

Communication Strategies in Combating Corruption by ICPC in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the communication strategies adopted by the ICPC in its fight against perpetrators of corruption in Nigeria. The study adopted the communication-persuasive theory to provide support for the study. The study employed a qualitative research survey method and data for the study was collected through in-depth interview with selected key staff of the Department of Public Enlightenment and Education of the Commission responsible for the formulation of communication strategies. The findings of the study showed that ICPC uses different communication strategies in its fight against corruption. The types of communication strategies mainly used by the ICPC include workshops, advocacy visits, radio/television jingles/programs, billboards, branded shirts, and sponsorship of special festivals amongst others. Findings indicated minimal effectiveness in the Commission's effort to create awareness and attitudinal change in line with its mission and purpose. The study also identified challenges like poor funding, lack of audience research, lack of communication strategy document, and political will as factors militating against the fight against corruption by ICPC. The study therefore recommended that ICPC should have a communication strategy document for an effective communication approach and that there should be proper funding of ICPC communication programmes to enable it achieve the goals it has been established to achieve.

Keywords: Challenges, communication strategy, commission, corruption, ICPC and targeted audience.

Introduction

The Nigerian government in the last two decades through legislation established the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as anti-graft agencies to complement the efforts of the Public Complaints Commission and the Code of Conduct Bureau which hitherto were the only government agencies checking corrupt practices of government officials in the country. These agencies, no doubt, could be said to be making some noticeable progress in their fight against corruption and its perpetrators. This development which is targeted at redeeming the already battered image of the Nigerian state in the international community through its anti-corruption regulation policies and enforcement is on course and must be sustained through deliberate effort. Corruption is a structural feature of governance in developing countries where strikingly high levels of informality make it difficult for formal rules to be enforced (Amaechi & Okechukwu, 2015).

To buttress this, corruption is a term used to describe acts that are considered immoral, such as fraud, graft, bribery, stealing, perjury, lying, dishonesty, indiscipline, and debased acts like economic and financial crimes, nepotism, favoritism or discrimination and partiality in decision-making or allocation of values (Okojie & Momoh, 2005).

Over the years, corruption had often been the reason adduced by the military for their intervention in the Nigerian politics. Successive Nigerian governments have tried to tackle corruption through legislation and the creation of anti-corruption agencies (ACAs). However, the most ambitious effort in recent times was during the second coming of President Olusegun Obasanjo. In 1999, Chief Obasanjo presented an Anti-corruption Bill to the National Assembly to fight corruption. The Bill was duly passed and assented to; and transformed into the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000. This Act gave birth to Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) on September 29, 2000 (Awopeju, 2015). The aim of this Commission (ICPC) is to prohibit and prescribe punishment for corrupt practices and related offences in order to strengthen public accountability, probity, transparency and to combat the gravity of corruption in both public service and private sector management (Justine & Okoye, 2014).

However, this effort of government to fight corruption appears not to be working as desired hence the deliberate attempt to put in place communication strategies that will help drive home the mission and vision of the ICPC. It is believed that deliberate implementation of communication strategies by an organization like the ICPC can result in significant behavioural change. Hence, communication is regarded as an indispensable tool in the implementation of anti-corruption programmes. This underscores the establishment of the Department of Public Enlightenment and Education of the ICPC charged with the responsibility of handling all communication strategies and programmes of the Commission.

Chiakaan (2019) has reiterated the fact that communication is a very important instrument in the fight against societal ills by government agencies. Thus, where communication is effectively applied by ICPC, Nigerians will not only turn away from corrupt practices, but they will be willing to report corruption related matters in the society to the appropriate authorities.

Statement of the Problem

The level of corruption in Nigeria, has earned the country a negative image from the International Community. For instance, the former UK's Prime Minister, David Cameron described Nigeria and Afghanistan as 'fantastically corrupt' in a conversation with Queen Elizabeth. In his words, the Prime Minister said, 'we' have got some leaders of some fantastically corrupt countries coming to Britain... Nigeria and Afghanistan are possibly the two most corrupt countries in the world'. This assertion by the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom did not only portray Nigeria in bad light, but had the capacity to hinder investment in the Nigerian economy by foreign investors.

