Police Force, the institution is in a crisis of bad reputation due to not responding promptly to distress calls (poor public relations practice), her lack of integrity, unfairness, incivility, and as such needs to consciously address these to be able to foster national security and deliver more on the body's constitutional mandate.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE:

The operations of the contemporary Nigeria police force have the statutory backing of the 1999 constitution: the 1999 constitution. Specifically, Section 214(1) stipulates: "There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this section no other police force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof." The country briefly experimented local police force at the regional levels alongside the Nigeria Police Force, as enshrined in the Independence Constitution of 1960 and the Republican Constitution of 1963 which provided for Local Police Force and the Nigeria Police Force but the military halted this experiment when it seized power on January 15, 1966, and dissolved the Local Police Force, as a result of the negative roles attributed to the Force during the First Republic (1960-1966), Alemika and Chukwuma (2000) cited in Johnson, Johnson and Ifedayo(2013). The Nigeria Police has a centralized management command and control structure in which the Inspector-General of Police singlehandedly determines both policy and operational matters. As the head of the Force, the Inspector-General of Police is appointed by the President but on the advice of the Nigeria Police

Council.

COMMAND STRUCTURE OF NIGERIA POLICE FORCE

According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2000:p8) cited in Johnson *et al* (2013), the Force is organized into 37 Commands and the Force Headquarters. Each of the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory is served by a Command of the Force. The Force Headquarters is the office of the Inspector General of Police. The tasks of the Force are carried out through six Departments:

1. Administration and Finance
2. Operations
3. Works and Logistics.
4. General investigation and Intelligence
5. Training
6. Research and Planning.

Each of the Departments is under the leadership of Deputy Inspectors-General of Police. The 37 State Police Commands are further organized into twelve Zonal Commands. The Zonal commands are under the command of Assistant Inspectors-General, while Commissioners of Police are in charge of State Commands. The entire Force is under the command of the Inspector -General of Police. The Commandants of the Police Staff College, Jos and Police Academy Wudil, Kano are also Assistant Inspectors-General of Police, while the Police Colleges are commanded by Commissioners of Police, and the Police Training Schools where recruits are trained are under the direction of Superintendents of Police.

However, for effective national policing and operational command, the zonal command structure was created. The country is divided into the following twelve zones: Zone One is made up of Kano, Jigawa and Katsina States, with headquarters in Kano. Zone Two has Lagos and Ogun States; its headquarters is in Lagos. Zone Three has its headquarters in Markudi; it is made up of Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau States. Zone Five comprises Edo, Delta and Bayelsa States; its headquarters is located in Benin. Zone six comprises Rivers, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom and Ebonyi States; Calabar is where its headquarters is located. Zone Seven has its headquarters in Abuja and is made up of Federal Capital Territory, Kaduna and Niger States. Zone Eight has Kogi, Ekiti and Kwara State; its headquarters is in Lokoja. Zone Nine's headquarters is in Umuahia and is made up of Imo, Abia, Anambra and Enugu States. Zone Ten with headquarters in Sokoto; is made up of Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara States. Zone Eleven comprises Oyo, Osun, and Ondo States; Oshogbo is its headquarters. Zone Twelve has Bauchi, Borno and Yobe States; Bauchi is its headquarters. In the same vein, the State Commands are divided into a number of Police Areas and Divisions under the command of Assistant Commissioner of Police who oversees Police Stations and Police Posts within his Area or Division.

FORCE PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

In order to project the social services dimension of the duties of the police, the late Kam Salem, former Inspector-General of Police (1966-1975) formally established the Force Public Relations Department as a statutory function of the Force and expanded its services to states' Commands. The Nigeria Police Force has demonstrated how critical public relations are to its operations, hence, its replication in major police formations across the country. The Force headquarters Public Relations Officer (FPRO) is the official mouthpiece for the entire Nigeria Police Force, and he is superior in rank (the position is occupied by at least an Assistant Commissioner of Police) to Police Public Relations Officers (PPROs) who hold sway at the Zonal and State Commands— a responsibility that is traditionally entrusted to an officer of at

least the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police and Assistant Superintendent of Police respectively.

