PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICES AND THE IMAGE OF AKWA IBOM STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Precious Akamba Selong[1], Precious Ihunanya Ukeje[2],

and Nsikak Solomon Idiong (Ph.D.)[3]

[1]Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo, Nigeria.
Email: preciousselong@gmail.com; Tel.: +234 703 074 0044

[2]Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo, Nigeria.
Email: pukeje@yahoo.com; Tel.: +234 817 854 9746

[3]Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo, Nigeria.
Email: nsikakidiong@uniuyo.edu.ng; Tel.: +234 816 660 6494

ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the image of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly among Akwa Ibomites. The survey research method was adopted for a sample size of 400 out of Akwa Ibom's population of 6,888,776. The questionnaire was adopted for data collection with the stakeholder and impression management theories as frameworks. With data analysed in tables and simple percentages, the findings from the study revealed that: 50% of the respondents perceived the public relations practices of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly as insufficient to put them in a good light in the eyes of the public; public confidence in the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is low, 31%; the perception of 37% on the public relations practices of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is informed by what they read or viewed in the media. It was concluded in the study that the public relations practices of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly have not been enough to give them a solid public image. It was, therefore, chiefly recommended among other things, that the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly embarks on more grassroots engagement in the discharge of their duties. Suggestions were made for further studies.*

KEYWORDS: Public relations, Public relations practices, Image, Reputation management, Akwa Ibom state house of assembly.

INTRODUCTION

Government activities are of interest to the citizens. Conversely, the government is interested in making known some of its activities. Equally, the legislative arm of government holds some interesting roles including the oversight of the activities of other arms of government, which Agbedi, Allen and Ukachikara (2020) note, is of immense significance to the citizenry, affecting the general outlook of governance and the overall and intricate well-being of constituents. Given this scenario, the government at all levels wants to connect or at least be seen to connect with the citizens. All arms of government, and especially, the legislature which Odalonu (2020) notes, have the primary role of lawmaking and promoting good governance, considering it is important to at least, appear to be representing their constituents well at the various offices wherein they are elected. Hence, the need for a constant engagement with the people.

Similarly, the legislative arm of the government, like any other organisation, seeks to maintain good relationships among its units and stakeholders. It is the same way all tiers of government want to have a great relationship with the citizens. These stakeholders could either be latent, being affected by the organisation, but may not necessarily know that, according to Hellsten, Jacobs, and Wonneberger (2019); aware, including those who have come to know that an organisation's operation affects them; and active publics, who not only know how they are affected but can also cause changes.

Consequently, integrated marketing communication, a dominant tool in the communication and marketing strategies of organisations, according to Rehman, Gulzar, and Aslam (2022), and a concept Anabila (2019) notes, is an audience-driven process in a business that involves the strategic management of stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programmes, provides public relations as one of its components that allows for the establishment of mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.

In light of the above, Orakwue, Hammond, and Gyambrah-Adaefie (2016) opine that an organisation's corporate reputation and image have become a powerful factor of differentiation in the face of competition. This is even as Oparaugo (2021) notes that organisations, including the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, the subject of this study, are unable to satisfy their public if they are not first perceived by the public as trusted and dependable.

The Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, a 26-man legislature, at its plenaries, receives petitions, motions, and deliberates over bills, which when passed into law, and assented to by the governor of the state, shape the lives of citizens, with Lee (2022, p.30) citing public relations as a key component of business operations in an age of "instant communication and rightly inquisitive citizens," signposting the need for opening up communication channels between the members of the legislature and those on whose matters they legislate over.

Public relations practice, therefore, becomes an indispensable endeavour for organisations including the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, more so, the present eighth assembly, hence the constitution of a House Committee on Information, as well as a Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs. In addition to these, the assembly also has an information unit, where citizens can visit to make inquiries regarding the operation and activities of the legislature.

Be that as it may, these image-building and management efforts by the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, leave trails of perception, attitude, and reactions amongst citizens who come in contact with them either directly or indirectly through the media, piquing our interest on the perception, and perhaps, the reaction of the Akwa Ibom public to the public relations practice of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly.

