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## STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS USE IN IMAGE MANAGEMENT OF PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP) IN NIGERIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study assessed stakeholders' perception of Public Relations use in the image management of People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria. The study is anchored on stakeholders' theory. Survey research method was adopted using questionnaire for data collection. Sample size of 484 was statistically determined using Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. The study found that planning of political events and campaigns; media planning and campaign and advising party's leaders and hierarchy to implement programmes and policies that benefits both the party, and the publics were the areas in which Public Relations was used by PDP in image management of the party in Nigeria. The study further found that overwhelming majority had unfavourable disposition about the stakeholders' perception of the use of public relations in the image management of PDP. The study concluded that public relations activities of PDP did not contribute much to overcoming the challenges of unfavourable perception of its stakeholders in image management of the party. This was because of challenges of restricted budget/inadequate funds, poor appreciation/lack of adequate support from party's hierarchy and no feedback mechanism. The study recommended that PDP should employ trained PR practitioners to handle public relations activities, provide adequate funding and develop feedback mechanisms for efficient management of the party's image.*

**Key Words:** Stakeholders, Public Relations, Image Management and PDP.

### **1. Introduction**

Image management is the ongoing, proactive process of evaluating and controlling the influence of organisation's appearance on itself, on others, and the achievement of organisation's goals (Rozwadowska, 2012; Willi, Nguyen, Melewar & Dennis, 2014, Fariaa & Mendes, 2013; van der Merwe & Puth, 2014). Rozwadowska (2012) identifies four organizational image perspectives, depending on who views this mental image: internal perspective (organization's perception in the eyes of its members), market perspective (image in the eyes of its contractors, clients), socio-

political perspective (image of public opinion), and investor perspective (image in the eyes of shareholders and investors). This explains why Selin (2017), concluded that in today's increasingly competitive environment, institutions often must strengthen their corporate image in order to create demand by differentiating from other enterprises. With the formation of the internal and external image of the institution, its products and services are demanded more, more qualified employees are in demand of working in that workplace, financial institutions, public institutions as well as the suppliers confide in that institution and sustain long-term relations. If an image problem is left unaddressed, as Anholt (2009) claims, a company might find many of its costs of doing business rising dramatically, including the cost of product development, sales support, employee wages, and shareholder dividends.

Researchers (Frandsen, 2017; Gioia, Hamilton, and Patvardhan, 2014, Svensson, 2009; Wolfe & Blithe, 2015, and Fombrun & Rindova, 2000) have studied the use of public relations in the management of organizational image which is often driven by an objective to leave a consistent image in the minds of the stakeholders. Public relations practitioners devote efforts to manage the impression of organizations among external constituents. Such external organizational image is considered vital in order to build and manage stakeholder relationship and a positive image is argued to achieve organization legitimacy and a unique brand position, which makes the organization attractive and a "preferred choice" across all stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2012; Scott & Lane, 2012).

In spite of the use of public relations in managing organizational image by creating a consistent positive impression in the minds of the stakeholders, PR programmes are not substitute for substandard or ill performance or inaction from the organisations (Scott, 2013; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Heath (2005) emphasises that public relations has no mystical power to work miracles. What is achieved in any worthwhile sense must be based on integrity, and sound attitudes, policies and actions at the very top level of management. Communication not supported by deeds results in inconsistency and confusion and devalues any branding efforts. A recent meta-analytic study concluded that corporations recognize that it is not only formal communication but also the behaviours of organizational members that leave an impression. The extended focus on managing organizational image is thus no longer only a matter of establishing an attractive "one look" for the firm, but also of achieving normative consistency across all organizational touch points and a consolidation of internal and external communication activities (Frandsen, 2017).

