

Nigeria's Declining International Image and the Role of Nigerian Television Authority in Nation Branding

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Abstract

This paper examines Nigeria's international image and the role of Nigerian Television Authority in nation branding. The study used the qualitative research method to gain insights into the public perception of Nigeria's image internationally. Thus, historical and analytical approaches were used while carrying out the research. The study used both secondary and primary data, image theory, agenda-setting theory and theory of communication to guide the research. The study found that media has a critical role in promoting Nigeria's international image. It also found that the public perception of Nigeria's image abroad is negative, and that Nigeria could have achieved positive image perception had the country utilised media in promoting its international image. The study also found that Nigeria could have made more progress in tackling its international image problems had it fully focused and funded the NTA as an instrument of foreign policy. It found that key among challenges preventing Nigeria from achieving a positive image externally include non-utilisation of media and in particular, the NTA as a foreign policy instrument. The research recommends that the Nigerian government should develop an international image promotion media strategy managed by an independent agency in the Presidency with immediate, medium and long term sustainability mandates, to promote the country's foreign policy including global propaganda. Additionally, the study recommends adoption of utilisation of media for promoting international image as official government policy, and excision of NTA from the ministry to be an independent agency in the Presidency, fully funded and to function professionally.

Keywords: *foreign policy, media, Nigeria's international image, Nigerian Television Authority, perception*

Introduction

Nigeria has enjoyed international reputation and a good image as a result of various roles it played and many contributions it made to global peace and development, which brought it good will and global respect. The United Nations acknowledged that since 1960, Nigeria has been a major contributor of troops and police to UN peace operations having aided in several of the global body's missions including being the backbone of the UN Mission in Liberia from 2003-2018 where Nigeria helped to restore security in a country that underwent a brutal civil war (UN, 2018). At the continental level, Nigeria's leadership role in the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 (now African

Union – AU), her political and economic support for the liberation struggle that saw the independence of several other African countries, her leadership role in the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the role it played in the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) force in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the institution of the Technical Aid Corps scheme founded in 1987 by Nigeria as a foreign policy creation designed to provide technical support to developing countries, mainly in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, by sharing Nigeria's expertise and manpower with other countries in need, all of which endeared Nigeria to the world and earned for her a positive international image (Ayinde, 2011; Osakwe & Audu, 2017; Salami, 2013). Nigeria is generally acknowledged to be the giant of Africa, with the largest population currently of over 200 million, and until 2015, the largest economy in Africa, acknowledged in its generosity in giving aid and human capital support to other African nations and other developing states. However, more recently, owing to domestic issues, the respect which earned the country the positive international image and endorsed Nigeria's prestige to the world, has declined due to bad governance, corruption, failed leadership, a bad economy for a country so well endowed, poverty, insecurity, cybercrimes and drug-trafficking.

The domestic issues at home and the dwindling international image of Nigeria affect the way the country engages with the rest of the world, because a positive national image boosts a nation's foreign policy. But when the image declines, this leads the country to lose influence in the comity of nations. This is the case with Nigeria, as the country has been experiencing image crises since 2010 its international image, once highly regarded, has plummeted and the public perception of the country internationally is starkly negative. The promotion of a country's image nationally and internationally is an important attribute of a state foreign policy (Fayomi et. al., 2015; Zimako, 2009). For this reason, states go to great lengths to build positive image domestically devoid of, or with minimal crisis, and to promote, protect and promote their image externally. Holsti (1996, p. 22) explains that image is an individual's perception of an object, fact or condition in terms of badness or goodness as well as the meaning ascribed to, or deduced therefrom. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that country image promotion, of necessity, essentially

forms an important component of the foreign policy of a nation because how a country is perceived more so in the modern-day is a function of its national image (Adeniyi, 2012: p. 356).

Nigeria has over the years successively introduced nation-branding and rebranding programmes to position the country's image in positive light to the international community. Historically, the first nation-branding effort Nigeria undertook is traceable to the General Yakubu Gowon's "No Victor, No Vanquished" statement in 1970 after the 30-month civil, as "image-polishing" became a visible aspect of Nigeria's foreign policy, to explain the war to the outside world so as to regain favourable public perception and good image (David, 2021). According to Ojo & Aghedo (2013), since then, to discard the nation's negative image at home and internationally, other rebranding projects Nigeria launched include the Jaji Declaration by the Obasanjo military government (1975-1979), War Against Indiscipline (WAI) by Buhari/Idiagbon military regime (1983-1985), Mass Mobilisation for Self Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and 'Not-in-Our-Character' of the Babangida/Abacha military administrations (1985-1998). The country's return to democratic rule in 1999 witnessed rebranding under Obasanjo, first, as 'Nigeria Image Project', later renamed as the 'Heart of Africa' project, between 1999 and 2007. Yar'Adua's government (2007-2010) launched the "Nigeria: Good People, Great Nation" rebranding project focused on "accelerating Nigeria's development through foreign investment and tourism" (Albert, 2009, p. 406). The most publicised "Rebranding Nigeria" crusade was launched in May 2009 by Prof. Dora Akunyili then minister of information and communication under Yar'Adua government. It is viewed as the most comprehensive of Nigeria's rebranding attempts (Ojo & Aghedo, 2013). President Buhari launched "Change Begins With Me" in September 2016. However, many scholars have criticised Nigeria's rebranding projects for being superficial, wasteful, without in-depth media content, cosmetic, and lacking candid commitment to address fundamental problems, while the identified issues such as bad governance, corruption and