The magnitude of corruption in Nigeria has led to loss of confidence in Nigeria by its citizens at home and abroad and the international community due to the activities of fraudsters, corrupt public officials and mis-governance by the county's leaders. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) were established to combat corruption at various levels. It is however a thing of concern that in spite of the establishment of these anti-corruption agencies, the success story is not commensurable with the human, time and resources invested in the corruption fight in Nigeria.

Taking cognizance of the foregoing, it then becomes imperative for the establishment of a specific department that would coordinate the communication agenda of the various anti-corruption agencies including ICPC in Nigeria. Hence, the Public Enlightenment and Education Department of ICPC is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the communication strategies and programmes of the Commission. If ICPC must succeed in its fight against corruption, it is expected to utilize all the available media channels or platforms to conscientize and educate the citizenry on

the ills of corruption and its effect on the general wellbeing of the country through the use of its formulated communication strategies. This shall include the use of posters, radio and television jingles, social media, public enlightenment and other communication fora like anti-corruption clubs in schools among others with the aim of sensitizing members of the public about the dangers of corrupt practices and activities. Though established before the EFCC, not much is being heard about the commission vis- a -vis the popularity of the EFCC among Nigerians. Considering the imperative of communication for the success of any organization, this study examines the communication strategies of ICPC in her fight against corruption in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Communication Strategy

Communication strategy as a concept can be seen as the blueprints guiding how an organization communicates with the public and the generality of stakeholders. The concept of communication strategy has attracted some definitions from several scholars. Pattison (2011) defined communication strategy as a holistic planning approach to engaging a brand or organizational audience to ensure greater effectiveness.

Based on the definitions above, it can be deduced that communication strategies are plans for communicating information related to a specific issue, event, situation, or audience. Communication strategies serve as the blueprints for communicating with the public, stakeholders, or even colleagues. Communication strategy is therefore, primarily a guiding document such that while communications objectives might change over time, its guiding principles will remain the same (Hambrick & Fredrickson, 2001). Communication strategy links communication to the organization's mission, vision and values (Ekwueme & Geveer, 2015).

According to Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) communication strategy has four major components: communication goals, target audience, communication plan and channels. By communication goals, it implies that any communication assignment or program must have desired result. The goals of the communication are the basic motivation for the entire communication activity. Hence, the communication goal serves as the first step in developing communication strategy and influences other components in the plan. A communication goal for an anti-corruption agency like ICPC can be to generate awareness and support of members of the public about the activities of the agency. It is important to note that communication goals are designed in such a manner that they are measurable.

The second component of communication strategy is the target audience. Audience is any one the sender of the communication seeks to share information with (Anaeto & Solo-Anaeto, 2010). Thus, audience according to Chiakaan and Ahmad (2022) is also known as the receiver, decoder or communicate whose response to the message is conditioned by the ability to understand the sent message. Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005) state that communication to all 'constituents' (audiences) of the organization must be customized through appropriate channels, while maintaining consistency of information. An organization like ICPC deals with different audiences at a given time; it is therefore expedient that each communication plan clearly spells out the target group to avoid sharing particular information to the wrong audience. Target audience of ICPC at a given time can be members of the National Assembly, Secondary School children, members of the National Youth Service Corps, Journalists among others. Understanding the target audience

would further determine the communication plan and in particular the media or channel selection (Anaeto & Solo-Anaeto, 2010).

The third component of communication strategy is the communication plan. A communication plan basically shows the schedule of the communication program and responsibilities of key players in the communication team. Communication plan is expedient because a haphazard communication process does not exert any impact on the target audience. A communication plan of ICPC can seek to reach Secondary School students during the Children's Day celebration. Others can be to reach the rural communities during cultural festival.

The fourth component in a communication strategy is communication channels. According to Chiakaan and Ahmad (2022), communication channel is also known as the medium is simply the vehicle or means through which information or message is transmitted to the receiver. There are various channels of communication ranging from mass media channels like television, radio, newspaper, oral or traditional channels like the town crier, use of traditional leaders among others. Furthermore, there are also new media technologies like social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and hosts of others. The choice of communication channels in every communication strategy depends on certain factors such as its cost effectiveness, accessibility to the intended audience, level of believability or credibility among the target audience as well as its adaptability to the purpose and content of the message.