Realizing the place of public relations during electioneering, People's

Democratic Party (PDP) hired a U.S. Public Relations and lobby firm, Levick, to provide strategic direction for her image management activities months before the 2015 presidential elections. Even after castigating the ruling party for allegedly hiring a foreign Public Relations firm, the All Progressives Congress (APC), also hired Burson-Marsteller, a London-based Public Relations and Public Affairs firm, to tackle her perception and reputation challenges (Ntia, 2015). However, based on the available literature there has not been any empirical research on how the stakeholders view the use of PR in PDP image management, which is what this study aims to investigate.

#### Statement of the Problem

Recently, contemporary researchers are concerned about the perception of the application of public relations for organizational image (White & Park, 2010; Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield & Cropp, 2009; Olatunji, 2014). They argued that as with many other problems in public relations practices, what the public knows and thinks can have important implications for the programme and the success of the various public relations used in image management. Some of the studies also used fewer population or singular organisation as sample making it difficult to generalize conclusions. More so, majority of the works are outside the Nigerian literature. Even those studies (Ntia, 2015; Ngwoke, 2010) in Nigeria did not examine the stakeholders' perception of the use of public relations in image management of political party. For PDP's public relations efforts to be successful, the opinions of the party's stakeholders such as PDP members and electorates can have a significant impact on the party's image and the effectiveness of the different public relations programmes employed to manage the image of the party. Additionally, stakeholders' perception of public relations impacts the profession's perceived credibility and determine whether or not the public regards public relations as beneficial to society. There is therefore the need to carry out research on stakeholders' perception of Public Relations use in image management of Peoples Democratic Party in Nigeria.

#### Objectives of the Study include

- i. To ascertain the areas in which Public Relations was used by PDP in image management of the party in Nigeria.
- ii. To find out stakeholders' perception of Public Relations activities of PDP in image management of the party in Nigeria
- iii. To identify the challenges faced by PDP in image management of the party in Nigeria.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Clarification

#### Public Relations

According to Public Relations Society of American (PRSA), cited in Lattimore *et al.*, (2004), in public relations, one must anticipate, analyze, and interpret public opinion, attitudes, and issues that could have a positive or negative impact on the organization's operations and plans. One must also counsel management at all organizational levels regarding policy decisions, courses of action, and communication while taking into account the organization's social and civic responsibilities. Finally, one must conduct ongoing research and evaluate action plans and communication to achieve the informed public understanding that is essential to an organization's success. This suggests that the fundamental goal of public relations is to frame and mold the public's opinion of an organization via influencing, interacting with, and developing relationships with important stakeholders across a variety of platforms.

According to the 1978 World Assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico: Public relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation's and the public interest (Theaker, 2001). The implication of the Mexican statement of implementing planned program involves planning of programmes and implementation as well as execution of these programmes. This emphasizes that public relations is a distinct management role and implies that the management of planned programs is essential to organizational performance.

In summary, the foregoing discussion on the concept of public relations identifies public relations as an activity or practice and as a process. As an activity, public relations is deliberate, planned, emphasizes performance, is mutually beneficial to the organization and the public, is a two-way communication, and is a management function. As a process, public relations involve four steps: defining the problem or situation via research, creating goals and plans of action to deal with it, putting the plans into action, and finally assessing the impact of the public relations campaign.

#### Image Management

Despite the voluminous literature, the concepts of image management has no universally accepted definition. In much of the literature the terms corporate image management and image management have been used interchangeably. According to the Indian School of Management (2019) image management is a conscious ongoing

process of evaluating and enhancing organisation's image and how others perceive it and therefore respond to it. It is about creating first impressions and more importantly an impactful presence. It gives an organisation the power to control, modify or improve the image that they want to project to others. The Image Consulting Business Institute (ICBI) (2018) states that image management is the ongoing, pro-active process of evaluating and controlling the impact of an organisation's appearance on itself, on others, and the achievement of their goals.