leadership failure persist in government (Ani, 2014; Amadi, 2017; David, 2021; Edigin, 2011; Ijewere & Imhanlahimi, 2010; Ojo & Aghedo, 2013; Onwuliri, 2022; Uchem, 2009; Usang & Ekpo, 2014).

It has been suggested that a nation's image has a strong influence on the flow of international capital. While the relationship between news media and images of nations is not adequately researched, images of certain nations, whether right or wrong, appear to be formed through a complex communication process involving diverse information sources (Lippmann, 1972; Kunczik, 2001). Some scholars (Braimah and Edo, 2020; Ogunnubi and Isike, 2018; Ojo & Aghedo, 2013) have bemoaned Nigeria's recent declining international image due to bad governance, corruption, leadership failure, insecurity and poverty. In fact, Nigeria used to be highly respected due to its contributions to Africa's regional integration but the country has been increasingly losing its influence due to its recent performance (Garba, 2023). The main task of the paper is to assess Nigeria's international image crises and the connection between public perception of Nigeria's international image and the role of media in nation branding and the efficacy of Nigerian Television Authority in promoting Nigeria's image abroad.

International Image

As the world ceaselessly operates in a state of flux, the quest by nations to increase power, enhance national interest and assert their influence in international relations has not been in short supply. To attain to their desires, countries often resort to and rely on acquiring country image and promoting it in international affairs for economic, political, trade, and cultural gains. Thus, the concept of country's international image is one that has attracted attention of scholars, authors, experts in political science and international relations for quite some time already. Country international image is the collective perception and judgment of a country or entity by the international community, which encompasses the country's reputation, cultural understanding, and ranking in international affairs. The international image of a country is the way such a country is perceived by people and organisations in other countries,

encompassing its policies, culture, values, and complete character (Agena, 2010; Anholt, 2007; Boulding, 1959).

Accordingly, the international image of a nation is the combined perception and valuation of a country by foreign publics, including such a nation's culture, values, policies and actions, which have a noteworthy impression on the country's standing and thus influencing the country's relations with others on the world stage (Anholt, 2013; Boulding, 1959; Owuamanam & Agbaenyi, 2021). The images which are important in international systems are those which a nation has of itself and of those other bodies in the system which constitute its international environment. Whether transmitted orally and informally through the family or more formally through schooling and the written word, the national image is essentially a historical image – that is, an image which extends through time, backward into a supposedly recorded or perhaps mythological past and forward into an imagined future, and the more conscious a people is of its history, the stronger the national image is likely to be (Boulding, 1959).

Media

Mass media has been variously defined (Arifin, 2023; Cambridge, 2009; Erbaş, 2022; Fang, 1997; Garba, 2016; Hanson, 2019; Katz, 1957; Luhmann, 2000; Musaeva, 2021; Riley, Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1956; Saragih, 2020) as communication that reaches enormous and heterogeneous audiences over vast distances usually simultaneously, with targeted messages or information intended to stimulate desired outcome on the receiver. The mass media, comprising print (newspapers, magazines, journals), electronic or broadcast (radio and television), and the internet (online) – more commonly referred to as “media” – has, since its emergence back in the 15th century and credited to Johannes Gutenberg who invented the printing press, become an essential indeed indispensable part of modern society from the national to the international setting. The significance and indispensability of media in society is underscored in the settled consensus that communication is indispensable among human beings and human societies, and that among all creatures on earth, there are no other creatures that are so

communicative and in such need of informing others and being informed, as human beings (Frederick, 1993). Watzlawick et. al. (1967) assert rather emphatically that “one cannot not communicate” (Watzlawick et. al., 1967, p. 277).