The benefits of a communication strategy within an organization like ICPC are innumerable. Effective communication strategy can help organizations improve or create a positive presence in the public and instil a sense of trust in them at the same time. Without effective communication strategy, an organization runs the risk of incorrect information circulated to the audience or public. Through effective communication strategy, organizations enlist the support of their target people by getting them motivated and involved, bringing down obstacles that might be embedded in the organizational culture, which may lead to failure. From all that has been said so far, communication strategies should be perceived as the communication principles, approaches or gimmicks which are employed by an organization or agency in achieving its goals. Organization, based on this, does not apply a single communication strategy it has many and different approaches which it applies in communicating to its publics, creating awareness about its operations and so on. Underscoring the importance of communication to an organization, Chiakaan (2016) in appreciation of Keghku (2006) submission, states that no organization that is after goal-attainment underrates communication.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the communication persuasion theory. The communication–persuasion theory was propounded by McGuire in 1976. The theory seeks to explain how messages are created, transmitted, received, and assimilated. It also shows a relationship within external and internal factors such as individual attitudes or beliefs and demographic characteristics such as age or ethnicity that affect communication. Orina (2014) argues that the Communication-Persuasion theory was built around Lasswell's Communication theory which explores “who says what, in which channels, to whom, and with what effects.”

The theory has been used often times in the field of advertising to test consumer behaviour in response to advertising messages. Corcoran (2007) describes the theory as an input-output matrix that can be manipulated and measured to achieve a change. The ‘input’ factors contain five separate stages of communication: source, message, channel, receiver and destination. These ‘input’

variables are the main steps in achieving the ‘output’ variables. The output variables are a sequence of events that, according to McGuire (2001) cited in Orina (2014), must take place for effective communication to exist. These include: Exposure to the message, paying attention to the message, liking the message, comprehending the message, agreeing with the message, storing the message and acting in line with the message as well as advising others to behave likewise) to enable the message to have an effect and a change to happen.

The strength of this theory is that it has clear planning stages that can be followed in the communication process in order to obtain an outcome. The model can also help media professionals to identify and consider channels and strategies that can influence their campaign outcomes.

The communication–persuasion theory is relevant to this study because the tenets of the theory believe that planning is a key to achieving any communication programme by an organization like ICPC. The theory also holds that in planning, the audience, message or content among others need to be considered. These aspects of the theory highlighted relates to the components of communication strategy. The above assertions suggest that, the Commission’s communication strategy can be effectively persuasive when the audience, channels and contents are carefully juxtaposed. This goes to say that, the theory clearly supports all the components of a communication strategy as a necessity for the actualization of the general goals of ICPC.

Channels of Communication

Studies have shown that individuals trust depend on different channels to access information (Rogers, 2003). Therefore, identifying and deploying the right or appealing communication channels for particular audience at a given time is a sine-qua non for successful strategic communication for any campaign including anti-corruption. Duggal (2011) cited in Owusu (2014) defines communication channel as a medium through which a message is transmitted to its intended audience, such as print media or broadcast (electronic) media.

UNICEF (1999) proposes that channels must be selected to fit the participants and the communication task and that it is therefore important to consider the characteristics of available communication channels before applying them to a target audience. Mefalopulos (2008) posits that a number of factors should be considered before a specific channel is used. One of the factors is the objective of the communication strategy. Depending on what the campaign seeks, different communication channels including multi-media can be used. Below are some of the recognized channels of communication that can be used to drive home an organization’s communication strategy blueprint:

Interpersonal channels: This type of communication channel refers to either one-to-one or one-to-group communication. One-to one channels include person-to-person, citizen to citizen, and anti-corruption agency to citizens. An example of one-to-group communication may be a community-based anti-corruption sensitization public forum which is mostly done in town halls, village squares, market squares or places of worship. Interpersonal channels are considered effective because the channels provide opportunities for the sender and receiver of information to ask questions and seek clarifications.

Community-Oriented Channels: This focuses on spreading information through existing social networks, such as families, traditional institutions, schools, clubs or a community groups. This channel is effective when dealing with community norms and offers the opportunity for audience members to reinforce one another’s behaviour. Community based channels are considered

effective because they create room for community involvement, engagement and partnership with key stakeholders (Niederdeppe *et al*, 2008).