Statement of the Problem

Like every other State Assembly in Nigeria, the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly engages in some public relations endeavours, some of which primarily include the organisation of public hearings on issues of public importance, allowing the people to make contributions, as well as having a sense of belonging in their state, and being part of the process of governance, even if indirectly.

The eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly has also embarked on some strategic public relations ventures, a means of building a favourable public image and reputation among their constituents, and consequently, such would attract perception from Akwa Ibomites. However, the knowledge, perception as well as the level of public confidence in the Assembly is unknown. Also, the factors that could inform the public perception of the public relations practices of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly remain in the realm of speculation and, perhaps, observation, unless further determined by empirical means such as this.

This study, therefore, seeks to understand how the public relations practices and activities of the assembly are seen and received by citizens. Consequently, the study seeks to find answers to the question: to what extent have the public relations practices of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly influenced its image among the people of Akwa Ibom State?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

i. find out how the indigenes of Akwa Ibom State perceive the public relations practices of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly;

ii. understand the level of public confidence in the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly based on its public relations practices; and to

iii. ascertain what informs the perception of the indigenes of Akwa Ibom State on the public relations practices of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly.

Hypothesis

H_0: There is a significant relationship between the public relations practices of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly and the public image of the Assembly among the people of Akwa Ibom State.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public Relations: Conceptual Overview

At the foundation of public relations is the need to establish mutual understanding between an organisation and its public, the public being those directly or indirectly affected by the operations of the organisation. It is largely a process, art or science maybe, of building and managing an organisation or individual's image and reputation. Lin and Liu (2021) posit that it encompasses a series of activities intended to "meet the needs of the environment, win the understanding, trust, and support of all sectors of society, and establish the good reputation and image of an enterprise or group".

Etika, Ejue and Oshie (2018) observe that like advertising, public relations is also a means of creating awareness for an organisation. However, it costs much less than advertising. They identify some of its tools including press releases, lobbying, product publicity, investor relations, and development. Kaleli, Otslulah and Mutisya (2021) posit that it is an important tool for the government. Its importance to that sector of society stems from its emphasis on democracy and good governance. The authors further note that public relations services gained prominence across the globe following increased competition in foreign markets among cross-national firms.

Public relations agencies, according to Agnihotri and Rastogi (2024), have the primary duty to increase their clients' standing with the public, government, employees, and investors. According to Al-Hadeed, Maysari, Aldroubi, Attar, Al-Olaimat and Habes (2024), the phenomenon is largely followed by communication and persuasion. This is especially true given the prevalence of new media, a factor that has unprecedentedly improved public relations. Among other things, it cultivates mutually beneficial connections for organisations and their public and is reported by Alshanag, Rahim, Kanaker and Malek (2023), to have a positive effect on audience engagement.

An interesting development in public relations, just like several other phenomena, is that it has undergone an incredible evolution. In light of this, Agbasimelo and Duru (2024) submit that "public relations practice is undergoing revolutionary changes in the emergence of social media which has enormous effect… on economics, politics, and the exchange of information and ideas" (80). The manifestation of this revolution is stretched every other day with the constant changes made to social media platforms and applications; public relations in another aspect, according to Shaya and Ahmad (2024) would result in organisational behavioural changes.

The scope of public relations continues to widen. However, at the basics, according to Charan and Mishra (2018), it is geared towards the building and improvement of human interaction between employees and employers, as well as among colleagues. It results in mutual understanding and harmony in the working environment. In a similar light, present-day technological realities have also found their way into public relations, with Suciati, Maulidiyanti, and Wiwesa (2021) reporting that the Chartered Institute of Public Relations formed #AIinPR panel, with the mandate to understand the impact of technology, especially, artificial intelligence, on the skills and professions of public relations.

A conglomerate of definitions shows the following: Baker (2022) sees it as a function that keeps the management of an organisation informed of changes in the disposition of groups whose support is needed. These groups, according to the author, could include employees,

shareholders, customers, suppliers, dealers, the community, as well as the government. Awofadeju and Ewuola (2019: 71) say "it defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve public interest", while keeping abreast of and effectively utilising change. It suffices to say, therefore, that public relations is a necessary function within an organisation that creates a line of communication that establishes a mutually beneficial understanding between an organisation, say the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, and their publics, say the people and residents of Akwa Ibom State.