Empirical Review

International Image in International Relations

To fully appreciate the empirical salience of the concept of International Image experientially, an understanding of image theory is essential. Herrmann (2013) states that image theory suggests a way to structure the study of perceptions in international relations and says image theory argues three core aspects of the way a relationship is understood, in particular the way the interdependence of goals, relative power, and relative status, which combine to motivate the construction of images that facilitate action, is understood. According to Herrmann (ibid), in the ideal-typical cases, these images resemble stereotypes that allow people to act on the emotions evoked by their understanding of the relationship. The stereotypes do this by presenting a cognitive picture of the situation that includes features that people believe release them from the moral prohibitions that would otherwise pertain. These motivated stereotypical images then operate as mental models with schemata-like properties, filling in missing pieces of information and shaping the search for new information and the interpretation of what it means (Herrmann, 2013).

Kenneth Boulding (1959), who is largely credited with initiating the image theory of international relations, writes that in grappling with the image theory, the world deals with two representative images: (1) the image of the small group of powerful people who make the actual decisions which lead to war or peace, the making or breaking of treaties, the invasions or withdrawals, alliances, and enmities which make up the major events of international relations; and, (2) the image of the mass of ordinary people who are deeply affected by these decisions but who take little or no direct part in making them.

Accordingly, “the tacit support of the mass, however, is of vital importance to the powerful. The powerful are always under some obligation to represent the mass, even under dictatorial regimes. In democratic societies the aggregate influence of the images of ordinary people is very great” while the image upheld by the powerful cannot diverge too greatly from the image of the mass without the powerful losing power (Boulding, 1959, p. 122). Talking about the manipulative nature, or how the national or international image, for that matter, can be manipulated, Boulding say it is this fact that the national image is basically a lie, or at least a perspective distortion of the truth, which perhaps accounts for the ease with which it can be perverted to justify “monstrous cruelties and wickednesses.”

Image theory suggests that ideas and cognition about other actors in world affairs are organised into clusters of knowledge which reflect three strategic judgments about the other actor whereby judgments about another actor’s relative capability and culture along with a judgment about the threat or opportunity the other actor represents give rise to images which in the ideal typical case operate like stereotypes (Herrmann et al., 1997, p. 422). In relating with one another, especially in the international arena, “subjects were also inclined to use information about another actor’s capability or motivation to draw inferences about the actor’s decision-making process” whereby perceptions of decision-making processes could lead to assumptions about intentions, characteristically associating democratic decision making with more “benign intentions”. In such instance subjects are more likely to have been guided by “empirically based theories while making some of these inferences.” They may have learned that “democracies rarely fight one another and from this concluded (that) they have benign intentions.” Herrmann et al. (1997) conclude that “results suggest that it is not only propaganda that paints other actors as good, bad, or backward across a host of independent components,” but as Heider (1958) also observes, “cognitive processes and affect contribute to this effect” (Herrmann et al., 1997, p. 422).

National image construction has become conventional since the 20th century, particularly in the Cold War era, when governments became aware of the significance of systematic image construction (Li & Chitty, 2009). The dawn of globalised communication led to an increase in national image building, in particular, as nations struggle to increase their power and influence in international relations. The present-day obsession with building national and international image serves twin functions provided that the image-building activities are effectively piloted, because not only will it create domestic political support but also enlarge a country's international influence, and the latter function is deemed to be more crucial today since nations desire to integrate with global markets, to participate in global affairs, and to enhance their status on the world stage. Therefore, how a country is perceived and projected by other countries can result in changes in their mutual relationships and to their strategic responses, which stresses the role of national images in international relations (Li & Chitty, 2009).

While the image is a human construct forced on an assortment of perceived qualities projected by an object, event, or person (Nimmo & Savage, 1976), the concept of projected images recognises individual and social constructions of the image, and questions unreservedly the value of state-constructed images projected toward other countries (Li & Chitty, 2009). Yet, in spite of the apparent vagueness of efficacy, there is scope in advancing a definition giving those concerned with image-making the room to modify or construct the public's perceptions of an object (Manheim & Albritton, 1983). Therefore, national image can be divided into the categories of "perceived and projected" images, and perceived images of nations can be identified as the pictures of other nations in the minds of people from the perspective of social psychology (Li & Chitty, 2009). On another note, Lippmann (2022) had stated that images are the pictures in people's heads, as people's productions of images are primarily shrouded by stereotypes as well as individual experiences. In this guise, the most prevalent influences are stereotypes as through them people are told how to see the world before seeing it (Lippmann, 1922). There is the consensus that the way decision-makers observe other nations will potentially influence their decision-making in

foreign policy construction (Holsti, 1962), and this in turn impact the mutual relationships (Kunczik, 1997; Holsti, 1968; Boulding, 1958). Consequently, the importance of international image in foreign policy cannot be overstated and countries aim to enhance their image in order to derive economic, trade, tourism benefits, as well as also to create political and military alliances, cultural or ideological benefits (Saliu, 2017).