### **Public Relations and Publics of Politics**

All public relations managers deal with a multiplicity of publics and audiences inside and outside the organisation. Publics and audiences exist because they interact with or are affected by the organisation in some way, or they may develop around an issue, problem, or opportunity (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Sustained, long-term public relations programmes are developed to maintain the dialogue and communication with publics and audiences such as communities, investors, neighbours, and employees. One of the core concepts in political science, political communication, and public relations is that of *public* or *publics*. It is also one of the fuzziest concepts in these fields of research, which is true also of related concepts such as public opinion (Freeman & Cicero, 2012; Davidson & Binstock, 2012; Splichal, 2001). Still, most conceptualizations of who belongs to, or what constitutes a public range from mass to situational perspectives (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). Thus, in some cases the term *public* refers to virtually everyone, or everyone entitled to vote in a polity. In other cases, the term refers to a much narrower group, for example, in the situational theory of publics. In the context of political public relations, both the mass public and situational publics are relevant. The large proportion of theory and study has been committed to general population, as evidence by opinion polls. From the perspective of both the media and political actors themselves, public opinion as measured by opinion polls is highly important in virtually all political communication and political campaign processes (Heath & Waymer, 2011; Lavrakes & Traugott, 2000; Mitchell & Dave, 1999).

### **Public Relations and Image Management**

In today's increasingly competitive environment, institutions often must strengthen their corporate image in order to create demand by differentiating from other enterprises. With the formation of the internal and external image of the institution, its products and services are demanded more, more qualified employees are in demand of working in that workplace, financial institutions, public institutions as well as the suppliers confide in that institution and sustain long-term relations

(Selin, 2017).

In his study, Botan (2013) helped to demarcate the dichotomized conception of organizational image in public relations scholarship referring to the two approaches as instrumental and humanitarian. Under the instrumental view, organizational image is regarded as the identity that is “intended” for audiences (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2016), and one that is projected to the publics to enhance the organization's legitimacy (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000) through one-way communication that “attempts to make organizations look good regardless of their conduct or the actual situation”. In this sense, the organization is seen as a communicative entity that “engages deliberately in public communication” to impress a desired image upon intended audiences (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). Managing image, in this view, centres around planning, applying, and controlling communication efforts aimed at influencing audiences' perceptions of the communicative entity.

Managing organizational image when 'image' is viewed from the humanitarian perspective is, however, not as straightforward. The humanitarian approach symptomatizes what Cheney (1991) termed the “audience-centred perspective” of organizational image, where the real image makers are the organization's publics (Avenarius, 1993). Therefore, from the humanitarian perspective, managing organizational image through planned and directed communication efforts can only be part of the solution. To effectively “manage” image will, more importantly, require organizations to also possess a good understanding and up-to-date knowledge of stakeholders' perceptions of the organizations at different points in time through, for example, environmental scanning and monitoring. As such, Dozier's (2016) recommendation of the importance of gathering information about perceptions and reactions of publics toward organizations becomes a crucial aspect in image management efforts. Unfortunately, this strategic information gathering aspect in image management research has been lacking in public relations scholarship.

Consequently, image management efforts of PDP using public relations should include planning, applying, and controlling communication efforts aimed at influencing audiences' perceptions of the communicative entity (e.g voters/electorates and PDP members). In addition, research should be conducted to possess a good understanding and up-to-date knowledge of stakeholders' perception of the party at different points in time through, for example, environmental scanning and monitoring.

## 2.2 Review of Empirical Studies

White and Park (2010) investigated the public perceptions of public relations to find out if the negative bias and stereotypical stock of frames used by journalists to describe public relations, which have been identified in previous studies, are reflected in perceptions of public relations among a sample of the general population. To achieve this, three questions were asked; thus, how are positive attributes of public relations perceived; how the term public relations rank in importance comparing to other terms for functional communication activities of public relations and do respondents equate public relations with media relations. A survey research method was adopted; a computer-assisted telephone interview question was conducted to measure perceptions about public relations. The researchers concluded that perhaps it is time to stop worrying about how the media portray public relations and lay those studies to rest. It may be more important to think about how organizations portray public relations and how strategic functions that benefit society can be made more visible in order to enhance the credibility of the profession. Graham and Avery (2013) examined the use of social media tools by local governments and their perceptions of social media use by their citizenry. The specific objectives among others are to find out the extent to which local government officials use social media to reach their publics and ascertaining the relationship between age and social media use among local government officials. Survey research design was adopted by administering questionnaire using participants' email address. Their study concluded that social media are somewhat underutilized by local governments, with a third of respondents not using them. Although perceived importance of social media predicted actual use, they were dismayed that the officials' perceptions of whether or not their citizens expected them to use social media did not predict use.

