



Research Article

Public Acuity, Home-made Vehicles and Public Relations in Nigeria

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Received date: 6 April 2020; Accepted date: 10 October 2022; Published date: 9 November 2022

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Abstract

Product quality and industry-public relationships enhance organisations' reputations worldwide. In Nigeria, both are critical to the automobile industry already bugged by public distrust and low confidence. Thus, the study examined the public relations (PR) actions of indigenous automobile companies amid these challenges. It looked at public relations as a strategic organisational function that could aid acceptance and stimulate a positive public attitude towards domestic automobile products. James Grunig's Two-Way Symmetrical model of public relations provided the theoretical framework for the study to investigate the shared values, support and partnership between automobile companies and their stakeholders. A stratified sampling technique was used to retrieve data via the survey research design. A structured questionnaire was administered to elicit the opinions of residents of Lagos metropolis which is a major hub of Nigeria's automotive activities. Findings showed that stakeholders' awareness level of public relations actions in the indigenous auto industry was low, with a significant percentage of respondents expressing a negative perception of the industry. The study concluded that despite the government's imposition of restraining tariffs on imported vehicles, docile public relations of local manufacturers had not helped the public to accept indigenous automobiles patriotically. The study recommended that Nigerian automobile manufacturers should outsource their PR programmes and undertake engaging productions of motoring documentaries. Moreover, the organisations should create public acceptance advocacy for locally-assembled vehicles.

Keywords: Automobiles, Indigenous, Made-In-Nigeria, Public Relations

Introduction

The automobile industry is a catalyst for development and industrialisation globally. The PR industry is a critical tool for

advancing the transportation sector of any economy (Olabanjo *et al*, 2019). It facilitates the value chain of allied manufacturing activities such as the production of iron and steel, electrical equipment, manufacturing

Cite this Article as: Oscar ODIBOH, Ernest NWOSU, Thelma EKANEM and Tunji OYEDEPO (2022), "Public Acuity, Home-made Vehicles and Public Relations in Nigeria", Journal of Eastern Europe Research in Business and Economics Vol. 2022 (2022), Article ID 960007, DOI: 10.5171/2021.960007

of rubber, and plastics, as well as the construction of roads which would subsequently make for development in terms of urban and rural advancement (Agbo, 2011; Black and McLennan, 2016). The auto industry could help establish a vibrant economy which is essential for an increased standard of living for the people. Not many industries command a massive range of technologies and production methods or the use of as various unfinished products, machinery and tools, as the automotive industry (Black, Makundi and McLennan, 2017).

The Made-in-Nigeria automobile industry is more than four decades old, three-quarters of which was in infancy. At the onset, the industry was controlled by privately owned organisations that set up assembly lines shortly after Nigeria's Independence in the 1960s. The growth in the global motoring industry resulted in many leading manufacturers starting joint-venture partnerships with indigenous automobile manufacturers (Adebanjo, 2008). The continued desire for a fully indigenous automobile industry led to the creation of Innoson Vehicles Manufacturing (IVM) Company Ltd, located in Nnewi, South-Eastern Nigeria in 2007. It was subsequently commissioned in 2010 via a Sino-Nigerian auto manufacturing partnership (PwC, 2016).

In an attempt to consolidate an import-substitution strategy, Nigeria, like other developing economies, decided to develop and localise the automobile industry to achieve total indigenous production within specific time frames post-commencement. The National Automotive Policy of the 1970s and 1980s was to midwife the idea of domestic vehicle manufacturing. However, after the initial successes, subscribing assemblers in the country have experienced a steady decline since the year 2000. Many automobile assembly plants of the 70s and 80s have shut down. Approximately 75% of existing automobile companies in Nigeria today deal only in sales; while about 80% of automobiles used in the country are fairly-used imports (PwC, 2016).

The decline in automobile production and public patronage influenced the

government of Nigeria in 2013 to introduce the National Automotive Industry Development Plan (NAIDP) to revive the industry. However, the revitalisation has increased production activities in the local industry. The National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDCC) approved 35 automobile manufacturers' licences to manufacture cars. Broad-based communication provides platforms for the automobile industry to thrive. One of these platforms is public relations (Aiyende *et al.*, 2020b; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020a; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020b; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020c; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020d; Olabanjo *et al.*, 2020b; Omokiti *et al.*, 2020a).