The Department performs communication tasks such as publishing the list of wanted persons, missing persons, stolen vehicles, dark spots, security tips and organizes press briefings to parade arrested criminal suspects. It also issues press releases and bulletins, writes feature articles, publishes photographs and advertisements through the press and electronic media in order to keep the public constantly informed of police activities. It also organizes public lectures and produces informative materials such as posters, flyers and booklets in order to inform and educate the public about police activities. The Department is also responsible for producing police calendars, diary, greeting cards, magazine and newsletter.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study population was of three categories: First, Police officers in Lagos State Command and Second, Nigerian populace from age 18 and above (for survey). The third population included professionals: Public Relations Consultants, Media Personnel and the Lagos command Deputy Police Public Relations Officer (key informant interview). A total of 200 copies of questionnaire, 50 for police officers using cluster sampling technique and 150 for the Nigerian populace were administered and all were retrieved which implies 100% response rate.

For the Nigerian Populace, three Local Government Areas were randomly selected from the three senatorial districts in Lagos state namely Surulere, Ikeja and Shomolu. Fifty copies of questionnaire were administered in one local government area in each of the three senatorial districts in Lagos state using the convenience sampling technique.

Data presented for analysis in this study were elicited from selected respondents [Nigeria Police, Lagos Command, the Nigerian Populace, Public relations practitioners, crime correspondents, and Lagos Command Deputy Police public relations officer].

The views and opinions expressed by respondent were subjected to critical analysis. To achieve this, the retrieved questionnaires were vetted and analyzed with the aid of computer software statistical package for social science (SPSS) (version17) employing the tools of simple count and Percentages.

To ease the analysis, Data for the police (such as questionnaire items and tables) were labeled A while those of the Nigerian Populace were labeled B. Furthermore, the key informant interviews conducted were transcribed and analyzed with issues of interest extracted to support the findings of the study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A major concern to stakeholders in charge of National security in Nigeria is the revolutionization of Nigerian Police Force's public relations activities. Findings from this research work reveal that the force has suffered public discontent as a result of its operatives unprofessional and inhuman conducts thereby requesting an urgent overhaul of the system.

As an introduction, a question sought to examine the current public relations practice of the NPF and the findings are presented thus:-

When asked to make an assessment of NPPRD'S activities, respondents' responses presented in table 4 reflected some bias on the part of police. For example table 1 (population A) indicates that 37 police officers representing 74% of the total number sampled said it was satisfactory, 5 or 10.0% said it was unsatisfactory while the remaining 8 or 16% said it was progressing. However, Nigerians responses presented in table 1 (population B) reveal that members of the public sampled refuted police officers' rating of the institution's PR effort. For instance, majority, 93 or 62% said NPPRD's effort was progressing, 37 or 24.7% said

police PR effort was unsatisfactory while 13.3% or 20 of the total number of Nigerian populace sampled opine that force's PR activities was satisfactory.

Facts collated from table 2(Population A) show that 4% or 2 members of the force sampled got police messages through TV/Radio. 54% or 27 through newspapers & Magazines, 17 or 34% or through in house journal while 8% or 4 officers got it through online. Also, table 2(Population B) indicates that 4 or 8% of the populace sampled got police messages through broadcast media, while 76% or 114 got it through newspapers/magazines, 6 or 4% got it through advertorials while 12 or 18% visit online media for police messages.

On the viewing and listening patterns of respondents, table 3 above presents security oriented programs that respondents watch and listen to in the broadcast media. Table 3(Population A) shows that 58% or 29 officers watch crime fighters, 14 or 26% said police and you, 5 or 10% said security watch while another 2 or 4% said they watch all of the programs. In addition, in table 3(Population B) 43 or 28.7% of the populace prefer Crime Fighters, 27 or 18% said Police and You, 20 or 13.3% view security watch, another 18 or 12% do not watch any of the programs while 42 or 28% tune in to all the programs.

