
**Assessment of Public Relations Strategies in Crisis Management
During the 2020 #ENDSARS Protest and “Lekki Shooting” in
Lagos, Nigeria**

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Abstract

Public relations strategies are sacrosanct to crisis management. Governments often use public relations strategies to maintain peace in the society. The study assessed the perception of students of tertiary institutions in Lagos on the State Government's public relations strategies in managing the Lekki Shooting during the #ENDSARS protests in October 2020. Data were gathered using quantitative and qualitative research methods. Research instrument was administered on 353 students of four universities, while four key informants from the public sector were interviewed. Findings show that the public relations strategies deployed by Lagos State Government were Community Relations (Mean = 2.44), Media Relations (Mean = 2.43), Corporate Social Responsibility (Mean = 2.28) and Government Relations (Mean = 2.27) and they were found to be effective. However, Community Relations and Media Relations strategies were most effective. The study reveals that the strategic public relations efforts of State Government

underestimated the power of digital media in stoking the embers of violence. Thus, there was loophole in the strategies adopted. The study therefore recommended that the Lagos State Government should integrate digital media in its public relations strategies and intensify its strategic community relations to build goodwill among the youths to forestall further crisis in future. The study also recommended that government should draw on the goodwill of the people to prevent future breakdown of law and order.

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Introduction

In its simplest sense, public relations refers to the totality of activities, processes and strategies targeted at building relationships that are mutually beneficial to both public and private establishments and their publics. However, it must be stated that public relation is often seen by lay persons as exclusively restricted to business organizations that needs to promote their brands in order to attract more buyers or clients for their services. This perception is so widespread that even the United States government had to enact a law to streamline public relations activities.

As reported by experts in the field who traced the growth of public relations in the US, there was a time when public relations was only acceptable when it was practiced by businesses and non-profit organizations. When it comes to the government, any public relations strategy became immediately suspect and tagged as propaganda. This position is definitely taken due to lack of understanding of what public relations stands for. Indeed, public relations as practiced today was pioneered in the context of politics and it has always been a critical element in politics and public administration (Anderson, 2016).

It was reported that the term, 'public relations' was first used by an American President; Thomas Jefferson who mentioned it during his address to Congress in 1807 (Babaleye, 2021). Since then, various experts have come up with various definitions to encapsulate what is really meant by public relations. Among the earliest of such definitions is the one which defined public relations as a management function and articulates public opinions and attitudes, defines the policies, procedures and interest of an organization followed by executing a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (Battistella, 2014).

Other American Public Relations professionals also provided definitions which described public relations as a deliberate and strategic effort to influence public opinion through good character and responsible performance based upon mutual and satisfactory two-way communication. In the same vein, another definition presented public relations as the art and science of managing communication between an organization and its key constituents to build, manage, and sustain its positive reputation (Briant, 2015). Yet, one of the most popular definitions of public relations is one that defined it as a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (Bruns, 2014). It is a process that is usually consciously planned, carefully implemented and persistently monitored to achieve a given goal or objective, targeted mainly at building and sustaining mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. Public Relations (PR) is the business, organizational, philanthropic, or social function of managing communication between an organization and its audiences. There are many goals to be achieved by the practice of public relations, including education, correcting a mistruth, or building or improving an image (Castells, 2015).

There are various accounts regarding the origin of PR. However, there is an agreement among scholars that modern practice of public relations

can be traced to the activities of two Americans; Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays. Ivy Lee was the first to promote the concept of public relations and established public relations as a vocation while Edward Barnays was regarded as the first university lecturer to the teach course title “public relations” in any university in the world (Babaleye, 2021). Ivy Lee was regarded as the pioneer of the news release or press release as it is called in the modern day, while Bernays was regarded to be the first person to develop a theory of public relations. Ivy Lee. He was behind the use of propaganda by Nazi Germany to make the citizens support the ambition of the leader and the soldiers to fight hard even when there seemed to be no hope. He was also the first to borrow ideas from subjects such as psychology and sociology just to mention a few. On the other hand, Bernays was a prolific writer who published several classic books on public relations. These include; *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), *Propaganda* (1928), and *The Engineering of Consent* (1947). To Bernays, public relations is an “applied social science” that uses insights from psychology, sociology, and other disciplines to scientifically manage and manipulate the thinking and behaviour of an irrational and “herdlike” public.