In another study titled "The Impact of Public Relations in Nigerian Political Parties' Campaign Programme in the South East of Nigeria" Ngwoke (2010) examined the impact of public relations in Nigerian political parties' campaign programme. The objectives of the study were set out to identify the various public relations strategies used during political campaign and the implications of not employing public relations strategies in political parties' campaign. Survey research design was adopted with questionnaire, observation and interview as instruments for data collection. Ngwoke concluded that lack of professional public relations practitioners and lack of adequate funding account for the ineffective application of public relations strategies during electioneering campaigns. In all the studies, none of them was conducted about stakeholders' perception of the use of public relations in image management of PDP which had created a gap in knowledge, hence this study sought to fill this gap. To do this, this study focused on studying stakeholders' perception of public relations use in image management of People's Democratic Party in Nigeria.

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

### Stakeholder Theory

This study is anchored on stakeholder theory. The stakeholder theory is an offshoot of the social systems and resource dependence models. It was first propounded by Edward R. Freeman in 1984 and expanded by scholars like D. R. Gilbert (1987) and Robert L. Heath (1997) (LittleJohn & Foss, 2009). The main tenets of this theory is that, organizations must forge links with stakeholders to gain mutual understanding, acquire valuable resources or gains and reduce uncertainties (Freeman, 1984). As further explained by Heath (2005, p. 809) “organizations and stakeholders can and should essentially influence one another in an ongoing process of accommodation and since organizations are dependent upon stakeholders for resources, they (stakeholders) have the ability to withhold the organizations on important issues”. Implicitly, an organization's ability to communicate in a clear and consistent manner contributes to a reduction in misinterpretations of its goods, services, and initiatives. Furthermore, by giving stakeholders current and accurate information, organisations can make sure that everyone is aware of the expectations and the goals of the project.

As demonstrated in this theory, much burden is imposed on organizations. In the context of this study a political party like PDP play a pivotal role in political processes. Through the application of public relations, the party can bring people together to achieve control of the government, develop policies favourable to their interests or the groups that support them, and organize and persuade voters to elect their candidates to office. Thus, the assumptions of the stakeholder theory are quite germane to this study. It is obvious that the people responsible for the public relations programmes of the party need to understand, appreciate and conscientiously apply the propositions of stakeholder theory. For every individual or group that have stake in PDP, effort must be made by them to preserve and protect their interests towards effective implementation of the party's programmes. This is because the achievement of party manifesto and victory at the poll presupposes a genuine partnership between the internal and the external publics in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarily, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences and this lies the relevance of stakeholder theory to this study.

### 3. Methodology

*A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted.* Survey research methodology is becoming more and more popular because of its great degree of data gathering flexibility, ability to establish rapport, and high degree of diversity of questions resulting from interaction (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). *This involves the design of a well-structured questionnaire which was administered to the staff of PDP in the six selected states and FCT in Nigeria. The population of the study*