With the National Automotive Policy in active implementation since 2015, this study aims to assess the public relations actions of the made-in-Nigeria automobile industry in bringing about general acceptance and utilisation of indigenously produced automobiles given the continued importation of fairly used automobiles and slow adoption of these indigenous brand-new vehicles even at the corporate level. This study will also assess public awareness and perception of the local vehicle manufacturing industry. Many factors affect public affinity with the industry. The primary factor is organisational behaviour and reputation, especially in the automobile industry (Hagan, 2003; Fayemi *et al.*, 2019). This study looks at public relations as a relevant factor.

Statement of the Problem

Consolidating the local manufacturing sector, policies encouraging indigenous manufacturing companies to thrive now exist in Nigeria further to enhance the import substitution plan of the Nigerian economy. However, the automobile industry is facing setbacks in production and public acceptance of products as a result of the gross importation of fairly-used automobiles. This development has significantly challenged automobile companies which are already unsettled by high product pricing. Reduced public trust to deliver world-class after-sales services and existing negative perceptions of

indigenous products are other challenges. This study, therefore, seeks to examine how automobile companies are applying public relations tools to increase public awareness and change the negative perception of Nigerian-made vehicles.

Study Objectives and Research Questions

This survey assesses the awareness levels and perception of stakeholders regarding the PR activities of indigenous automobile companies. It investigates the public relations tools and actions of indigenous automobile assemblers. Also, this study aims to obtain public opinion on the way forward for local auto assemblers towards the delivery of acceptable made-in-Nigeria automobiles. In tune with the foregoing objectives, these research questions were drawn:

- A. To what extent are Nigerians aware of and perceive the public relations practices of indigenous automobile companies?
- B. What are the public relations tools and actions of indigenous automobile manufacturers?
- C. What is the opinion of the public on the way forward for local auto assemblers towards the delivery of acceptable made-in-Nigeria vehicles?

Review of Related Literature

This study examines public viewpoints on the public relations actions of Nigeria's local vehicle manufacturing industry. It compares public awareness and perception to explain how PR, as a strategic organisational function, performs an essential task in the acceptance and attitude towards domestic automobile products. An underlying issue causing this indifference is the issue of trust and low confidence in products locally manufactured (Olabanjo *et al.*, 2019).

There is inadequate literature on Nigeria's vehicle manufacturing and public relations actions. However, there is published

research in the automobile industry. These research studies come under crisis communication and customer relations management. Excellent public relations is thoughtful, truthful, open, strategic, and symmetrical communication with stakeholders (Odiboh *et al.*, 2020a; Odiboh *et al.*, 2020b; Odiboh and Oladunjoye, 2019; Odiboh and Ajayi, 2019; Odiboh, Ezenagu and Okuobeya, 2019). In this case, current and potential customers of automobile manufacturing. Though public relations is not limited to one definition, it is primarily a management function with the crucial role of maintaining relationships, through interaction and information sharing amongst organisations and stakeholders.

The Public Relations Concept and the Importance of its Practice in the Automobile Industry

Public relations is the process of analysing the character, actions and perceptions of stakeholders, distinguishing the policies and methods of a person or an entity concerning the satisfaction of stakeholders. It is about coming up with and implementing an actionable programme to elicit mutual support and empathy (Wilcox, Cameron and Reber, 2015; Odiboh and Oladunjoye, 2019). It is the information-sharing administrative role of management whereby organisations evolve, adjust or sustain their ecosystem to achieve organisational goals (Abitbol, 2017; Fayemi *et al.*, 2019). From those mentioned above, public relations is expediently relevant in an organisational setting, especially in the context of the automobile industry. One aspect of an industry like the automobile industry is production and sales. However, the relationship that ensues before and after transactions such as after-sale services, vehicle recalls and other communication aspects of the administration, is of the utmost importance.