In Nigeria, the earliest accounts of public relations was attributed to the emergence or establishment of the War Information Office by the British colonial government in 1943. The department was headed by a Briton named D.C Fletcher, who was the leader of a group of staff including a public relations officer, an assistant public relations officer, a process engraver, a press officer, a publicist and an artist, a films officer, a radio officer and a confidential secretary (Babaleye 2021) and (Ajala, 2005). This office was created to drive up and sustain local support for World War II in which over 70,000 Nigerians were involved. However, the office served two roles; apart from shaping opinions about the 'Great War', it also extended its operations to image making aimed at boosting the image and popularity of the colonial government against agitations for independence especially after World War II, when India, Ceylon (Sri

Lanka), Burma and other Asian colonies under Britain began to fight for, and eventually obtained independence (Ajala, 2005). At the end of the war, the information office was renamed Public Relations office. Its added duties which included campaigning for the control of communicable diseases, mass education and payment of taxes during the second world war had become its official duties (Cutlip, 2013). From the origin of public relations it can be seen that the main purpose of PR is to create a mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. No matter whether the organization is a profit oriented business, government institution or a non-profit charity, the key focus is to engage with the publics to ensure that the organization is able to achieve its set objectives (Coombs, 2010)

The strategies usually adopted by public relations practitioners to achieve their aims and objectives have been grouped into four models. These models of public relations were developed by Grung and Hunt in 1984 and further modified in 1992. They are: (1) press agency, (2) public information, (3) two-way asymmetrical model, and (4) two-way symmetrical model. These models were categorized based on their level of development in the society in which the public relations practitioner operates. Although, the four models were presented as distinct stages in the evolution of public relations, the varying level of development around the world shows that all of them are still being practiced in one way or the other. Furthermore, globalization and peculiar nature of societies often allow organization to adopt any model convenient to them at a particular point. Indeed, scholars acknowledged that it is possible that public relations cannot be practiced in a uniform manner across the globe as the nature of each country may require different, localised approaches.

Press agency is a model where the PR practitioner is ready to go to any length to promote the viewpoints and agenda of their principals. This model does not discriminate between propaganda, half-truths and even

misinformation so far it helps to further the interest of their principals. This approach often overlooks the interest opinion of the public, and it is ready to violate all ethics to induce the public to agree with certain narratives. As observed in a study, those who rely on this strategy usually attempt to mold public opinion by highlighting the positive side and suppressing the negative aspect of their establishments. This is often achieved through the use of tactics such as, propaganda and the provision of alternative facts which is also called 'spin' (Coombs,2014). The next one is public information model which is focused on the provision of information to the public. Here, public relations performs a journalistic function which sees it providing accurate and complete information to the target audience. For those who adopt this PR strategy, the objective of public relations is to provide accurate and timely information. This strategy thus encourages the business of government agency they represent to host well designed websites, provide fact sheets, flyers, pamphlets, annual reports, newsletters, and other materials such as media releases that media practitioners can be encouraged to incorporate into their regular news reports. However, this is still a one way process where no feedback is expected. This is different from the two-way asymmetric model of public relations (Cutlip, 2013). The two-way asymmetrical model of public relations adopts what is referred to as 'scientific persuasion'. This means that the public opinions were gathered through scientific research methods which are factored into the development of the public relations activities. This strategy takes the public into consideration and tries to give them what they want as opposed to what the organization assumed they want. It gives prominence to the public relations practitioner more than the audience. Although the view of the public was sought, it was sought through within a structured research which often asked questions based on what the researchers want to know. The two way asymmetrical strategy was thus evolved to provide the publics of organizations various platforms to be involved fully in the communication continuum.