The Practice of Public Relations in Government Circles

Public relations, according to Kaleli, Otslulah, and Mutsiya (2021), is useful in sensitising the public on government projects since there is limited participation in the decision-making process. The government, therefore, embarks on several exercises as a means of communicating its activities to the citizens. They engage, on different occasions, in any of the components of public relations to build its image, as well as create an understanding between itself and the citizens.

In government circles, the practice can largely involve the sourcing of funds for projects or accounting for how funds are spent. Murthy (2018) suggests that a state's finance commission has the responsibility of devising a formula for budgetary allocations once budgets are determined. Government agencies engage in consultations and lobbying to improve their budget and ensure that beyond approval, they are truly and thoroughly funded.

With public relations being an important tool for the entrenchment of democracy, according to Asemah (2019), the government largely engages in press conferences, press releases, or statements, and their engagements are considered by Lasmana, Nurlimah, and Yuniati (2020) as political public relations. Meanwhile, Celebi (2020) observes that the phenomenon could be embedded in different roles and also take up diverse nomenclatures in public institutions, yet with a unified goal of influencing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours through effective communication. This holds true, pending that observations have shown that governments aim to build narratives, and through strategic communication, inform their people to believe the same.

In the most recent times, with the advent and penetration of the internet, there is now an increased conversation about e-governance, and this is a means through which the government engages in public relations in the digital space. Citing Kang and Norton, Matyek, Kaze, Ohaji and Etumnu (2022) note that governments use Web 2.0 tools for two major things: electronic government and digital public relations, perhaps, digital political public relations, and manifestly promote and publish their activities via websites, and social media platforms. In agreement, Sari and Soegiarto (2021) aver that the current public relations writing style has changed, and could now also mean a post on X, blog posts, Facebook updates, etc., which inherently applies to government public relations.

Ngadisah, Hassan, Ermanto and Darmono (2020: 34) capture the gamut of public relations in government circles and what the phenomenon could necessarily mean for the government, public relations professionals, and citizens thus:

Public Relations in government agencies is a functional requirement in the context of disseminating information on program policies and activities of the government agencies to the public… the function of PR in the government is essential… is a continuation of the process

of policy determination and the provision of public services with an attitude adjusted to the interests of people or groups. Government PR has duties to provide information and explanation to the public about the policies and steps/actions taken by the government and seek a harmonious relationship between agencies and the public as well as give understanding to the public about the activities carried out by the government agencies.

Lee in Olabanjo, Odiboh, Nwosu, and Ndubueze (2019) insists that the government must first do a job for the people, and when this is done, they work to earn the trust of the people, their confidence and support, and this becomes possible through the tool of public relations. They further note that public relations in government circles involve listening to the voice of the people of the community.

From the foregoing, government public relations is absolutely a compendium of several related activities that culminate in one. PR in government circles takes diverse aspects and is approached from varied angles. The government also uses all tools – traditional and digital – available to it to ensure that within the government, there is mutual understanding, and most importantly, mutual understanding between itself and those who they govern.

Audience Perception and Attitude Towards Public Relations

Public relations remain a veritable tool for communicating an organisation's activities and relating with those who are directly or indirectly affected by their activities. It is a communication tool that leaves the target audience with impressions or perceptions about the organisation. Consequently, this perception, in turn, affects reactions and attitudes toward an organisation. For instance, Igben and Ilaya (2021) observe that with the advent of the new media, public relations professionals perceive the concept as a fast-paced activity, leaving little chance for delay in responding to issues.

Furthermore, Tanyildizi and Ataykaya (2019) report that the perception of public relations, as a profession and as an art, is low as it is not well known. In worst-case scenarios, they are mixed with other professions. With an emphasis on concepts of identity-image-communication, and global competition rise, among other things, Bozkurt, Soylu and Aktas (2018) argue that public relations, being a multidisciplinary field, has a problem of definition and positioning, as it involves communication processes that are applicable to diverse other fields and a never-ending scope.