*consists of the staff of Public Relations/Publicity Unit of People's Democratic Party (PDP) from six selected states and FCT. In selecting these states, the researcher wrote the names of the states that makes up each geo-political zone of Nigeria in different pieces of papers and placed them in six different boxes to represent six geo-political zones. Afterward, reshuffled each box and picks one state from each box. In this regard, Enugu (South East), Akwa Ibom (South South), Oyo (South West), Bauchi (North East), Kaduna (North West), Nasarawa (North Central) were chosen randomly while Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory was purposively chosen because it also has the headquarter of People Democratic Party (PDP). The population also consist of residential dwellers of the selected sates. Residential dwellers as used in this study are stakeholders of the party such as electorate and member of the party. The staff of the PDP's Public Relations/Publicity Unit was selected due to their engagement in communicating with the party's stakeholders over the party's image management initiative. The total population of the study is 38, 611, 265 (National PDP Secretariat, 2022; National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). To ensure that the sample size is adequately determined, the study adopted the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for the determination of samples size where the population is given. By computation, the sample size for this study is four hundred and eighty-four (484). The research instrument used for this study was the questionnaire in which the respondents were required to respond. Respondents in this study were sampled using two sampling techniques. These include purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were analyzed using frequency distribution tables. For the Likert Scale questions, mean scores and standard deviations were used with a cut-off point of 2.50 and above; 2.50 and above was taken as positive response and accepted while less than 2.50 was seen as negative response and rejected. Likert scale questions were used to evaluate the perception of stakeholders in the use of public relations in image management of PDP. This is because the replies are predetermined, making the data easier and faster to analyze than answers to open-ended, qualitative survey questions.*

#### **4. Presentation of Results**

484 copies of questionnaire were administered, 472 were filled and returned, which represent 82.60% response. Out of the 472 copies of questionnaire, 77 were for Publicity/Public Relations Unit of PDP of six states, 395 for external publics.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Item		Response		
		Internal Publics	External Publics	Total (%)
Sex	Male	56(11.9)	210(44.5)	266(56.4)
	Female	21(4.5)	185(39.2)	206(43.6)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>77(16.3)</b>	<b>395(83.7)</b>	<b>472(100)</b>
Age Range	18-25 years	12(2.5)	21(4.5)	33(7.0)
	26-30 years	8(1.7)	72(15.3)	80(17.0)
	31-40 years	46(9.7)	154(32.6)	200(42.4)
	41-50 years	10(2.1)	134(28.4)	144(30.5)
	51 years and above	11(2.3)	14(3.0)	25(5.3)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>77(16.3)</b>	<b>395(83.7)</b>	<b>472(100)</b>
Marital Status	Married	16(3.4)	164(34.7)	180(38.1)
	Single	61(13.0)	210(44.5)	271(57.4)
	Divorced	00(00)	10(2.1)	10(2.1)
	Widowed	00(00)	11(2.3)	11(2.3)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>77(16.3)</b>	<b>395(83.7)</b>	<b>472(100)</b>

Table 1 presents data on demographic characteristics on internal publics and external publics. Accordingly, male respondents were 56.4% and female respondents were 43.6%. Most of the respondents representing 72.7% were males. With regards to age distribution, 7.0% were between the ages of 18 and 25 years, 17.0% were between the ages of 26 and 30 years, 42.4% were between the ages of 31 and 40 years, 30.5% were between the ages of 41 and 50 years and the remaining 5.3% fell within the ages of 51 years and above. On the marital status, 57.4% were single and 38.1% were married. Even though there are singles participated in the study, the outcome of the study will not be influenced because it is only for broad description about the characteristics of the population.

**Table 2: Areas that PDP has used public relations in the management of the party's image**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Planning of political events and campaigns	15	19.5
Research to gain insight for effective political campaign	12	15.6
Media planning and campaign	13	16.9
Advising party's leaders to implement programmes and policies that benefit both the party and the publics	13	16.9
All of the above	24	31.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Access to PDP's messages</b>		
Internet e.g Emails, and social media	78	20.3
Newspaper and magazine	72	18.8
Billboards and posters	112	29.2
Rallies and campaigns	104	27.1
Brochure, Annual report and pamphlet	14	3.6
All the above	4	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 presents data on the areas that PDP has used public relations in the management of the party's image. From the table majority of the respondents representing 31.2% went for all the options. By implication 31.2% of respondents agreed that public relations was used in planning of political events and campaigns; research to gain insight for effective political campaign; media planning and campaign and advising party's leaders to implement programmes and policies that benefit both the party and the publics. However, from the table, data showed that research to gain insight for effective political campaign had the least responses which means research has been underutilized. From table 2, majority of the respondents had access to PDP's messages through billboards and posters; and rallies and campaigns.