Appraising NPPRD's public relations' activities, Mr. Damasus Ozoani, the deputy PPRO, Lagos Command who gave a thorough insight into the activities and public relations efforts of the police pinpointed that the NPPRD has witnessed tremendous improvement in a bid to be more proactive. He disclosed that the entire force rank and file is involved in the image laundering process starting from the IGP to the Commissioners to commandants to the least rank, up to the police public relations officers manning police image in all major police formations throughout the country. Specifically, he said the NPPRD use public relations tools such as: community relations (through the police public complaint bureau (PPCB); police community relations committee(PCRC)), courtesy visits, trainings, seminars and workshops, press conferences, broadcast programs, newsletters and in-house journals to pass information across to the citizenry and restore public confidence in the police. He hinted that Crime Victims Foundation; a non-governmental organization organizes periodic training and seminars for the police.

Despite the inspiring renditions of the Lagos Command deputy PPRO on NPPRD's activities, assessing the activities of the NPPRD from a professional angle, the public relations practitioners interviewed both said most of the police PR activities are damage control. They opine that most NPPRD efforts across the country have been rather responsive rather than being proactive.

The two PR practitioners namely: Mrs. Omolara Olaosebikan, an analyst, Client Service/Media Relations at The Quadrant Company (a PR firm) and Mr. Muiyiwa Akintunde, Managing Director of Leap Communications (PR firm) are both of the opinion that the Force PPRD in the various states had been rather responsive rather than being proactive. This, Akintunde reiterates has made "the police to be on the defensive often and engaging in damage control.

The damage control approach of NPPRD is what Center and Jackson (1995) cited in Olaiya (2006:29) calls Reactive public Relations practice. This, to Center and Jackson (1995), is public relations practice that is engineered by response to outside influences. Akintunde added further that "inconsistency in the deployment of officers to that sensitive position is also one major challenge."

Mr. Sunday Oditia, Senior crime correspondent with The Guardian and Mr. Mohammed

Umar of News Agency of Nigeria(NAN) support this view when they said by virtue of their exposure to the Lagos command PPRD, the government must really be up and doing in providing an enabling platform to ensure good public relations practice of the police.

Re – engineering the reactive public relations practice of the police is the focal point of this research work, a question was raised to establish how the Nigerian Police Force can improve on its public relations practice for improved national security.

For an improved Public Relations Practice the NPF, Umar suggests the total centralized digitalization of police data base across the country. With this in place, all accidents, riots, intelligence reports, robberies, bombings, and other social vices can be digitally reported, uploaded and collated from the point/state of occurrence thus granting on the spot access to information to key police officers across the country irrespective of their area of jurisdiction. This will militate against Police Public Relations Officers (PPROs) and key police officers maintaining an alibi during emergencies and will ultimately reduce the institution's reactive approach to issues/crisis. This way, he advocates, the effectiveness of the PPRD's activities will be felt by all and sundry. He notes further that applying public relations to launder the image of the police will start from a re-direction in individual police officer. As such, police public relations program should be a joint effort which will start from the individual police officers irrespective of cadre being good ambassadors of the force.

Additional insight was gathered in the research work when the researcher sought to establish the significance of hiring professional public relations consultant to rejuvenate the battered image of the Nigerian police force?

Findings from responses to the above questions varied, the Lagos Deputy Police Public Relations Officer interviewed exhibited some reluctance in his response. Ozoani opines that it would not be appropriate for PR consultants to take over the force's public relations activities 100%. He advocated that he would only suggest a synergy between them.

The take of Lagos DPPRO on the subject matter was disputed by public relations practitioners. Both Olaosebikan and Akintunde who were of the opinion that it is necessary to hire PR experts however cautioned that they must be autonomous in order to succeed in redeeming the image of the police. The PR consultants believe that it is necessary to hire PR experts who must indeed be autonomous if they will succeed in redeeming the image of the Police, stressing that a sustainable public Relations campaign must be practiced to achieve commendable result. Olaosebikan says PR experts will independently and periodically use PR tools such as stakeholder's relations, capacity building and development, effective media relations to gauge and influence public opinion and perception of the Police.