In the automobile industry, product quality, as well as the industry-public relationship in every aspect, influences the organisation's reputation (Adelua *et al.*, 2020a; Adelua *et al.*, 2020b; James *et al.*, 2020d; Nwosu *et al.*,

2019; Adelua *et al.*, 2020c; Adelua *et al.*, 2020d; Aiyende *et al.*, 2020a). Likewise, excellent product quality and functional interactions within an organisation and its sphere of stakeholders help to build as well as sustain an admirable stakeholder perception or at least counteract or mitigate the adverse impacts on the perception of such an organisation (Hagan, 2003). Given the importance of relationship and communication, public relations ought to have a direct role in managing and communicating to the Nigerian public about the importance of embracing indigenously manufactured automobiles which in turn would boost economic growth and development (Nwosu *et al.*, 2020; Nejo *et al.*, 2020b; Olabanjo *et al.*, 2020a; Omokiti *et al.*, 2020b; Salau *et al.*, 2020a; Salau *et al.*, 2020b; Nwosu *et al.*, 2020).

Issues Faced by the Automobile Industry Involving Public Relations Actions

The scandalous situation German auto manufacturer Volkswagen (VW) got into is an avid case in point of how players in the automobile industry face issues of trust, reputation and acceptance that necessitate public relations actions. VW hitherto aspired to become a renowned auto manufacturer by 2018. However, the scandal resulted in the company losing a third of its market capitalisation (Ayiteh, 2019).

In a move to bring about restitution as a result of the infringements, VW facilitated a vehicle recall and tendered an open apology which also saw the resignation of the Chief Executive Officer and top directors. Volkswagen was also hounded with legal actions, and indicted with illicit behaviour. This threatened the existence of the auto giant. In the affirmative, policy formulators and regulators, as well as worldwide customers, expressed shock as to how an organisation could commit such ethical violations for a prolonged period of such a magnitude. However, with the introduction of a new line of electric and hybrid vehicles, they are starting to rebuild trust (Zhou,

2016). For an industry where reputation depends on the quality of the vehicles it produces, safety-related recalls can quickly diminish an automaker's reputation and shareholder value and even destroy a brand (Hagan, 2003; James *et al.*, 2019).

Another portrayal of good public relations was in the Toyota scandal of 2009. Toyota Motor Corporation is renowned as one of the largest in the automotive industry, located in Aichi Prefecture, Japan. Decades after the Japanese corporation was founded in 1937, there has been a long record of manufacturing dependable, cost-effect and premium standard automobiles. Currently, the auto manufacturer rolls out automobiles and vehicle spares from 53 manufacturing locations in 27 nations and territories over the world, also possessing several flagships such as Lexus and Scion as well as models like the saloon Camry, sport utility Rav4, and light-duty Tacoma truck. Toyota is also renowned for the first hybrid vehicle (the Prius). Toyota was forced to call back nine million automobiles around the world with its flagships and models affected. This was a result of throttle defects which caused affected vehicles to speed up inadvertently. The Toyota crisis escalated as a result of an initial dilly-dallying. When Toyota finally spoke up, it was unsatisfactory (Feng, 2010). Nevertheless, when Toyota stepped up to the challenge to sustain its reputation, it took no more than a quarter of a year to bounce back to its leading status in the automotive sphere. Relatively, Toyota's vehicle carpets and defective gas pedal recall are in tandem with methods widely known to manage crises. Nevertheless, Toyota employed a few crisis communication tenets while also coming up with its approach (Stewart, 2010). Toyota leveraged its track record, which was the focal point in its defence that sustained confidence in restoring its public trust. Although, in handling the situation, Toyota took advantage of rhetoric renowned for the maintenance of identity that may not be associated with crises (Knoespel, 2011).

To some PR executives and administrative personnel, a relationship exists between the function of PR, reputation and public perception, mainly in times of crisis (James

et al., 2020a; Ndubueze *et al.*, 2019; James *et al.*, 2020b; James *et al.*, 2020c; Ndubueze *et al.*, 2020; Nejo *et al.*, 2020a; Olabanjo *et al.*, 2019). Roschwalb (1994) once interviewed 259 chief corporate communication officers at large corporations in the United States. When they asked the chief corporate communication officers what the primary mission of their corporate communication programme was, they most often rated reputation as expedient to success. Of the chief corporate communication officers interviewed, most said they would turn to a public relations expert first if their business had a problem with perception.