In international relations it is always the image, not necessarily the truth that immediately determines behaviour, and for this reason, states and other actors in international relations act according to the way the world appears to them, as such, countries make deliberate efforts to construct a positive international image (David, 2021). And, the attempts by states to build a favourable image means perception management, because perception management involves deliberate efforts to guard and manage positive images, identities, or reputations (Elsbach, 2003). For instance, Saaida, (2023) argues that on a practical note, the European Union's soft power strategy has been a cornerstone of the bloc's foreign policy objectives and says this has helped to enhance the EU's global influence and reputation. By promoting its values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, the EU has been able to foster a positive international image for itself and thus build trust and a positive public perception among countries around the world (Duarte & Ferreira-Pereira, 2022).

Nigeria International Image

Ugbor-Kalu et al (2020) analysed the connection between globalisation and Nigeria international image, focusing on its adaptability, challenges, and prospect. The scholars' central question of the study was how Nigeria international image crisis impacts on the country's ability to adapt to the ongoing globalisation process. Image, be it national or international, is a function of perception, which again can be a resultant of objectivity or subjectivity of purpose, as there is no disputing the fact that a good image constitutes a source of goodwill and patronage for a country. As such, the country's international image is considered by investors in determining where to direct their funds. The country image where it is

positive also brings the level of unfriendliness down, and this is why every government seeks to promote at all times, a better image for itself nationally and internationally (Akinterinwa, 2007). The country international image is one of the perquisites for the level of influence and relevance of a nation's degree of interaction in the international system, as image crisis denies a nation high level of integrity and credibility by other states and makes it difficult for a state to genuinely and gainfully market or advertise its goods and services in the international system because states do question the authenticity and origin of such goods or services (Ugbor-Kalu, 2020).

Thus, many countries perceive Nigerians as "corrupt" and will not like to do business with them, while on the other hand, others look at the governance structure in Nigeria as a factor that undermines Nigeria international image and inability to catch up with the globalisation process. In their observation, political governance had created the insecurity debacle of Boko Haram, with its problem of internally displaced persons, devaluation of the country's currency, the Naira, and declining foreign reserves. Also, many Nigerians' behaviour and activities domestically and in foreign lands go a long way in defining the country's image externally. Consequently, Nigeria's international image has, in recent times exhibited a negative posture as governance is not all about winning the election but is also about international image credibility which the government can champion beyond its boundaries (Ugbor-Kalu et al., 2020).

Agena (2010) submits that terrorism, especially with the emergence and rise of Boko Haram in 2009 and its spread of violence, murder and destruction across Nigeria, has had direct impact on Nigeria resulting in increasing negative public perception, low level of foreign direct investment and the declining international image of Nigeria. The discussion on the international image of Nigeria has been on the front burner for some time against the backdrop of the fact that the international image of a country is an important determinant of how well the nation is doing at home which mirrors its image

abroad because international image provides a basis for self-assessment in the event of any ugly happening (Agena, 2010, p. 25).

Nigeria's international image crisis has been a contentious issue resulting from adverse effects created by stringent socio-economic and political conditions facing Nigerians. The country's state of affairs has sullied approaches and attempts aimed at resolving the nation's image crisis such that the image branding programme launched by a former minister, late Prof Dora Akunyili, to address the situation was unable to ameliorate the condition (Owuamanam & Agbaenyi, 2021), even as the scholars recommended the image theory of International Politics by Kenneth Boulding (1959) as a theoretical guide for the explanation. Their study reveals that Nigeria's international image is in crisis as it is shrouded by poor international perception of Nigerian business environments, poor perception of Nigeria and Nigerians abroad and the international perception of corruption in Nigeria. This is seen in the withdrawal of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), ill-treatment and unwarranted suspicion of Nigerians abroad, the deportation of Nigerian nationals, visa ban on various Nigerian nationals, and Nigeria's corruption perception index and poor ranking reports. The national image of a country, both at home and abroad is a critical issue (Owuamanam & Agbaenyi, 2021), and Nigeria was not always perceived negatively by the international community because of the great possibilities the country had at independence. However, Nigeria had transformed to become one regarded among the most corrupt in the world, which warrants concern and study, because "Nigeria has been likened to a giant that is in danger of becoming a dwarf" (David, 2021, p. 42), while it has become apparent that corruption and human rights are two themes central to Nigeria's external image problem (David, 2021, p. 48).

Idowu & Ogunbiyi (2024) identified "political corruption" as one of many problems besetting and denting Nigeria international image, which, resulted in "unfriendly treatment" of Nigerians in the diaspora, poor foreign investment inflow into the country and the lack of attraction of foreign reliefs as

corruption is one of the “corrosive elements of Nigeria’s political system” with its attendant effects on national image that is rapidly grabbing grander global attention currently, manifesting in the electoral process through “money bag politics, political thuggery, godfatherism – anointing candidates to subvert a free and fair party primary election – as well as in governance with contempt for the rule of law, flagrant abuse of office, (and) economic corruption” (Idowu & Ogunbiyi, 2024, p. 372).