This strategy is most effective in terms of crises or misunderstandings as the clients will be able to voice their disagreements about organisation's decisions and these opinions will be reckoned with either to make adjustment or clarifications which will resolve the conflict and further strengthen relationships¹⁶. As earlier discussed, public relations is not limited to private and profit oriented organizations who seek to 'sell' goods and services to the people. Governments at all levels also make use of public relations for various purposes such as to encourage popular participation in democratic and civil activities (Kamei, 2019), to boost the image of the government and to manage crises (Reddi, 2019).

A crisis is an event which leads to instability or social upheaval with its attendant disruptive impact on the lives and livelihood of the people. It is an unexpected event that threatens the expectations of stakeholders, has the potential to produce negative consequences, affects the performance, good name, reputation, and image of the organization (Reddi, 2019). Crises are part of life and government, as a body saddled with the responsibility of creating a peaceful and prosperous environment for the citizens, must be able to solve them before they become unsolvable. However, crises are random, non-linear occurrences that are difficult to predict. Crises are often dynamic and complex, which means that they are not easy to anticipate and tackled before they cause any damage (Schwarz, Seeger and Auer, 2016).

Crisis events include natural and technical disasters, terrorist attacks, international conflicts, nuclear threats, civil unrests, and global pandemics (Kamei, 2019). However, crises are usually not often the direct results of socio-political events. Crises are functions of how each event is handled. In socio-political unrests, effective crisis management requires timely communication and application of public relations strategies on the part of government agencies and stakeholders (Kamei, 2019) This is because during crises the people look up to the government

for information on the cause and on what to do to mitigate further escalation of violence. When there is no adequate and timeous communication from the government, rumours will take over and do much more damage to issues at stake. Furthermore, when there is inadequate and incomplete information and communication, more dangerous rumours, conjectures will take over. Such rumours will further erode people's trust in government and limit its opportunity to manage the crisis and bring the situation back to normal (Kiouisis, and Strömbäck, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Crisis management capabilities are not only essential for restoring normalcy into the society but also essential for any government that wishes to maintain its relevance and legitimacy in the minds of the people. A perfect example of how government can use public relations in crisis management strategies to manage crises and maintain its image was the 2020 nationwide protest against police brutality in Nigeria. Nigerians, especially the youths have been complaining about the high handedness of the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police since about 2016 with various social media reports detailing cases of harassment, extortion, illegal detention, torture and extra-judicial killings. The online campaigns continued intermittently until 2017 when it became more articulated. The branch of the police that kept reoccurring in the online complaints was that of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). As a result, a Twitter user came up with the hashtag #EndSARS to demand that the Nigerian government disband and reform the police unit. Hashtags on twitter are used to bring together related information so that a searcher can easily find all that is being said and done about an issue. This hashtag exposed the magnitude of the atrocities of this special police unit which had been established to fight Armed Robbery but had turned itself to some sort of mafia arresting people going about their legitimate, normal daily businesses and extorting them. At a point, the hashtag had 28 million tweets making it the

number one trending issues in the world. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) officers have been alleged to profile youths based on fashion choices, mount illegal road blocks and searches, conduct unwarranted temperature checks, arrest without warrant, rape women, and extort young Nigerians for driving luxury cars and using expensive electronics. The federal government responded to the online campaign by making a few adjustments to the structure of the Police unit. However, the more things change, the more the protesting youth remain undaunted. The unit did not change its mode of operation and, social media users keep tweeting about the misdemeanors of the SARS, supporting their claims with video and photo evidences. Throughout all these, the governments' response was ad hoc at best, making no definite efforts to meet the request of the youths on twitter and only punishing individual officers when there are incontestable evidence and making no real changes in the operations of the SARS Unit. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was formed in 1992 when the then Inspector General of Police, Aliyu Atta directed Simeon Dalandi Midenda who was a commissioner of police to unite the three existing anti-robbery squads operating in Lagos into one unit in a bid to break the stronghold of armed gangs. The newly formed unit started with 15 officers and two station wagon cars (Lipschultz, 2015). SARS was controversial for its links to extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, extortion, torture, framing, blackmail, kidnapping, illegal organ trade, armed robbery, home invasions, rape of men and women, child arrests, the invasion of privacy, and polluting bodies of water with the illegal disposal of human remains. In 2009, after several years of operations, the squad grew in number and strength. Due to the increasing number of fraudsters and secret societies in Nigerian universities, SARS operatives turned its attention to them and made several successful arrests. However, they harassed innocent people in the process. SARS was investigated several times in response to protests, but without results; reforms were promised in 2016, 2017 and 2018, 2019 (Malunfashi, 2021)