Theoretical Framework

This survey is built on James Grunig's (1984) Two-Way Symmetrical model of public relations. Grunig proposed the framework, together with other modern-day models, that seeks to incorporate all models and theories in public relations. This model explains the operations and purpose of PR, as it seeks to achieve shared values, support and partnership within organisations and their stakeholders. The framework, suggests that PR managers use research and information exchange to come about the shared interest of both organisations and stakeholders (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002). Strategies required in this model include negotiation, accord and conflict resolution to obtain mutual understanding and to alter behaviours and attitudes of both the public and the organisation (the made-in-Nigeria automobile industry in this case). The theorists posit that the model is the most efficient, as well as accepted professional

standards and guiding principles for public relations as communication and feedback are achieved. This fact, however, points out the need for symmetrical public relations strategies in the Nigerian automobile industry to change the attitude of Nigerians towards locally manufactured vehicles and raise the level of trust as well as reduce the apathy between the Nigerian motoring industry and members of the society.

Research Design and Methodology

This study incorporated a survey research design aided by a well-structured questionnaire with both open-ended and close-ended questions for data collection. We processed the data results using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). We selected two hundred and seven respondents using stratified random sampling. Stratified random sampling is a sampling technique that entails the distribution of a population into strata or smaller groups. This sampling technique is utilised based on similar attributes or characteristics shared by individuals constituting the study as Denzin and Lincoln (2017) justified. Lagos metropolis was selected because most of the made-in-Nigeria automobile manufacturers coagulate in metropolitan Lagos. Another reason is that vehicle assemblers in other parts of Nigeria have dealerships and sales offices in Lagos. Examples are Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing and Peugeot Automobile Nigeria (Nwagwu and Oni, 2015; PwC, 2016). Individuals sampled had general or specific knowledge about the indigenous motoring industry from the different strata of the population.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Table 1: respondents' awareness of indigenous automobile manufacturers

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	154	74.4	74.4	74.4
No	37	17.9	17.9	92.3
Not Sure	16	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	207	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 demonstrates that most respondents (74.4%) are aware of Nigerian-made automobile manufacturers. In comparison, 17.9% and 7.7% indicate that

they are not aware or not sure about Nigerian-made automobile manufacturers, respectively.

Table 2: respondents' awareness of public relations activities or programmes of Nigerian automobile manufacturers

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	79	38.2	38.2	38.2
No	27	13.0	13.0	51.2
Not Sure	101	48.8	48.8	100.0
Total	207	100.0	100.0	

Regarding awareness of public relations activities or programmes of Nigerian automobile manufacturers, Table 2 shows that 38.2% are aware of the PR activities of indigenous automobile manufacturers. In

comparison, 13% indicate that they are not aware of the PR activities. However, 48.8% constituting almost half of the respondents sampled indicate that they are not sure if they are aware.

Table 3: Specific public relations activities known to the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
After-sale services	15	7.2	20.8	20.8
organising children's competitions and educational support activities	4	1.9	5.6	26.4
Free maintenance and servicing	19	9.2	26.4	52.8
Festivity gifts	10	4.8	13.9	66.7
Community development projects such as partnering with the Federal Road Safety Corps	3	1.4	4.2	70.8
Career Mentorship programmes	1	.5	1.4	72.2
Auto maintenance tips	4	1.9	5.6	77.8
Facility tours/showroom invitations and the inauguration of car clubs	16	7.7	22.2	100.0
Total	72	34.8	100.0	
Unanswered	135	65.2		
Total	207	100.0		

A small section of the public is aware of the PR activities in the made-in-Nigeria automobile industry. The result shows that 7.2% of the respondents say they are aware of communication and information dissemination regarding after-sale services.

Another set of respondents constituting 1.9% indicate that they are away from activities revolving around children's educational support and competitions. 9.2% indicate that they are aware of free vehicle maintenance and servicing. In comparison,

4.8% say they are aware of gifting activities during festivities. Respondents constituting 1.4% of the respondents say they are aware of activities such as community development projects such as partnering with the Federal Road Safety Corps. In contrast, 0.5% and 1.9% indicate career

mentorship programmes and auto maintenance tips, respectively. Finally, 7.7% of the respondents indicate that they are aware of facility tours, showroom invitations and the inauguration of car clubs as PR activities of Nigerian automobile manufacturers.