Mass-media channels: This entails conventional mass communication channels such as radio, television, newspaper and other printed materials that deliver information to larger and scattered audience. Mass media channels are particularly effective in agenda setting, they also contribute to the establishment of new social norms. Formats range from educational to entertainment and advertising such as jingles and public service announcements on radio and television about the subject of campaign.

New Media Channels: Technology developments globally have led to proliferation of many communication tools or platforms which are often called New or online Media (Shadrach, 2017). The development is primarily hinged on the emergence of internet and web 2.0- an internet connectivity which supports interactivity among audience, thus making the audience active producers and consumers (*Prosumers*) in the communication process. Popular new media channels include social media like Facebook, twitter, Instagram among others (Shadrach, 2019). Despite the criticism against the new media platforms, they are one of the most patronized by corporate organizations because of its outreach and promptness.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

There are studies previously carried out by other scholars which have significant relationship with the current study. For example, Ekwueme and Gever (2015) explored the communication strategies for promoting agriculture in Nigeria and enhancing food production. A total of 32 postgraduate students from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka provided narratives through a semi-structured interview that lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. The result showed that persuasive message contents which educate and inform, emerged as an important strategy. It was also found that audience segmentation in disseminating agricultural messages is a very cardinal strategy. Finally, findings showed that strategic choice of media that take care of the special needs of the target audience is a vibrant strategy for promoting agriculture and enhancing food production in Nigeria. The study relates to the current study in the aspect of communication strategy, however, the latter focused on promoting agriculture while the former focuses on promoting activities of ICPC.

In addition, Awopeju (2015) appraised the *Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC)* as regards fighting corruption in Nigeria. The appraisal covers 2001-2013 with a view to determining the effectiveness of ICPC in combating corruption in Nigeria. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The study revealed that due to ineffectiveness in applying communication ICPC is ineffective in fighting corruption in Nigeria. The study recommended among others, that for ICPC to be a proactive anti-corruption institution, it should not be starved of funds, adequate and qualified personnel should be recruited, special court should be set up and the Act of the ICPC should be reviewed by the National Assembly for effective performance in fighting corruption in Nigeria. While this study focused on ICPC as a whole, it failed to establish any knowledge regarding communication strategies used by ICPC in carrying out its responsibility which is what the current study seeks to do.

In a separate study by Oghu (2017) on *Whistle Blowing Policy as a Mechanism for Energizing the 'war against Corruption in Nigeria* attempted to examine the theoretical foundations of the policy as well as the current application of its provisions against the ultimate objective of fighting corruption in Nigeria. The Ethical Theory of Whistle Blowing, Universal Dignity Theory of

Whistle Blowing and Framing Theory were used to structure the postulations of the study. The study argued that the policy, which is still awaiting the backing of an enabling law at the time of the study, might need to be further tweaked to speak to the issues of ethics, protection of whistle blowers and impactful communication strategies, in order to serve as a potent energizer to the 'war against corruption' in Nigeria. The study, therefore, concluded that communication strategies driving the whistle blowing policy in Nigeria appears weak and poorly articulated. The framing of the campaign messages does not seem to capture the wholesomeness of the anti-corruption war and the role of whistle blowing as an enabling tool in it.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach as data were collected through the means of in-depth interview. The interview was held with eight key staff of the commission in Abuja, headquarter of the commission. The key staff works in the information department of the commission. They were selected purposively as it is not every staff of the commission is responsible for the planning and implementation of communication programmes of the commission. The views of the interviewees were recorded, transcribed thematically and contextually analyzed.

Result of the Findings

This part of the study centres on the analysis of data collected from the field and the discussion of the main findings in line with the three research objectives of the study which are:

- i. What are the communication strategies used by ICPC in fighting corruption.
- ii. How effective are the communication strategies used by the ICPC?
- iii. What are the problems associated with the communication strategies used by ICPC in fighting corruption and other related offences in Nigeria?

Theme one: What are the communication strategies used by ICPC in fighting corruption?

Four out of the eight respondents interviewed unanimously agreed that the absence of an officially approved communication strategy document is greatly hampering the progress of the Commission's fight against corruption and needed to be worked upon because an official communication strategy document of an organization, serves as its blue print and guide on how it intends to carry out its campaign against corruption by getting the citizens involved.