In a study that compared leadership style, as well as public relations and school-community collaboration, Owan, Asuquo, and Etudo-Eyor (2022) report that school-community collaboration did not depend on the leadership styles adopted by principals, but on the public relations expertise of the principals. Principals with good public relations skills were more likely to maintain a good school-community collaboration. The implication of this report is that public relations, when well employed, play a mediatory role between an organisation and its public relations audience. It is perceived as a tool that has the potency to enhance the work done by managers of organisations.

There is, according to Spurgeon and Wondimu (2018) and Plowman, Forde, Rawlins, Puglisi and Turk (2022), a significant difference in the perception of public relations based on several human factors or elements including gender, age, educational status, field of study, and level of work. In other words, females perceive public relations differently from their male counterparts. In the same vein, Koch, Obermaier and Riesmeyer (2017) submit that journalists

and public relations professionals are always in personal contact, and that evidence shows that this increases the influence of public relations. A culmination of several reviewed studies reveals divergent results some of which are cited by Koch, Obermaier and Riesmeyer (2017) namely:

On one hand, a number of studies have demonstrated that both journalists and PR practitioners perceive cooperation to be increasingly close between the two professional groups… journalists depend on PR sources, and PR practitioners need journalists to reach audiences, leading to interdependence between the two groups… studies have uncovered fundamental differences – journalists assume far more often that these two groups have fundamentally different goals. Consequently, three of four journalists did not perceive PR as being equal to the status of journalism, whereas three of four PR practitioners did perceive PR as equal in status (3).

Moreover, Gorpe and Oksuz (2021) report that public relations academics are perceived as reputable. However, the negative perception of the public relations profession has been transferred to academia. Among many other things, professionals believe that academics should be more visible to practitioners and society, with the assumption that this visibility will create a bridge between society/industry and them, whereas, Plowman, Forde, Rawlins, Puglisi, and Turk (2022) report that just over one-third of surveyed students expected to spend their lives practising public relations, but about three-fourths expressed satisfaction toward their degrees and the public relations profession.

Theoretical Framework

The study was hinged on the stakeholder theory of public relations. According to Godam, Omego and Ochonogor (2019), the stakeholder theory was first mentioned in an internal memo at the Standard Research Institute in the United States in 1963 but became a full-fledged theory through the enhancement work of Edward Freeman in 1984. The major postulation of the theory, according to Dmytriyev, Freeman, and Horisch (2021), is that businesses should create value for their stakeholders. The authors further note that the theory is three-dimensional, encompassing descriptive, normative, and an instrumental aspect, all of which are mutually supportive, although the normative dimension is fundamental to the theory.

Although widely applied in public relations, the stakeholder theory is observed by Squires and Elnahla (2020) to have a governance perspective and provide a basis for understanding how decisions are made by managers, owners, or stakeholders of a firm or organisation. Similarly, Mahmud (2020) observes that businesses exist in entities, and the stakeholder theory, among other similar ones, sheds light on what role information plays in the relationship that subsists between the organisations and the entities in which they exist.

With the digital age and social media in place, Shen and Chen (2020) observe the need for crisis managers to quickly respond to issues, as publics who are stakeholders could more easily connect. This way, reputational damage is minimised. The stakeholder theory of public relations provides the framework for the possibility of explaining organisations' activities to ensure that there are no rifts between them and their publics. This spells the relevance of the theory to this study.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative survey method was adopted as the research method for this study. It is, according to Darmola, Bello, Yusuf and Amali (2019), useful in collecting data on the opinions of research subjects. It is a method adopted to describe a trend, or condition in attitude; it sets out to study mainly contemporary things that exist at the moment. The population of the study was 6,888,776. This is a 2023 projected population figure from the office of the National Population Commission in Akwa Ibom State. Consequently, the sample size for this study was 400, determined using Taro Yamane's formula for calculating the sample size. The computation is provided thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample Size

N = the Final Population

e = Level of Significance

1 = Unity (Constant)

The researchers adopted the multi-stage sampling procedure, requiring the carrying out of sampling in stages using smaller and smaller units at each stage. The following sampling procedure sufficed for the study: cluster, proportionate, purposive, and availability, respectively. The cluster sampling method was useful for the delineation of Akwa Ibom State into three senatorial districts: Akwa Ibom South, Akwa Ibom Northwest, and Akwa Ibom Northeast Senatorial Districts. In administering the copies of the questionnaire, the proportionate sampling method was adopted, where each of these clusters received copies based on their percentage in the entire population. The number of people in each of the clusters was ascertained to achieve this.