Table 3: Public Relations competent use in the image management of Peoples's Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria.

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Media campaigns/media relations	22	28.6
Community relations	8	10.4
Employees relations	10	13.0
Fund raising	17	22.1
Research	4	5.2
All of the above	16	20.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Perception of the use of public relations in image management of PDP in Nigeria</b>		
Favourable	105	24.5
Not favourable	290	75.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 presents data on the components/strategies of public relations used in the image management of People's Democratic Party. Findings show that majority of the respondents representing 63.7% picked media campaigns/media relations, employee relations and fund raising as the major components of public relations used in the image management of PDP.

Table 3 also presents data on the perception of the use of public relations in image management of PDP in Nigeria. From the table, it is evident that most respondents had unfavourable disposition about the use of public relations in image management of PDP. Table 4 provides supporting data which gave insight to the respondent's disposition. The implication of the above low perception of stakeholders in the use of public relations by PDP in image management was that the sources of messages were not credible to maintain a positive image with voters.

**Table 4: Reasons for the Perception of the use of public relations in image management of PDP in Nigeria**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remarks
PDP's public relations messages are credible	56	113	132	94	2.33	Rejected
Public relations helped in managing the reputation of PDP in Nigeria	97	241	34	23	3.04	Accepted
The use of public relations programmes change public opinion about PDP in Nigeria	31	167	139	58	2.43	Rejected
Public relations is used mostly by PDP to repair its damaged reputation	121	181	57	36	2.98	Accepted
Public relations help to establish and maintain good relations and reputations with the target audience	101	203	64	27	2.96	Accepted
Public relations helped in developing strategies of mutual relationships with journalists	141	217	44	20	3.26	Accepted
Public relations help to inform the public about current political events	201	161	13	7	3.38	Accepted
<b>Total</b>					<b>2.91</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Table 4 presents the mean rating of items thus: 2.33, 3.04, 2.43, 2.98, 2.96, 3.26 and 3.38 respectively. Five out of the seven mean rating are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This result points to the fact that respondents affirmed the statements that public relations helped in managing the reputation of PDP in Nigeria, Public relations is used mostly by PDP to redeem its reputation and public relations helped to establish and maintain good relations with the target audience. They also affirmed that public relations helped in developing strategies of mutual relationships with journalists and public relations helped to inform the public about current political events. However, respondents based the unfavourable perception about use of public relations in image management of PDP on the believe that PDP's public relations messages was not

credible and do not believe that the use of public relations programmes changed public opinion about PDP.

Despite the cluster mean being over the 2.50 cut-off mark, respondents were not persuaded that PDP's PR campaigns were credible or that their deployment would alter public perception of the party in Nigeria.

**Table 5: Challenges in the use of public relations in the management of PDP's image in Nigeria**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of adequate funding	24	31.2
Lack of autonomy to act as a directorate	10	13.0
Lack of adequate and effective media of communication	9	11.7
Lack of recognition from party's chieftains	21	27.3
Lack of trained staff	11	14.3
All of the above	2	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 presents information on the challenges in the use of public relations in the management of PDP's image in Nigeria. According to the table, 58.5% went for lack of adequate funding and lack of recognition from party's chieftains constituted the main challenge in the use of public relations in the image management of PDP in Nigeria. The above finding implies that public relations is not part of the decision-making process of the PDP's activities. For public relations to be effective in the image management of PDP, the national publicity secretary should be part of the strategic decision making in the party.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

Findings showed that public relations was used in planning of political events and campaigns; research to gain insight for effective political campaign; media planning and campaign and advising party's leaders to implement programmes and policies that benefit both the party and the publics. However, from the finding, data show that research to gain insight for effective political campaign had the least responses which means that research has been underutilized. From the finding, majority of the respondents had access to PDP's messages through billboards & posters and rallies & campaigns. The above data implies that PDP has utilized public relations as an activity but has not as a process. As earlier stated, as a process, public relations involve four steps: defining the problem or situation via research, creating goals and plans of action to deal with it, putting the plans into action, and finally assessing the impact of the public relations campaign.