Table 4: respondents' awareness sources of public relations activities of made-in-Nigeria automobile manufacturers

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook	15	7.2	10.3	10.3
TV	12	5.8	8.2	18.5
Newspaper	21	10.1	14.4	32.9
Twitter	24	11.6	16.4	49.3
Instagram	11	5.3	7.5	56.8
Billboards	2	1.0	1.4	58.2
Relatives/friends	11	5.3	7.5	65.8
Press conferences and seminars	2	1.0	1.4	67.1
Word of mouth	31	15.0	21.2	88.4
Radio	6	2.9	4.1	92.5
Others (involvement of employers in activities, posters, personal experience of activities)	11	5.3	7.5	100.0
Total	146	70.5	100.0	
Unanswered	61	29.5		
Total	207	100.0		

Table 4 identifies the media through which respondents became aware of public relations activities of made-in-Nigeria automobile manufacturers. The majority (7.2%) indicate Facebook, 5.8% say television, 10.1% indicate newspapers, and 11.6% choose Twitter. Another 5.3% reveal that they got aware via Instagram, while 1% chose billboards as a channel of awareness. Relatives and friends were the

choices of 5.3%. In comparison, another 1%, 15%, 2.9% and another 5.3% achieved awareness via press conferences and seminars, word of mouth, radio, and other means (involvement of respondents' employers in PR activities, posters and witness of activities personally) respectively.

Table 5: if public relations activities/ programmes influenced respondents' decision to purchase a made-in-Nigeria vehicle

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	70	33.8	33.8	33.8
No	102	49.3	49.3	83.1
Not sure	35	16.9	16.9	100.0
Total	207	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 indicates that 33.8% concur that it was these PR activities that prompted them to purchase a Nigerian-made vehicle. Almost half of the respondents constituting 49.3% of the respondents say the PR

activities of these home-based manufacturers have not prompted them to purchase a vehicle. In comparison, 35% of the respondents are not sure if PR activities have caused them to purchase one or not.

Table 6: If the survey participants are pleased with the PR activities of Nigerian automobile manufacturers

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	56	27.1	27.1	27.1
No	83	40.1	40.1	67.1
Not sure	68	32.9	32.9	100.0
Total	207	100.0	100.0	

From Table 6, which measures respondents' satisfaction with public relations activities of local automobile manufacturers, 27.1 % say they are satisfied. In comparison, 40.1%

say they are not satisfied with the PR efforts of the manufacturers, while 32.9% admit that they are not sure if they are satisfied.

Table 7: shows if public relations activities/programmes of indigenous vehicle manufacturers have added knowledge about the local automobile industry and its potential

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	86	41.5	41.5	41.5
No	78	37.7	37.7	79.2
Not sure	43	20.8	20.8	100.0
Total	207	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows that 41.5% of the study participants agree that they have gained new knowledge from the public relations

activities/programmes of indigenous vehicle manufacturers.

Table 8: Showing how public relations activities of indigenous automobile manufacturers have added to knowledge about the indigenous industry

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Automobiles are adaptable to Nigerian terrain and road conditions	11	5.3	14.7	14.7
Patronage helps boost the Nigerian economy	7	3.4	9.3	24.0
Succeeded in creating belief in the potential of the Nigerian industry	24	11.6	32.0	56.0
Being instrumental in the reduction of the economic effects of importation	3	1.4	4.0	60.0
Mirrored the challenges of production while showing that local production is attainable	8	3.9	10.7	70.7
The automobile industry aims to be the biggest in Africa	19	9.2	25.3	96.0
Sheds more light on the National Automotive Policy	3	1.4	4.0	100.0
Total	75	36.2	100.0	
Unanswered	132	63.8		
Total	207	100.0		

From Table 8, 5.3% of the respondents admit that the PR activities of indigenous manufacturers revealed to them that their vehicles are suited to Nigerian terrains and road conditions. 3.4% said that the PR activities showed them that patronage of the domestic industry vehicles helps boost the Nigerian economy. In comparison, 11.6% opine that the PR activities of the local industry have caused them to believe in the potential of the Nigerian automobile industry. Also, 1.4% of the respondents said that PR activities have added to their

knowledge by attempting to advocate for the reduction of the economic effects of importation. In comparison, 3.9% said the PR activities of the indigenous automobile industry have helped to mirror the challenges of local production as well as showing that local production is attainable. Finally, 9.2 % of the respondents say they discovered that the automobile industry aims to be the biggest in Africa. In comparison, 1.4% of the respondents admit that they got to know more about the National Automotive Policy.