Table 3.1: Cluster of Akwa Ibom State into Senatorial Districts

CLUSTER	LGAs	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE
Akwa Ibom South	Ikot Abasi, Mkpat Enin, Eastern Obolo, Onna, Eket, Esit Eket, Ibeno, Okobo, Oron, UdungUko, Urueoffong/Oruko and Mbo	2,171,719	31.5
Akwa Ibom Northwest	Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikono, Ikot Ekpene, Ini, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun.	2,338,103	33.5
Akwa Ibom Northeast	Ibiono Ibom, Itu, Uyo, Uruan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit	2,378,954	35

Ibom, Nsit Atai, Etinan, Nsit Ubium.		
TOTAL	**6,888,776**	**100**

The purposive sampling procedure sufficed in the next stage for selecting respondents who conscientiously participated in the research, and were at least 18 years of age. The availability or convenience sampling technique, in the final stage, was adopted which allowed every member of the population who was available to participate in the study. Data from the fieldwork were organised in tables and analysed in simple percentages based on frequency count, while the Pearson Moment Correlation Order Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis.

Presentation of Data

Table 1: Respondents' impression of the public relations activities of the eighth AKHA

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
As only a cover-up for their incompetence	28	7
As a means of endearing themselves to the public	71	18
As insufficient to put them in a good light in the eyes of the public	197	50
As a normal organisational engagement	99	25
As propaganda	-	-
Total	**394**	**100**

Source: *Field Survey (2024)*

Table 1 shows that 197 (50%) of the respondents perceive the public relations activities of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly as insufficient to put them in a good light in the eyes of the public.

Table 2: Respondents' thoughts on whether public relations activities of the eighth AKHA caused a mutual understanding between them and Akwa Ibom people

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	189	48
No	102	26
Maybe	59	15
Not Sure	43	11
Total	**394**	**100**

Source: *Field Survey (2024)*

From Table 2, it is shown that 189 (48%) of the respondents affirm that the public relations activities of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly caused a mutual understanding between them and the Akwa Ibom people.

Table 3: Respondents' opinion on whether Akwa Ibom people trust the eighth AKHA

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	110	28
No	83	21
Maybe	126	32
Not Sure	75	19
Total	**394**	**100**

Source: *Field Survey (2024).*

Table 3 shows that 126 (32%) of the respondents opine that Akwa Ibom people may trust the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly.

Table 4: Respondents' level of confidence in the eighth AKHA

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	74	19
High	79	20
Low	122	31
Very Low	118	30
Total	**394**	**100**

Source: *Field Survey (2024).*

According to data in Table 4 above, 122 respondents representing (31%) have low confidence in the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly.

Table 5: How much of the time respondents think they can trust the Eight Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Just about always	51	13
Most of the time	99	25
Some of the times	173	44
Hardly ever	47	12
I don't know	24	6
Total	**394**	**100**

Source: *Field Survey (2024)*

From Table 5 above, the majority of the respondents 173 (44%) think they can trust the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly only some of the time.

Table 6: What forms respondents' opinion on the public relations practice of the eighth AKHA?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Personal experiences with members of the eighth AKHA	55	14
Personal experiences with Information officers in the AKHA	51	13

How I've seen members of the eighth AKHA treat cases of citizens	102		26
My relative or a close friend is a member of the AKHA or works at the assembly	39		10
What I read or viewed in the media	146		37
Total	**394**		**100**

Source: *Field Survey (2024).*

Data in Table 6 show that the opinion of 146 (37%) of the respondents is formed based on what they read or viewed in the media.

Test of Hypothesis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the relationship between public relations activities and the level of public confidence in the eight Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly.