Akintunde notes that public relations experts can be consulted to enthrone a proactive public relations practice but "the system must make the consultants do their work.

Akintunde opines that a sustainable public relations campaign must be practiced to achieve commendable success. This view was postulated by Adebayo (1998:2) citing the British Institute of Public Relations when he said "public relations is a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and goodwill between an organization and its public".

The Guardian crime correspondent, Oditia and his NAN counterpart, Umar, said hiring PR consultants will certainly provide a holistic approach to the image laundering process of the police since they are professionals. They stressed that PR expert execution is needed but can only be successful with adequate funding and improved welfare of the police.

In addition, the veritability of media relations as a vibrant public relations tool was tested as the researcher sought to know whether or not improved media relations practice by the police

can engineer positive public perception of police vis-à-vis reduction in bad publicity. Ozoani pointed out with dismay that the perceived bad image of the police was promoted by negative and unfair repertoire. The LDPPRO expressed displeasure about negative and imbalance stories of members of the press about the force. He added that the bad image of the police was also overblown by media reports.

The DPPRO hinted that in a bid to ensure good media relation practice, the police under the leadership of former police IGP, Mike Okiro built a secretariat for crime reporters as the Lagos command to have cordial and two way communication between the police and the media. It was gathered during the researcher's field visit to the Lagos Command PPRD that the police actually built secretariat for crime reporters.

Dissenting views were expressed by crime reporters and DPPRO on the media relations practice of the force. The reporters said the LPPRO was discriminative and selective in her media relations practice as she chooses which media house or reporter to attend to. This, Umar noted, had greatly affected her accessibility and availability when contacted in a bid to give fair hearing to the police on news stories stressing that this also affects media representation of police sides in news publications. Umar, therefore advised that the media relations practice of the current Lagos command PPRO must be improved upon if the force wants to enjoy favourable and positive publicity.

Drawing from evidences advanced from the perspectives of DPPRO and crime reporters, it will be safe to infer that the discriminatory media relations approach of the current Lagos command PPRO has adversely affected media presentation of police activities as disclosed by the reporters interviewed.

To buttress the above point, the researcher conducted an independent content analysis of media report of police activities and discovered that some of the journalists' (spread across media houses) reports on the side of Lagos PPRO usually end with the allegation of no response from the Lagos PPRO as at press time.

According to a story written by Eniola Akikioku in Punch of Monday, December 23, 2013 pages 4-5, titled "Policemen kill teenager, other during Christmas party". The concluding paragraph capturing the side of the LPPRO read; "... promised to respond to the development but did not call back as of the time of going to the press".

In addition, Comfort Oseghale in her story published in Punch of Wednesday November 27, 2013 on pages 4-5 titled "Widower accuses police of shielding wife's killer". The last paragraph stating the Lagos Command PPRO's side of the story wrote "The telephone line of Lagos state PPRO,, rang out and she did not reply text messages as of press time.

By and large, these quotations are pointers to the alleged inaccessibility and unavailability and by extension discriminatory media relations practice of the LPPRO.

From a professional point of view, Olaosebikan cautioned that the potency of media relations in restoring police's battered image can be better realized if the police intensify efforts aimed at re-orientating members especially those who deal with the public regularly to ensure best practices adding that media relations in public relations practice is not about falsehood. Just as Akintunde said effective media relations can help launder Police image cautioning that if it must work, then individual police officers must project the institutions image positively in every facet of life.

The underlying point of the dissenting stances of DPPRO and crime reporters is that there is a gap in effective communication between the two parties. This translates that for the Nigerian Police to enjoy positive publicity that will restore public confidence in the force, and then it must evolve effective media relations practice as one of the PR tools to launder the image of

the force and also tackle the reactive PR practice of NPF.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawn from facts gathered, the study recommends that:

- **Digitalized Data Base for the force to curb reactive PPRO approach.**

In a bid to guard against the negative reports of PPRO actions during emergencies/occurrences nationwide, it is recommended that the police should embrace the digitalization of its data base whereby the entire system will be connected via information technology. This way, all accidents, intelligence reports, surveillance efforts, robberies, bombings, inter-ethnic wars, riots and all social vices can be reported from point of occurrence on the system and such information irrespective of the state of occurrence can be assessed by the necessary authorities and police mouth pieces (such as: IGP, commissioners of police, commandants, PPROS amongst other) and appropriate, timely remedial actions taken. This will to some degree combat the reactive PR practice of the police and subsequently reduce media reports that PPRO when contacted said he or she was not aware or has not been briefed.