Two other respondents agreed that through their sponsored programs on television, radio, social media platforms, the print media and sponsorship of special events/festivals, the content of their campaign against corruption gets to their target audience which in turn educates and creates public awareness of the ICPC's mandate and the role it plays.

Finally, two other respondents stated that it is not mandatory to have a communication strategy document because the mandate of the Commission is well defined.

Theme two: How effective are the communication strategies used by the ICPC?

Under this theme, three respondents stated that the communication strategies used by the ICPC are only making minimal progress which shows that more needs to be done to drive home the mandate of the Commission which is to fight corruption.

In another shade of opinion, three respondents noted that the Commission has to reach out to more targets in the urban areas where these corrupt acts are being perpetuated if the fight must succeed. This is to get the people involved through sensitization on all channels of communication.

While two other respondents noted that the communication approaches by the commission in the fight against corruption are clearly not effective as many bodies such as schools, religious organizations and other professional bodies are yet to be fully involved in the campaign against corruption in the country. Findings here have clearly indicated failure of the ICPC communication strategy in this regard.

Theme three: What are the problems associated with the communication strategies used by ICPC in fighting corruption and other related offences in Nigeria?

Four respondents noted that low feedback rate is hampering the implementation of the Commission's communication strategies for combating corruption. In another opinion, two respondents noted that lack of audience research by ICPC is hampering or affecting the campaign against corruption through the use of communication strategies.

Finally, two other respondents identified lack of adequate funding and budgeting as one of the major factors affecting the implementation of communication strategies adopted by the ICPC because communication projects are expensive. Summarily, this study summarily outlined the communication strategies already being used by ICPC, its effectiveness and the factors affecting the implementation of the ICPC communication strategies as can be seen below:

Anti-corruption Communication Strategies used by ICPC to Combat Corruption?

The respondents from the findings of the study attested that ICPC has always engaged in communication as part of its strategies to combat corruption. Finding also revealed that the major communication strategies used by the commission include the mass media (radio, television) and print media, new media, face to face, fora like workshop, visitations and partnership with club and societies.

Effectiveness of the Communication Strategies used by ICPC to Combat Corruption?

The findings of the study revealed that the communication strategies adopted by the ICPC have had minimal impact, hence their effectiveness is average in their drive towards Nigerians' attitudinal change to corruption.

Challenges Associated with the Implementation of the Communication Strategies by ICPC?

The result of the findings revealed that the challenges faced by the ICPC in implementing communication strategies for anti-corruption campaigns include lack of audience research, absence of audience engagement, lack of adequate fund for communication activities, poor attitude and public support, proliferation of new media, lack of communication strategy document, budget and channels of transmission etc.

Conclusion

This study has examined the communication strategies used in combating corruption by ICPC in Nigeria. The result of the study revealed that corruption is an attitudinal problem that has enveloped Nigerian. Hence. multiple laws without a standard communication strategy(s) or policy document

cannot reduce or stop the monster called corruption in Nigeria. Through communication, anti-corruption agencies like ICPC can create awareness and educate Nigerians about the menace of corruption with the view of eradicating it. This if properly implemented will bring about behavioural change in favour of anti-corruption campaigns by anti-corruption agencies.

The findings of the study revealed that communication must be an integral part of anti-graft agencies like ICPC if they must drive home their mission and vision of ridding the country of corruption. The findings underscore the importance of the establishment of the Public Enlightenment Unit or Department in the Commission with a sole responsibility of planning and executing communication activities in tandem with the organization's vision.

It was categorically established that communication strategy of ICPC is undermined by several factors.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations were put forward;

- i. That the, ICPC should have a communication strategy document. The communication strategy is an important tool, which not only outlines the key tools and approaches to communication activities, but it also aligns internal and external communication activities of the organization.
- ii. It was also established that the success of communication activities and strategies of an organization is highly dependent on the extent to which the organization's leadership integrates communication as a key role in its strategy implementation process and the understanding of its targeted audience.
- iii. There is also need to improve funding of communication activities of ICPC. Since the organization clearly recognizes the critical role of communication in the actualization of its vision, it would be important that the management improve the budgetary of the Public Enlightenment Unit. This will require funding from international agencies like the World Bank, USAID, UNDP among others using strategic programmes.

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