X	X²	Y	Y²	XY
28	784	75	5625	2100
71	5041	79	6241	5609
197	38809	122	14884	24034
98	9604	118	13924	11564
394	**54238**	**394**	**40674**	**43307**

Source: *Computed by the researcher using primary data obtained from the field survey, and with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 25*

$$r = \frac{N\sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{\{N(\sum X^2) - (\sum X)^2\}\{N(\sum Y^2) - (\sum Y)^2\}}}$$

$$r = \frac{4(43307) - (394 * 394)}{\sqrt{(4*54238) - (394)^2(4*40674) - (394)^2}}$$

$$r = \frac{173228 - 155236}{\sqrt{(216952 - 155236)(162696 - 155236)}}$$

$$r = \frac{17992}{\sqrt{61716 * 7460}}$$

$$r = \frac{17992}{\sqrt{460401360}}$$

$$r = \frac{17992}{21456}$$

$$r = 0.83$$

Pearson Product Moment Correlations Coefficient

		X	X2	Y	Y2	XY
X	Pearson Correlation	1	.964**	.951*	.971**	.995**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008	.013	.006	.000
	N	5	5	5	5	5
X2	Pearson Correlation	.964**	1	.841	.884*	.979**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008		.074	.047	.004
	N	5	5	5	5	5
Y	Pearson Correlation	.951*	.841	1	.990**	.926*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.074		.001	.024
	N	5	5	5	5	5
Y2	Pearson Correlation	.971**	.884*	.990**	1	.959*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.047	.001		.010
	N	5	5	5	5	5
XY	Pearson Correlation	.995**	.979**	.926*	.959*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.004	.024	.010	
	N	5	5	5	5	5

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

SPSS Version 25

Decision: The calculated "r" is 0.83; it is lower than the value of critical "r" 0.8783 at 0.05 level of significance for a two-tailed test, with a degree of freedom (df) = 3. Thus, the stated hypothesis of this study that there is a significant relationship between public relations activities and the level of public confidence in the eight Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: How do the indigenes of Akwa Ibom State perceive the public relations practices of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly?

Residents of Akwa Ibom State perceived the public relations practices of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly as insufficient to put them in a good light in the eyes of the public. From Table 4 where tabulated data provided the basis for this answer to the above research question, 50% of the respondents precisely indicated this option. Conversely, only 7% perceived the public relations activities of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly as a cover-up for their incompetence.

Other indications show that 25% of the respondents considered the activities a normal organisational engagement, while 18% held the impression that the activities are endearing to the Akwa Ibom public of the present legislative arm of the Akwa Ibom State government. Additionally, following from data in the succeeding Table 5, the majority of the respondents

(48%) think that the public relations activities of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly have caused a mutual understanding between them and the Akwa Ibom people. 11% were not sure whether they had or not.

The findings are in alignment with the findings of Awosemusi and Awofadeju (2023) reviewed; thus, public relations has an impact on the performance of an organisation. It is also in consonance with the result of the study of Kaleli, Otslulah and Mutisya (2021) who noted that public relations was instrumental in informing people of the government's public relations activities. Conversely, the findings from the study of Olabanjo, Odiboh, Nwosu, and Ndubueze (2019) are inconsistent with this finding. Findings from the quartet's study revealed that a good number of the respondents did not think public relations helped in thinking about the local governments and traditional councils.

It, therefore, goes against what Etika, Ejue and Oshie (2018) pinpointed, that public relations plays a significant role in organisations. It suggests that the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly has not tapped sufficiently into the phenomenon of public relations, and therefore, limited its role in their practices and endeavours to engage with their constituents and remain in a good light. Furthermore, it does not agree with the findings in the study of Arebai and Ijeh (2024) whose respondents indicated that they perceived public relations as relevant to crisis management in the local government council.

Again, the propositions of the impression management theory come to bear by the findings of this research question. For instance, the findings prove that the impression management of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is in force, although the theory does not cover whether people would hold a positive perception of an organisation or not based on the impression an organisation attempts to create.

Similarly, although not herein reviewed, the major arguments of the individual differences theory are by these findings reinforced by the differences revealed in the responses of the respondents. They show some level of independent-mindedness of the respondents, although the theory holds that the differences are based on several factors including educational background, and biological makeup, among others.