Table 9: shows how respondents rate the frequency of information dissemination and other public relations actions of indigenous vehicle manufacturers.

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	7	3.4	3.4	3.4
Above Average	46	22.2	22.2	25.6
Average	73	35.3	35.3	60.9
Below average	48	23.2	23.2	84.1
Very poor	33	15.9	15.9	100.0
Total	207	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 indicates that a meagre 3.4% of the respondents believe that the frequency of information dissemination and other public relations actions of indigenous vehicle manufacturers is excellent. However, 35.3%

think that frequency of information dissemination is average. In comparison, 23.2% and 15.2% believe that it is below average and very poor, respectively.

Table 10: Showing how respondents think local automobile manufacturing companies can improve their information dissemination and other public relations functions.

Variable	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Partnership with government and agencies, sponsorships and continuous advocacy for import substitution	28	13.5	14.4	14.4
Focusing on engagement across all major social media for products to be at the fingertips of Nigerians	129	62.3	66.2	80.5
Advocating for the creation of packages and schemes to facilitate the easy acquisition of made-in-Nigeria vehicles	1	.5	.5	81.0
Outsourcing their public relations functions for quality performance	9	4.3	4.6	85.6
Better customer relations	10	4.8	5.1	90.8
Production of motoring documentaries with placement both on traditional media and on social media as done in developed climes to better engage and create an online followership.	18	8.7	9.2	100.0
Total	195	94.2	100.0	
Unanswered	12	5.8		
Total	207	100.0		

Table 10 indicates that 13.5% of the respondents suggest that indigenous automobile manufacturers should improve their information dissemination and public relations functions. They also advocate for an increase in sponsorships and continuous advocacy for import substitution, which would increase production and acceptance. Moving on, 62.3% of the respondents want local vehicle manufacturers to focus more on engagement across all major social media platforms for products to be at the fingertips of Nigerians. However, one respondent (0.5%) suggested that the creation of packages and payment schemes

to facilitate the easy acquisition of made-in-Nigeria vehicles should bring about support and a trickle effect of acceptance. Some respondents (4.3%) think an improvement in public relations functions of the local automobile industry would come by outsourcing their public relations functions for quality performance. In comparison, 4.8% think that the focus should be on better customer relations management to get more referrals and acceptance of indigenous products. Finally, 8.7% of the respondents think that the made-in-Nigeria motoring industry should take on the production of motoring documentaries and

show with placement both on traditional media and on social media.

Discussion of Findings

The results above are a result of this discussed in line with the research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent are Nigerians aware of and perceive the public relations practices of indigenous automobile companies?

Table 1 confirms that most respondents (74.4%) are aware of Nigerian-made automobile manufacturers. However, from Table 2, 38.2% are aware of PR activities or programmes of indigenous automobile manufacturers. In comparison, 13% indicate that they are not aware of the PR activities. Furthermore, 48.8% constituting almost half of the respondents sampled indicate that they are not sure if they are aware. This result means that many Nigerians, making generalisations from the Lagos metropolis drawn as a sample, do not have much awareness of the made-in-Nigeria automobile industry. The reason is not farfetched because, in the last three decades, Nigeria has experienced up to 80% rate of importation of fairly-used automobiles, hence the obscurity of indigenously manufactured automobiles (Ezeoha, Okoyeuzu, Onah, and Uche, 2018).

In terms of perception, most Nigerians do not perceive the PR activities of indigenous vehicle manufacturers as satisfactory as seen in Table 6. Only 27.1 % say they are satisfied, 40.1% say they are not pleased with the PR programmes of manufacturers, and 32.9% are not sure if they are content. Also, Table 5 reveals that 33.8% concur that it was these PR activities that prompted them to purchase a Nigerian-made vehicle.

Examining specific knowledge Nigerians have gained from the PR activities of the local automobile industry, only 36.2% of the respondents hold a positive perception. In this regard, the local industry has to step up in consumer satisfaction, engagement in the online space, sponsorships and

partnerships with the government for more support.

Research Question 2: What are the tools and acts of indigenous automobile manufacturers in terms of public relations?