- **Hiring independent PR consultant expertise execution to lauder police image.**

A holistic approach to laundering the image of the police will be to employ the services of PR experts to handle the image problem of the force.

The PR consultants, being independent concerns and civilians can design PR framework(s) that would transform the Nigerian police to be responsive, accountable and public friendly operatives with best practices.

- **Adequate funding and correction of operational inadequacies.**

To achieve commendable success in proactively positioning the police for national security, government must be ready to fund forces' activities adequately including Public Relations and other operational activities. This way, PR efforts whether by the NPPRD or public relations consultants will be felt in the image restoration effort.

- **The recruitment and appointment of PPRO and the team should be based on professional prowess and certification.**

A practice whereby any general duty officer is posted to the department should be halted. Such technical know-how will definitely come to bear in the PPRO's approaches and strategy on laundering the corporate image of the force as well as projecting the institution favorably before the public.

- **Improved media relations practice.** The PPRO should as a matter of necessity cultivate good media relations. Media relations must go beyond being publicity shy. No entity that wants to be perceived favourably can do without establishing good rapport with members of the fourth estate.

CONCLUSION

The basic rule of effective policing is human element as reflected in the police code of conduct launched recently. PPRO must see good public relations as an on-going process, which needs persistence, being positive and continuously looking for opportunities to position the force favorably and encourage trust in the long run. To be candid, applying public relations principles to address the reactive PR practice of the police requires visible policing which involves five key elements namely: preparedness, centralized digitalization of police data base nationwide, improved media relations, addressing institutional inadequacies and a changed disposition of officers to unprofessional conducts and the Nigerian populace. These, when instituted through sustainable and strategic public relations effort will definitely improve national security.

Real national security must move far away from debates on the concept to carefully selected

programmes, successful implementation of laudable projections and continued evaluation and monitoring of progress report.

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TABLES

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS RATINGS OF POLICE PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORT.

(POLICE) Population A				(CIVILIANS) Population B			
Option	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent	Option	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Satisfactory	37	74.0	74.0	Unsatisfactory	37	24.7	24.7
Unsatisfactory	5	10.0	84.0	Satisfactory	20	13.3	38.0
Progressing	8	16.0	100.0	Progressing	93	62.0	100.0
Total	50			Total	150		

SOURCE: field survey

TABLE 2: AVENUES THROUGH WHICH RESPONDENTS GET POLICE MESSAGES

(POLICE) Population A				(CIVILIANS) Population B			
Options	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Options	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
TV/radio	2	4.0	4.0	TV/radio	12	8.00	8.00
Newspapers/ Magazines	27	54.0	58.0	Newspapers/ Magazines	114	76.0	84.0
In house Journal	17	34.0	92.0	Advertoria l	6	4.0	88.0
Online media	4	8.0	100	Online Media	18	12.0	100.0
Total	50			Total	150		

SOURCE: field survey.

**TABLE 3: SECURITY ORIENTED PROGRAMMES THAT RESPONDENTS WATCH ON TELEVISION AND RADIO
(POLICE)Population A (CIVILIANS) Population B**

Option	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent	Option	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Crime fighter	29	58.0	58.0	Crime fighter	43	28.7	28.7
Police and You	14	28.0	86.0	The Police and You	27	18.0	46.7
Security watch	5	10.0	96.0	Security watch	20	13.3	60.0
All of the above	2	4.0	100.0	None of the above	18	12.0	72.0
		100		All of the above	42	28.0	100.0
Total	50			Total	150		

SOURCE: field survey