Research Question Two: What is the level of public confidence in the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly based on its public relations practices?

Public confidence in the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is low. 31% of the respondents in the data in Table 9 indicate this response. Another 30% indicate that the confidence of the public is very low. These are in addition to 47% who considered their public relations as ineffective, while only 32% considered the public relations activities of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly as effective.

Regardless of the above, 44% of the respondents think they can trust the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly some of the time. 25% indicated that they would trust the assembly most of the time. 18% think they can hardly ever trust the assembly, and they don't know if they can. Palmisano and Sacchi (2024) report that one of the problems that characterises modern societies is a decline in institutional trust, all arms and tiers of government and their agencies inclusive. Similarly, Dellmuth (2024) reports a decline in the public's trust in government in Europe, especially since the Euro-crisis of 2009.

This finding is in both negation and affirmation with the findings in the study of Olabanjo, Odiboh, Nwosu, and Ndubueze (2019) who revealed that respondents in their study were satisfied with the public relations of the local governments, while the same respondents were unsatisfied with the public relations of the traditional councils. They also noted that public relations added to the people's knowledge of the local governments. This could be the basis of the confidence they had in their government.

It is also not in alignment with the findings of Kaleli, Otsulah, and Mutsiya (2021) whose study focused on the role of public relations in sensitising the public about government projects. The researchers showed that their respondents indicated that public relations promoted strong and trusting relations between the organisation and the public and helped build and manage long-term relationships with the public. This is indicative of confidence in the government rooted in public relations.

The stakeholder theory's postulations are herein reinforced. The findings show that the residents of Akwa Ibom State are indeed stakeholders, affected by, as well as affecting the decisions of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly. Conversely, the findings do not show any alignment with the arguments of the impression management theory as the theory falls short of showing whether the engagements of organisations to present a positive self-image automatically gets them a good impression among the public, thus, leaving the theory hanging as regards the findings to research question four.

Research Question Three: What informs the perception of the indigenes of Akwa Ibom State on the public relations practices of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly?

The perception of the residents of Akwa Ibom State on the public relations activities of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is informed by what they read or viewed in the media. 31% of the respondents, which was the best indication, chose this option. It was followed by 26% who indicated that their perception was informed by how they have seen members of the assembly treat the cases of citizens.

Furthermore, 14% of the respondents formed their opinion following their personal experiences with members of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly. 13% is based on their personal experiences with information officers in the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, and only 10% formed their perception because they have a personal relationship – as relatives or close friends – with a member of the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly.

None of the studies reviewed in unit three of chapter two of this study has a corresponding finding. Therefore, they are neither in agreement nor different from the findings of each other. However, the findings suggest again that the propositions of the individual differences theory of mass communication still hold water.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study was embarked on to ascertain how the indigenes of Akwa Ibom State perceived the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly. With data gathered from 394 completed and returned instruments, and data analysed, findings from the study include the following:

i. Indigenes of Akwa Ibom State perceived the public relations practices of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly as insufficient to put them in a good light in the eyes of the public;

ii. public confidence in the eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is low; and

iii. the perception of the indigenes of Akwa Ibom State on the public relations practices of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is informed by what they read or viewed in the media.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequent upon the findings from this study, which were arrived at following rigorous means, it suffices to infer that the public relations practices of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, have not birthed a high confidence among the residents of Akwa Ibom State. Several submissions by the respondents indicate this. Furthermore, the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, especially, the present one, will have more things to do to meet the expectations of their constituents, including carefully choosing their languages of communication to persuade the people enough to believe them, must embark on manifest actions that directly impact on the lives of the majority of the citizens positively. This way, it is easier to perceive their public relations practices as sufficient to put them in a good light in the public's eyes. It must focus on transparency, reliability, and human capacity development of constituents. Additionally, direct engagement with the people rather than through intermediaries will suffice. Also, given that the factor that influenced respondents' perception of the public relations practices of the Eighth Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly is what they read or viewed in the media, members of the Assembly should consciously control their individual and collective narratives in the media, ensuring that negative press is censored as much as possible.

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