Fayomi et. al. (2015) hold that from all appearances, it is obvious that the inconsistencies and ambiguities in Nigeria’s foreign policy objectives over the years, heightened by whims in domestic policies, more than any other variable, explain the international image crisis that has confounded Nigeria. Specifically, a United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) at a forum in Lagos in 2004, concluded that Nigeria’s poor international image has been denying the country the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) needed to fast-track its economic development (Fayomi et al (2015). Citing Adeniyi (2012, p. 357), Fayomi et al (2015) state that the picture of denial of foreign direct investment painted by the UNCTAD was understandable “given the fact that Nigeria has for long been bogged down by its perception as one of the most corrupt nations in the world” (Adeniyi, 2012, p. 357). Accordingly, Fayomi et al (2015) conclude that determination of the distortions entrenched in the nation’s foreign policy remains the single solution to resolving Nigeria’s national and international image problems (Fayomi et al, 2015).

Methodology

The study, being qualitative research, was conducted using a desktop research and library research as well as content analysis approach for secondary data. Thus, a discourse and historical analysis method was utilised, because perception and international image are reputational concepts that every nation wants to deploy today in the international arena to enhance their influence. This method is utilised specifically to understand public perception and the role of the media in promoting a nation’s international image. For primary data, the study deployed purposive sampling technique to identify

expert and stakeholders and collected data directly from the sources by conducting interviews using semi-structured and unstructured interview data collection technique. Consequently, thematic data analysis method was correspondingly adopted to identify, analyse, and report themes and patterns that emerged from the data. The sample population included relevant officials of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nigerian Television Authority, diplomats, academia, international relations experts and media professionals for their perspectives and insights. The combination of both secondary and primary data proved to be valuable as the data availed the researcher rich historical and empirical data affording a more wide-ranging understanding of the problem.

Theoretical Framework

There is an intriguing interplay among the three key concepts of image, agenda-setting and communication theories and their hold and influence on the international system. Through their interconnectedness, the image, agenda-setting and communication theories function to influence public opinion, perception and conduct. Whereas agenda-setting, principally in the milieu of mass media, weaves and emphasises how media's selecting and prioritising of subjects and matters is able to influence and shape how and what the public decides, considers and accepts as essential, communication theory, concurrently using framing, elucidates and describes how, information offered and made available and accessible, through word, text, image, or video, can influence and impact an audience construal and behaviour concerning such matters. As a result, media is primed to and does use images and framing methods to influence the public opinion and form public perception (Frederick, 1993; Lippmann, 1922; Luhmann, 2000; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Image theory, agenda-setting theory, and communication theories are therefore interrelated concepts that underscore how media shapes public perception. Agenda-setting theory, entrenched in the notion that media impacts what topics the public promotes as important, is meticulously connected to image theory, which surveys how media creates conceptual images or views of reality. Both image and agenda-

setting theories come under the wider authority of communication theories, which offer frameworks for the comprehension of transmission of messages between sender and receiver. In short, the influence of media to choose and shape stories shapes public perception and elevates issues for the public to deem important or less important and therefore, which the public should deliberate on as matters of priority. Three scholars, Walter Lippmann, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw are closely credited with providing foundations for the understanding of the three theories. While Lippmann is given credit for laying the foundation of agenda-setting theory as detailed in his book “Public Opinion” in 1922, in which he discoursed the role of media in influencing public perception, McCombs and Shaw registered their mark on agenda-setting theory in the course of a U.S. presidential campaign where they delivered experiential evidence pertaining to the theory. The agenda-setting theory suggests that media exercises substantial control over political, cultural and social news stories, which in turn influence the public opinion, thinking and decision-making. The agenda-setting concept holds that the media has the power to choose which issues or events to place priority upon by the way media outlets promote such topics, and influences how the public perceives those news stories (Lippmann, 1922; Luhmann, 2000; McCombs, 2003; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007).

The inevitability of communication in human society leads to the axiom that “one cannot not communicate” (Watzlawick, et. al, 1967, p. 51). Global communication is that intersection of disciplines that studies the international communication of values, attitudes, opinions, information, and data by individuals, groups, people, institutions, governments, and information technologies, as well as the resulting controversial issues arising from the structure of institutions responsible for promoting or inhibiting such messages among and between nations and cultures (Frederick, 1993; Troidahl & Van Dam, 1965-1966). The image theory, agenda-setting theory and communication theory are key for this paper as they provide the foundation for an understanding and explanation of the problem of the study.