By the year 2020, the youths have had enough. They decided that since the online campaigns have brought little or no changes, it was time to take it to the streets and cause a massive public disturbance. It started with a sit in by a few youths at the police headquarters in Abuja. A few days later, it became a mass demonstration staged in major cities throughout Nigeria. The protest started peacefully enough but soon, the protesters decided to block major roads in a bid to cripple all commercial activities in the country. Among the roads blocked was the Lagos-Ibadan expressway which is a major transportation artery for the nation and the Lekki Tollgate which later became the hotspot for the protest. The Lagos State government initially attempted to manage the crisis by showing solidarity with the protesters. The governor of the state came out to address the protesters and marched with them for a while to demonstrate his solidarity. However, as the protest seemed to be getting stronger even after the federal government had disbanded the rogue police, the Lagos state government started to become less accommodating to the protesters. The government declared a dusk to dawn curfew in the state and warned the protesters not to violate the curfew indirectly telling them to go home. The protesters were defiant and refused to budge. One of the focal points of the protest in Lagos was the Lekki toll gate which was blocked by the protesters as one of the strategies to force the government to listen to their demands. As the dusk was approaching on 20 October 2020, there was heavy mobilization of members of the armed forces to the Lekki Toll gate. As darkness enveloped the protest venue which was strangely not illuminated by any street light, the armed forces opened fire on the protesters. In an instant, photos and videos of purported victims of the shooting had flooded the social media and were watched in real time by millions of people across the world. These raw images drew condemnation from home and abroad. In Lagos, the news of the shooting sparked wild riots led by miscreants and other criminally minded people who burned government offices and properties in Lagos and attacked police officers and their stations in other parts of the country (Adebayo).

The event which was tagged “Lekki Shooting” by social media users thus became a public relations nightmare for the Lagos state governor and his administration. Before, the crisis, the Lagos state governor and his entire cabinet were receiving praises from the people for their proactive measures in combating the COVID-19 pandemic which threatened to overrun the state. However, in the aftermath of the “Lekki Shooting”, the governor was condemned by the people with some even calling for his resignation. The Lagos state government, in a bid to redeem its image therefore adopted various public relations strategies to manage the crisis and bring the situation under control. It conducted numerous press conferences and set up a judicial panel of inquiry which included some of the protesters as a way to show fairness (Odotola, 2020). The government also published names of police officers accused of committing various atrocities with a promise to prosecute them. However to some people, this is too little too late. As it was stated earlier, crises are not results of events but as a result of how events are handled. It could be argued that the ENDSARS protest the not directly resulted in the lootings, killings and damage of properties that followed the Lekki Shootings but as a result of how the government handled the protest. It is therefore imperative to examine the public relations strategies adopted by the Lagos state government in the aftermath of the Lekki Shootings as a way to determine the lessons learnt and prevent future occurrence.

The #EndSARS protest and the associated events that shook the country to its foundation in October 2020 could be attributed to a failure of the government, both at the federal and state levels, to follow the principles of public relations, particularly its crisis management components. In times of crisis, the credibility and reputation of any government is always on the line and whether they will be damaged or become heroes to the people depends on how effectively such crisis is managed with the application of public relations strategies and principles. Governments are expected to anticipate potent combustible issues and nip them in the bud by introducing before becoming full blown violence. When crisis does