From the results in Table 12, the major platforms for information dissemination by indigenous auto manufacturers as selected by respondents were relatively marginal. However, social media (Twitter especially), mainstream media (predominantly newspaper), and word-of-mouth communication (constituting 15% of respondents' choice) were selected by respondents as the primary channels of communication. The activities of these manufacturers on social media especially Twitter are commendable because it possesses one of the highest levels of engagement (Cortado, Chalmeta and Ntim, 2016; Odiboh, Ezenagu and Okuobeya, 2019; Ndubueze, Odiboh, Nwosu, Olabanjo, James, Adelua and Fayemi, 2019). There should, however, be an increase in social media engagement and experiential PR to keep up the debate in these virtual communities until there is a general awareness of the social space.

Activities such as after-sale services, organisation of children's competitions and educational support activities, free vehicle maintenance and servicing, and festivity gifts, should be regular. Community development projects such as partnering with the Federal Road Safety Corps, career mentorship programmes, auto maintenance tips, facility tours/showroom invitations and the inauguration of car clubs, are recognisable PR actions of indigenous automobile manufacturers. Though these actions can be said to be commendable, only a limited number of respondents are aware of these activities (34.8%) of respondents. After-sales service, free maintenance and servicing, facility tours and showroom visits, as well as festivity gifts, are mostly known by these respondents.

Research Question 3: What is the opinion of the public on the way forward for local auto assemblers towards the delivery of acceptable made-in-Nigeria automobiles?

From Table 10, most respondents (62.3%) affirm that indigenous vehicle manufacturers should focus more on engaging the public across all major social media platforms so that Nigerians can easily access information about their products. The reasons for this point are not farfetched. Social media have made the world a global village as well as a reliable source of public engagement (Öksüz and Genç, 2018; Odiboh and Ajayi, 2019). Respondents also suggest that indigenous automobile manufacturers should improve their information dissemination and public relations functions. They also call for an increase in sponsorships and continuous advocacy for import substitution strategies which would increase production and public acceptance (Öksüz and Genç, 2018; Amazu, 1994).

Some respondents also think an improvement in public relations functions of the local automobile industry would come by outsourcing their public relations functions for quality performance. In contrast, others think that the focus should be on better customer relationship management to get more referrals and embrace indigenous products. Outsourcing PR functions to agencies and consultancies most of the time is the best bet for corporate organisations. It would help them to focus more on core business responsibilities. Consultancies and agencies also have vast inexperience as a result of their dealings with so many diverse clients in different industries and understand different audiences and how to maximise reach (Olabanjo *et al.*, 2019). Respondents also suggest that PR handlers of local automobile assemblers should produce motoring documentaries for public views on traditional and social media as proposed by Suzor and C-Scott (2016).

Conclusion

This study established that though most Nigerians are aware of the made-in-Nigeria automobile industry, most are not in tune with the information and public relations actions of the industry. However, a lot still needs to be done to bring about the acceptance of made-in-Nigeria automobiles. The study also establishes that increased tariffs on imported new and used vehicles

call public relations practitioners in the industry to action.

It is, therefore, obligatory to encourage policymakers to exercise political will in providing a conducive environment, thereby consolidating the automobile industry. On this note, the indigenous automobile industry must start paying more attention to professional public relations. However, beyond government policy and political will, the private industry is expected to change the narrative by utilising the media to brand the indigenous automobile industry to bring about acceptance and joint public advocacy for the full indigenisation of the automobile industry.

Recommendations

Concerning the review of the literature and the results of this study, the following recommendations will be of immense benefit:

1. Nigerian automobile manufacturers should outsource most of their public relations planning, research and activities to public relations agencies and consultancies to exploit their vast experience and understanding of different audiences and how to reach them as a result of their dealings with so many diverse clients in different industries.
2. It would be beneficial for local automakers to initiate engaging PR organisations in motoring documentaries and shows such as Amazon Prime's *The Grand Tour* or the British Broadcasting Corporation's *Top Gear*. Electronic public relations on social media would help to engage better and create online followership, debate and bring about advocacy for locally assembled vehicles.
3. It is beneficial that the government does not relent in the implementation and enforcement of protective policies to enable the

attraction of investors and the overall growth of the indigenous automobile industry. Alongside this, the National Automotive Council (NAC) and the National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDCC) should continue PR advocacy to reach the government and other essential stakeholders.

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