Nigeria’s declining international image and the foreign policy implications

As nations increasingly come under the pressures to boost national interests to increase their influence in international relations, the importance of country international image is becoming increasingly acknowledged. The recognition of the significance of a nation's international image in influencing its foreign policy presupposes an understanding of the critical value of public perception in the aggregation of views and opinions regarding a nation by other nations and publics. What is the public perception of Nigeria's image internationally? This was the fundamental question put forward to interview participants in this study. It was with a view to ascertain whether Nigeria's image is positive or negative in the international community. The prestige and reputation of Nigeria, or the absence thereof, is the overall status of the country's international image, and the resultant foreign policy implications. The findings revealed that majority (60%) of participants have a wholly negative perception of Nigeria's international image, and hold the view that this is consistent with what the international publics hold about Nigeria's image internationally. However, a minority of the sample population (32%) held mixed views, stating that Nigeria's international image is not static but oscillates between negative and positive depending on which country or foreign publics' views of Nigeria's image were sought. Thus, the 32% held a split (equal, or 50-50) between negative and positive. Only an insignificant number (8%) of the sample population stated that Nigeria's international image is positive.

The perception of Nigeria's international image while being subjective rather than an objective reality, is a reflection of domestic policies of the government of Nigeria – whether such domestic policies brought relief or discomfort, joy or suffering, poverty or a good living standard for the entirety of the population, and, how those policies impact the lives of the citizenry. The economy of the country in general, how well or badly it is being managed, the resources, especially material and human resources, with which the country is endowed, how they are managed, came strongly as determinants that influenced the perception of the country internationally. Therefore, the theme of perception of Nigeria's

international image borders on the credibility, integrity and influence of Nigeria in the international arena, from sub-regional bloc, West Africa, to the continental African bloc and to the world in general.

One major interesting outcome of the study's findings is that secondary data accessed from existing academic literature as presented in literature review, and primary sources from field interviews, overwhelmingly revealed in the results a general consensus that the overall public perception of Nigeria internationally is negative. Thus, the image of Nigeria in the international community has dwindled drastically over the years, has become negative and problematic, and Nigeria's influence in the international arena has plummeted. This has far-reaching implications on the country's foreign policy. Fayomi et. al. (2015) observed that Nigeria's foreign policy over the years has been grossly damaged and dented by image crisis both domestically and internationally, and argued that the Nigeria's role expectations at different "concentric circles" of her foreign policy have generated multiple role perceptions, which have led to inadvertent role conflict with the resultant implication being confusion and dissonance in the internal institutional and constitutional mechanisms that drive the country's foreign policy formulation and implementation (Fayomi et. al., 2015). Chidozie et. al. (2014) submitted that effective and proactive foreign policy articulation and implementation have significant implications on a country's international image which could stimulate or impact on national transformation as a good image enhances the influence of a nation, attracts investment, and increases cooperation in the relations with other, while a deleterious or bad image can lead to isolation and impede a nation's foreign policy objectives (Chidozie et. al., 2014).

The sample population consisted of a total of 25 participants who were identified and recruited through purposive sampling. All participants are of Nigerian origin, and, they all consented to, and willingly took part in the survey, participated and contributed by freely answering interview questions. Most of the participants were interviewed through one-on-one face-to-face meetings, while a number of others

were interviewed via online (through electronic means, telephonically via WhatsApp or Google Meet) owing to distances and their availability. Among the 25 participants, a total of sixteen (16) were interviewed physically at various locations in Abuja, while two (2) were interviewed in Lagos. One (1) resident in Enugu, one (1) along Lagos-Ibadan expressway, Ogun State, and five (5) in Lagos, were interviewed electronically/telephonically. The demographics of the sample population has top management personnel of Nigerian Television Authority (5); top management personnel of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (5); top management personnel of other (private) media organisations (5); International Relations/Media Experts (5); and, Diplomats/Academics (5).

Content analysis of the data from interviews revealed a number of themes in the findings. Negative perception of Nigeria's image abroad emerged as the major theme on which participants scored Nigeria low. In international relations, perception of a country refers to the rational or emotional connotations, views, beliefs and the total image or appearance people, associations or countries hold regarding a country. Perceptions are influenced by many factors, including media representations, individual subjective experiences, cultural beliefs, and political philosophies (Herrmann, 2013). Majority of the participants (60%) identified bad governance, leadership failure, corruption, impunity of government officials, insecurity, cybercrimes, drug trafficking, money laundering, criminal and unwholesome conducts of many Nigerians in foreign countries, including illegal migration, as factors that are significantly responsible for the negative and poor perception of Nigeria's international image. A common thread that ran through in almost all the responses by participants on their perception of Nigeria's image abroad is summed up in the answer by participant #1: "I'll say that Nigeria's international image is not positive. I am not happy with what I see being posted and published about Nigeria globally. If there is anything that happens on social media, other nationals are casting aspersions on Nigerians. So, our international image is not what I would have loved it to be, because it is negative. Let us start from perception, but we see it in action also. But the way Nigeria is considered, actually, the

perception that other countries and nationals have about Nigeria, it has assisted in dwindling the respect that the country used to have in the international community. Bad governance has become like a cancer for Nigeria. There is widespread poverty all over; poverty in the midst of plenty.”