occur, the government must have at its disposal, the most effective public relations tools that can help respond to such crisis in a timely fashion. Undoubtedly such move will boost the image of the government and make it become indispensable to the people. For effective crisis management, public relations practice must be embedded into all the activities of the government to forecast a budding crisis, prevent it from becoming a reality and managing it when it becomes unavoidable. The public relations crisis management strategies of the government in Nigeria are supposed to engender positive perception and response from their critical publics namely the media, international community and most importantly, the citizens. The events that led to the 2020 #End SARS “Lekki Shooting” and the resultant violence indicated that there was a gap to be filled when it comes to understanding government public relations strategies in Nigeria. However, there are few studies conducted in Nigeria on the use of public relations strategies to mitigate and manage crises. This study therefore was aimed at assessing the public relations strategies employed by government to manage the violent crisis that followed the 2020 #ENDSARS “Lekki Shooting” in Lagos state, Nigeria

There are four public relations models that are relevant to this study:

Press Agency/Publicity: Developed early in the 19th Century, the model focused on using innovative methods of creating stories couched as news item that often grab the attention of journalists who will then publish such in their newspapers.

Public Information: Public information model seeks to improve on the shortcomings of the press agency model which has given the professional a bad name and which has started to lose its efficacy.. The public information model is based on the dissemination of positive, credible and accurate information to the target publics on a one-way route to provide organization stakeholders positive information about

organisations. The key is that this information is usually verifiable and is often useful in softening any potential hard feeling generated by the negative press...

The Two-Way Asymmetrical Model: The two-way asymmetric model was adopted as a result of the shortcomings of the two previous models which were receiving various criticisms from the consumer protection organizations, pressure groups, government regulators and even public relations experts themselves (Kriyantono, 2019). The model is therefore based on its interaction with the organisation's publics on solid research and expert analysis of the available information. The model relies on data from various studies to formulate disseminate messages among the publics and to decide on the use of effective communication channels within public reach. Thus, the model attempts to guide the public to behave according to organisational desires without changing or shifting organisational actions and policies

Two-way symmetrical model: While all the previous models of public relations have their focus in making the organisation look good to the public, the two-way symmetrical model focuses on the ways and manners of improving relationships between organisations and their publics (Laufer, and Wang, 2017). The two-way symmetrical model has been promoted as the first choice of organisations that prefer to practice public relations in an excellent and most professional way. Usually, the model uses a press conference or community and town hall strategy to allow members of the public to be involved in knowledge sharing about their organisation. This model is considered as the most ethical model of public relations because it uses ethical and dialogue based communication which always helps to enhance the efficiency and clout of the organisation among public circles (Megan and Noer, 2020). The basic objective of the two-way symmetrical model is to negotiate with publics by providing them accurate information, to resolve conflicts by providing the publics with suitable solutions and to encourage mutual

understanding and respect between the organization and its publics through an open and ethical communication policy.

Public relations as a management function is strategic in nature. Thus, strategies are integral part of any public relations campaign. The term strategy has a military connotation as it was first used in war or battle context in the ancient times. The etymology origin of strategy was traced to the Greek word 'strategos' which describes the activities of an army leader or a carefully laid plan to overcome the opponent through effective use of resources. Strategy was considered an organisational skill in the early Greek dominated era of Pericles (450 BC) which meant management skills (administrative, leadership, public speaking, and power). There are several definitions of strategy and no single and definite definition of the term strategy. Each definition seems to have been coined depending on the context in which the study was carried out. According to the English Dictionary, strategy typically, is associated with a plan of action marshaled to diffuse or reinforce a foreseen or unforeseen situation competitors.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive research which involved mixed research methods with the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The population for the study comprised students of Lagos State tertiary institutions who were active participants in the #EndSARS protest including the University of Lagos, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, Eko University of Medical and Health Sciences, Ijanikin Lagos and the Lagos State University. The Multistage sampling technique was adopted to select the study sample of 400 students from the four universities selected for the study. Two of the universities are public while the remaining two are private. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select 100 students from each of the four universities for the administration of research instrument. In addition, three stakeholders were selected for Key Informant interviews for the qualitative research data collection.