Findings also show that media campaigns/media relations, employee relations and fund raising were the major components of public relations used in the image management of PDP. The findings are rooted in and conform with the stakeholder's theory as anchored in this study. The thesis of stakeholders' theory is that “organizations must forge links with stakeholders to gain mutual understanding, acquire valuable resources or gains and reduce uncertainties” (Freeman, 1984, p. 2).

However, it was found that respondents had unfavourable disposition about the use of public relations in image management of PDP. The implication of the above low perception of stakeholders in the use of public relations by PDP in image management was that the sources of messages were not credible to maintain a positive image with voters. This explains why Johnston and Sheehan (2020) argue that the public typically perceives public relations messages as more credible than any advertisements that are paid for. For example, when there is an ad placed in a newspaper, many individuals feel as if the newspaper is simply advertising the message because they have been paid to do so by an organization. Considering the contentious and competitive nature of politics, and the complexity of political environments, environmental scanning, boundary spanning, and the strategic choice of publics and relationships to prioritize may even be more important in the context of political public relations than of corporate public relations (Kioussis and Strömbäck, 2011). However, Ihlen and Fredriksson (2018) argued that political actors can face difficulties to gain a reputation for truthful and reliable communication based on issues such as alternative facts and fake news. Party actors, need key competencies such as data analytical skills and stakeholder engagement to develop a good reputation in politics. Consequently, to curb these limitations, different strategies can be adopted, which include providing enough office space for better working conditions; the staff should also be trained frequently to enable them to acquire the necessary skills for professionalizing their public relations practice.

Finally, findings show that lack of adequate funding, lack of recognition from party's chieftains and lack of trained staff constituted the main challenge in the use of public relations in the image management of PDP in Nigeria. This finding could also be attributed to the fact the identified stakeholders consider the use of public relations in image management of PDP not credible, which undermines PR's significant impact on enhancing the party's image.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In an effort to manage the image of PDP as a party, media campaigns/media relations and donor relations were used as major component of public relations in the image management of the party. Other components include community relations and employee relations. These tools/components were used in planning of political events and campaigns; media planning and campaign and advising party's leaders and hierarchy to implement programmes and policies that benefit both the party and the publics. However, from the findings, data showed that research to gain insight for effective political campaign had the least responses which means research has been underutilized. The study concluded that public relations activities of PDP did not contribute much to overcoming the unfavourable perception of the party's image by its stakeholders'. This was because of challenges of restricted budget/inadequate funds, inadequate modern working tools, high expectations from the leaders, poor appreciation/lack of adequate support from party's hierarchy and no feedback mechanism. Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made for more effective use of Public Relations to assess stakeholders' perception in image management of PDP in Nigeria:

- a. People's Democratic Party should ensure that there is an adequate budgetary allocation to the public relations office for efficient image management.
- b. PDP's Board of Trustees, candidates, delegates and officials should give the public relations/information officers in PDP, the proper recognition in order to achieve effective public relation practice aimed at effective image management of the party. This is because the study found that one of the challenges of the use of public relations in assessing stakeholders' perception in image management of the party was lack of recognition from party's chieftains.
- c. The party should employ trained PR practitioners to handle public relations activities for efficient management of the stakeholder's perception of PDP's image.
- d. PDP should engage more in conducting research on effective assessment of the perception of its stakeholder's and develop policies and feedback mechanism to gauge and manage the image of the party.

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