The Role of the Nigerian Television Authority in Nation-Branding of Nigeria

When the government of Nigeria established the Nigerian Television Authority in 1977, the overall goal was to centralise television broadcasting directly under the central government. The intention was partly to reduce wastefulness, but more strategically, it was a move to ensure that the Federal Government had control of information, views, broadcast outcomes and commentaries issuing out of the public broadcaster. Data is scarcely available on a clearly defined government policy recognising, mandating or detailing the NTA as an instrument of Nigeria foreign policy. Thus, the NTA's focus has been to “inform, educate and entertain” Nigerians within Nigeria on government policies thereby promote national unity (NTA, 2013). The extension of NTA's broadcasts externally through NTA International has been a mere attempt to show presence beyond the boundaries of Nigeria. There has been no clearly defined policy that places either the NTA as a corporate body, or its international broadcast unit, as an instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy. Therefore, there has been no defined role for the NTA in promoting Nigeria's international image or Nigeria's foreign policy. The findings of this study show clearly that the NTA is not playing the role, or pretending to be playing the role as instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy in promoting Nigeria's international image or its foreign policy either.

In the study's findings, participants spoke of NTA's inability to adequately perform the role of promoting Nigeria's image abroad. One participant relates his experience of how as ambassador to Pakistan, he took two staff of NTA on two occasions to Pakistan to present news about Nigeria, and to also take news about Pakistan to Nigeria, and wished that NTA has representation if not in all Nigerian missions at least in some leading regional ones. “When I went, the business community, government officials, the citizens have very faint knowledge about Nigeria, even though we have established a

diplomatic relationship over a long period of time. So, the government officials, and the citizens, know very little about Nigeria. What they knew about Nigeria was what the media, the international media, was dishing out. The narrative that had been dished out, the image and representation was that this is a country that has been overtaken by Boko Haram, it's a country where insurgency has taken over. Suicide bombings, killings were the order of the day. So, you can see the perception they had of Nigeria and the narrative at that time, obviously it was very bad” participant 14 stated, and added: “If negative narratives are being bandied around” it will affect the international image of a country. He enjoined diplomats and government officials to “use media” to counter such narratives.

To play the role of instrument of Nigeria’s foreign policy and fittingly promote Nigeria’s international image, NTA has to proactively morph into creating programmes and content that drive its operations along a number of lines, ostensibly to live the spirit of the two key theories that guide media operations: agenda-setting theory and communication theory. As McCombs & Shaw (1972) stated, in picking and presenting news, the editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. This is because listeners, viewers and readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position based on the importance given to it by the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Consequently, on the political space where the biting issues of bad governance, leadership failure and corruption have combined to give Nigeria’s image nationally and internationally a deadly blow, the NTA can initiate and create programmes on political ideals and leadership exemplification, whereby it orientates the populace sustainably on the significance of good political legacies, strong national institutions and legal systems by benchmarking with what obtains in other nations and regions.

The government has a number of institutions, policies and initiatives on the fight against corruption and other social vices. Institutions such as the EFCC, ICPC, NDLEA, among others, will serve as valuable

sources for orientation and campaign against corruption programmes of the NTA to deploy in setting the agenda for the political class and the society in general. The NTA can help in creating programmes that will promote and project to the world the good and sterling attributes and unique characteristics of Nigeria and Nigerians thereby promoting the good image of the country nationally and internationally. Through consistently and actively participating in the campaign against corruption in its programmes and contents that it broadcasts, in reorienting people about how to behave properly abroad; cultivating the culture of discipline, and also in showcasing to Nigerians at home, how things are done in other countries, the NTA will be fitting well into the role as an instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy and thereby promoting Nigeria's international image. This will amount to practical nation branding in a more convincing manner and way than the previous rebranding programmes which government has launched.

There are so many sectors that the NTA can create content and programmes to promote the positive and enchanting features of Nigeria. From the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Nigeria, the over 250 languages, dialects, and tribes of the people to the fashion and dress sense of the different regions as well as cuisines and culinary traditions, there is an endless medley of areas from which the NTA can create content that is both unique and fascinating to enhance Nigeria's image abroad. The entertainment industry already offers boundless opportunities in music, traditional and cultural dances, the Nollywood phenomenon, musical exploits of Nigeria's all-conquering musicians, performers, comedians and the likes. Added to these fields is the promotion of value and moral re-orientation to support the anti-corruption, anti-money laundering and anti-cybercrime campaigns. These are areas that the NTA can invest its talents in churning out content and programmes that will keep the world fascinated to no end, all in promoting the country's image internationally. By creating content and programmes that showcase these areas, the NTA will be playing the role of nation-branding and keying into the campaign that promotes the good qualities of Nigeria against the things that make Nigeria look bad internationally. And also by showcasing what happens in other countries for Nigerians to learn from, because the media

is not just an instrument also of foreign policy, but of orientation and education, the NTA will take its place perfectly as an instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy.