Table 1: Effectiveness of the PR Strategies Employed by Lagos State Government in Managing the 2020 #ENDSARS ‘Lekki Shootings’ crisis

S/N	Public Relations Strategies	Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective	Mean	SD
Media Relations						
1.	Press conferences organised on the shootings	181 (62%)	69 (24%)	40 (14%)	2.51	0.732
2.	Social media interactions with the public	173 (60%)	85 (29%)	32 (11%)	2.50	.710
3.	Radio broadcast by government officials on the shooting	153 (53%)	67 (23%)	70 (24%)	2.31	0.830
4.	TV broadcast by government about the shooting.	205 (71%)	84 (28.5%)	1 (0.5%)	2.71	0.558
5.	Newspaper advertorials to explain what happened.	182 (62%)	98 (33%)	10 (5%)	2.41	0.823
6.	Press releases issued to reassure the public	182 (62%)	45 (16%)	63 (22%)	2.64	0.578
7.	Radio Jingles released to explain responses to the shooting	202 (70%)	73 (24%)	15 (6%)	2.33	.786
8.	Engagements with Journalists and Social Media Influencers	155 (53%)	78 (27%)	57 (20%)	2.00	0.930
Average mean					2.43	
Government Public Relations						
9.	Setting up a Judicial Panel of Inquiry to investigate what happened	125 (43%)	41 (15%)	124 (42%)	2.00	0.930
10.	Arrest of some of the soldiers who participated in the shooting.	175 (60%)	49 (17%)	66 (23%)	2.37	0.832
11.	Disciplined Law Breaking officers	167 (58%)	85 (29%)	38 (13%)	2.44	0.830
Average mean					2.27	
Community Relations						
12.	Town hall meetings organised to discuss the outcomes of the shootings.	139 (48%)	77 (27%)	74 (25%)	2.22	0.463
13.	Engaged with traditional rulers to ensure peace after the shooting	205 (71%)	2 (1%)	83 (28%)	2.71	0.464
14.	Celebrity Endorsement to explain government position in the shooting	194 (67%)	90 (31%)	06 (2%)	2.65	0.520
15.	Personal Interaction and Dialogue with key stakeholders to discuss the shooting and the way forward	162 (56%)	91 (31%)	37 (13%)	2.43	0.710

16.	Outdoor Interactions with protesters ease tensions	145 (50%)	57 (20%)	88 (30%)	2.20	0.876
17.	Meeting with pressure groups to explain government responses	164 (57%)	80 (28%)	46 (15%)	2.41	0.748
Average mean					2.44	
Corporate Social Responsibility						
18.	Provision of medical support services for the wounded in the shooting	143 (49%)	39 (14%)	108 (37%)	2.12	0.924
19.	Visiting the families of the victims of the shooting	203 (70%)	42 (14%)	45 (16%)	2.54	0.748
20.	Compensations to the families of the victims of the shooting	144 (49%)	57(21%)	88 (30%)	2.18	0.877
Average mean					2.28	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 1 shows the result of the assessment by respondents about the PR strategies employed by the Lagos State Government in managing the 2020 #END SARS Lekki shooting crisis. The Table presents a clear view of the level of effectiveness of each strategy. From the calculated average mean scores of each strategy, it can be seen that Community Relations (Mean=2.44) is the most effective, followed by Media Relations (Mean=2.43), Corporate Social Responsibility (Mean=2.28) and Government Public Relations (Mean=2.27) in that order of effectiveness. The Key Informant Interviews (KII) conducted further confirm the accuracy of the empirical data. One of the interviewee, a Youth Leader disclosed that the government reached out to various youth organisations both directly and through community elders which encouraged some of them to dialogue with the government and air their grievances. He also said that the compensation paid to some people affected by the crisis further placated the people and made some to stop antagonising the government. The Key Informant disclosed that the police command in Lagos state also tried to be civil to the protesters and punished officers convicted of assaulting innocent civilians.

The effectiveness of the public relations tools employed by the Lagos state during the crisis is measured by the data presented in table 4.3. Based on the decision rule, media relations tools such as Press conference (Mean=2.51), Social media (Mean=2.50), Newspaper advertorials (Mean=2.41), Radio broadcast (Mean=2.31), TV Broadcast (Mean=2.71), Press releases (Mean=2.64), Radio Jingles (Mean=2.33), Engagements with Journalists and Social Media Influencers (Mean=2.00) were all judged as effective by respondents.