While in some countries, like the UK, media sets agenda by helping to create a culture of greatness of the people and their country, the NTA appears to have fallen short in this expectation. So, specifically the role of the NTA should be to set the agenda by creating a new orientation for Nigerians, for the political class, for the business class, for the society in general; for the academia, for the youth, for the NGOs, for state governments, for local governments, for sporting associations and clubs, for MDAs, for ethnic cultural promotion, for the languages and the things that make Nigeria unique, and thus nurture and shape a positive and favourable image of Nigeria and present all these to the world.

How many ethnic groups are there in Nigeria, each with its uniqueness; how many distinct cultural areas? How many traditional festivals? What are the sporting events taking place in Nigeria, where and when? What are the unique areas of Nigeria for the foreign tourists? There is a sea of areas of opportunities for the NTA to help create an atmosphere of interest around them by producing content and programmes that broadcast their uniqueness to the world. The NTA can fashion programmes that promote better political culture, that promote Nigeria's moral values which speak against corrupt practices and social vices. These programmes will go to show the world that although there are a few bad eggs, they do not represent the generality of Nigeria, because Nigerians are generally, by origin and culture, good, warm, hospitable and friendly people. There are also institutions that carry out educational and leadership training, such as the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) and Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ALSCON), etc. Leadership failure and bad governance emerged as the main themes of this study's findings. By creating and promoting programmes that highlight and promote leadership training institutions in Nigeria, NTA will be promoting a culture that

focuses on tackling the leadership deficit of the country, a further nation-branding for Nigeria, thereby supplementing in promoting the country's image internationally.

Like media organisations and public broadcasters of other countries, the NTA's founding role is "to inform, educate and entertain." Now, however, the NTA needs to step up its game by adding "to promote Nigeria's international image" and take its place as an instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy. Media also promotes accountability and transparency. This places a further responsibility on the NTA to create programmes that promote both accountability and transparency, to guide people towards those ideals – and NTA should take the lead in this roles. NTA should step up to the tasks through programmes, and as an instrument of foreign policy, and also bring or initiate programmes that will show how things are done in other places; being a government media, it should incorporate those programmes into its overall content-creation and programming for broadcast nationally and internationally. Through the right mix and appropriate programming, NTA can and should create a new wave of political, educational, societal, cultural and youth movements thereby demonstrate a better nation branding and rebranding approach than has previously taken place. The NTA's role is to set the agenda by cultivating the agenda-setting role of the media, exploiting the communication theory to promote those images of Nigeria that will place the international image of the country on a good and positive pedestal. by initiating programmes that guide the people on the right ideals to follow, that also expose and show good attitude, and how people get into trouble abroad, and how they can avoid such by imbibing the good cultures that define Nigeria and Nigerians of all ethnic backgrounds, the NTA will be promoting Nigeria's international image and aptly fitting in as an instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The public perception of Nigeria's image abroad and the role of Nigerian Television Authority in promoting the image of Nigeria internationally formed the main task of this paper. The study's findings emphasised the indispensable role of media in shaping public perception and the impact this has on nation's international image. The study revealed that the public perception of Nigeria's image internationally is negative. The study findings identified bad governance, leadership failure, corruption, insecurity, and poverty as factors responsible for damaging Nigeria's image abroad. Some citizens' involvement in drug trafficking, money-laundering and irregular migration were also found to contribute to tarnishing the image of Nigeria internationally. The government has the opportunity but has failed to make enough efforts at redeeming the dwindling image of the country. Such efforts could have been in understanding, appreciating and utilising the media, especially the Nigerian Television Authority, in promoting the country's image abroad. But the government has failed to fund the NTA or allow it freedom and independence to function professionally.

Consequently, the paper makes some recommendations which offer Nigeria opportunities for nation branding to improve the country's image in the international system. The study recommends that the Nigerian government adopts an international publicity and image promotion media strategy with a long-term view to draw an implementable roadmap for international image promotion. Secondly, the study recommends the formulation of a policy that recognises, prioritises and adopts the utilisation of media as a strategic instrument of foreign policy. Finally, the study recommends that the NTA be excised from the ministry of information to be run as an agency under the presidency with freedom and independence to function as an instrument of foreign policy, fully funded, to operate professionally in promoting Nigeria's international image.

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