Similarly, Government Public Relations tools such as setting up a Judicial Panel of Inquiry to investigate what happened (Mean=2.51), Freeing some arrested protesters. (Mean=2.50), and disciplining Law Breaking officers (Mean=2.31) were also seen as effective. The responses to the community relations tools also showed that tools such as Engagement with traditional rulers (Mean=2.71), Celebrity endorsement (Mean=2.65), Personal Interaction and Dialogue with key stakeholders (Mean=2.43), Meeting with pressure groups (Mean=2.41), Town hall meetings (Mean=2.22), and Outdoor Interactions with protesters (Mean=2.20) in that order were also considered effective by the respondents. In the same vein, Corporate Social Responsibility tools adopted to deal with the crises was also evaluated. Tools such as visiting the families of the victims of the shooting (Mean=2.54), compensations to the families of the (Mean=2.18) and the provision of medical support services for the wounded in the shooting (Mean=2.12) were also considered effective.

The Key Informant Interview conducted with a government representative, (Personal Assistant to the Governor) shed further light on government public relations. He pointed out that the Lagos

State Governor was at the forefront of government public relations during the crisis as he was always visible; meeting with protesters, meeting with the presidents and other stakeholders to resolve various issues raised by the protesters. In his words: “The Governor has a listening ear which helped in appealing to the reasonable ones among the aggrieved parties” adding that “Only those who had ulterior motives refused to cooperate with the government”.

All of the four Key Informants were asked to assess any reputational damage to the Lagos state government arising from the management of the crisis under consideration and all of them provided relevant quantitative data to answer the research question. The responses revealed that the Lagos state government was able to apply public relations strategies to repair its reputation to a great extent. One of them who was editor of an online indigenous newspaper; *Asejere*, disclosed that the #EndSARS 'Lekki Shootings' crisis has shown that social media has become a double-edged sword for public relations practitioners. According to him: The protesters made maximum use of social media to whip up emotions to the extent that it became difficult for the government to make its voice heard. The government was eventually able to control the narrative but it has shown that public relations practice cannot overlook the impact of social media in crisis management.

Also, a government representative, who was a Key Informant agreed that the #EndSARS 'Lekki Shootings' crisis caused a lot of anti-government sentiments but most of it was due to misinformation on social media platforms. In his words: “Social media platforms were exploited by many people with ulterior motives to share fake news which led to a lot of backlash against the government”. However, the fake news, when they were debunked,

also helped the government to repair its damaged reputation. The government has learnt a lesson especially to have an effective representation on social media. Also, the government is increasing its visibility and transparent through avenues such as the judicial panel of inquiry set up and the compensations paid to victims. The take-away from these submissions is that, while the Lagos state government engages in public relations, there are gaps in its strategies which could be exploited by trouble makers to inflame crises.

Conclusion

All of the strategies met the acceptance criteria as they all have mean score >2.0. However, it was found that community relations (Mean = 2.44) was the most effective strategy followed by Media Relations (Mean=2.43, Corporate Social Responsibility (Mean=2.28) and Government Public Relations (Mean=2.27). The responses analysed showed that each of the PR tools received a significant level of confirmation of their effectiveness as they all had mean scores within the acceptable level determined for the research. The reason for the success of these tool according to a related study is due to the fact that they allow the government to consider the interest of the public rather than just focusing on what benefits the government⁴. The tools give each citizen a voice and a sense of belonging which makes conflict resolution easier. Examining the effectiveness of the PR strategies adopted, the study found that all of the public relations tools adopted by the Lagos state government in managing the crisis were effective to a significant level.. It was also reported that similar tools adopted by a public university in dealing with crises between management and staff were equally found highly effective in resolving conflicts and improving employees' performance

Recommendation

The major recommendation here is that the government must make effective use of social media to reach out to the public in order to forestall any further escalation of crisis in Lagos State in the future.

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