

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF DANGOTE GROUP REFINERY

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Abstract

In a society fueled by information and knowledge, public perception has become a germane asset that can make or mar an organisation, especially in a high-risk industry like the oil and gas. The study evaluates “Public Perception of the Reputation Management Strategies of Dangote Group Refinery (DORC) in Nigeria. The oil and gas sector is associated with environmental, socio-economic and regulatory issues that continues to heighten scrutiny and tensions, making reputation management a critical asset. It requires strategic communication, crisis response and stakeholder engagement to enhance organisational sustainability and public trust. The research sought to identify the reputation management strategies used by DORC, assess public awareness of these strategies, and evaluate the influence of digital media platforms in shaping public perception. Using the **quantitative survey method** and a structured questionnaire, data was collected from 381 respondents across diverse demographic segments. The findings revealed that a majority of the public are aware of DORC’s strategies, particularly media relations and press release, digital and social media platforms campaigns, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects. Respondents rated their awareness of the recognised strategies as moderately to highly effective in managing the DORC’s public image. Social media platforms emerged as the most widely used channel through which information about DORC is sourced, drawing attention to the increasing pertinence of digital media communication. Still, the study also identified gaps, especially among older age groups and less digitally active stakeholders, pinpointing the essence of increased inclusive and diverse engagement strategies as well as offline reputation management strategies. Based on the findings, the study recommends that DORC should enhance a two-way communication approach and its grassroots engagement, carry out internal communication assessment to improve message clarity, and integrate more participatory feedback mechanisms to foster public trust and generate goodwill.

Keywords: Public perception, reputation management, Dangote Refinery, crisis communication, stakeholder awareness, digital media, Stakeholder engagement.

Introduction

Modern-day organisations sustainability and the ability to maintain favourable competitiveness can be attained through the maintenance of positive reputation. It is an intangible asset of an organisation that is influenced by the information available to the stakeholders, including the public, host communities, regulatory agencies and investors (Nuotimo, Harkonen & Breznice,

2024). Reputation is no longer sustained in isolation but through reputation management strategies that build trust and enhance stakeholder management.

Reputation management is a strategic resource that, if properly managed, can facilitate stakeholder trust and engagement, boost brand trustworthiness, and improve

organisational performance and profitability (Fragouli & Joseph, 2016). It refers to the strategic discipline of monitoring, influencing and responding to crises while proactively utilising opportunities to strengthen the perceptions of the public (Watson & Kitchen, 2015). It is an essential aspect of every responsible organisation as it is a strategy that helps to distinguish itself by shaping its narratives approaches, ideas, viewpoints, and activities of its internal and external publics. An organisation's reputation is derived from stakeholders' information and opinion regarding the organisation which might emanate from within the organisation or media coverage/news report which is a vital method for reputational management (Akintaro & Ekhareafu, 2017). Reputation management is a deliberate effort used to shape public perception through stakeholder relation, strategic communication, crisis communication, digital engagement, CSR and other initiatives that enhances a favourable public image (Akintaro & Ekhareafu, 2017; Fragouli & Joseph, 2016).

Amidst this backdrop, the Dangote Oil Refinery Company (DORC) on 22nd May, 2023 in Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos State, Nigeria has drawn attention far and wide based on its economic significance as well as being exposed to heightened public scrutiny (*ThisDayLive*, 2024). The refinery has employed several reputation management strategies, including CSR, media relations, press releases and public statements; there are still a lingering questions on the effectiveness of these strategies in influencing public perception to reinforce or undermine the organisation's image.

Most existing literature have majorly focused on multinational oil companies (IOCs) with the absence of empirical studies evaluating how the reputation management strategies are perceived by the public and its impact on

the organisation's reputation over time. Studies like Alikor and Amadi (2021) examined public relations strategies from the angle of influencer collaboration, messaging and content creation. Similarly, the study of Odigbo, Samaila and Okonkwo (2017), highlighted the use of proactive monitoring and CSR initiatives in crisis prevention. Jerkey and Jonah (2022)'s introduction of the concept of peace marketing in crisis management singularly focuses on peace-building as a major tool in IOCs and not indigenous organisations. Fragouli and Joseph (2016), researched the reputation risks in Oil and Gas companies, leaving a void in the practical applications of indigenous oil companies and underrepresentation of digital reputation management strategies which is an important aspect of gaining insights into how the ever-evolving digital communication tools are used to build and enhance a good corporate image and address online reputational crises (Citrawijaya et al., 2024; Nwabuatu, 2023).

Given these identified gaps, this study seeks to address them by evaluating the public perception of the reputation management strategies of Dangote Group Refinery in the management of its reputation in Nigeria. An indigenous oil refinery such as Dangote Group Refinery has not been a research focus despite its uniqueness in operation and diverse stakeholder expectations. This provides fresh insights into communication and crisis management in the Nigerian oil industry for stakeholders and policymakers in the sector.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. Identify the reputation management strategies employed by Dangote Group Refinery to manage its image in Nigeria.
2. Assess the levels of public awareness of these reputation management strategies

in shaping public opinion and perceptions of the organisation.

3. Evaluate the influence of digital media platforms in shaping public perception of Dangote Group Refinery in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Reputation Management Strategies Employed by Dangote Group Refinery

Reputation management is no doubt an essential aspect of organisational strategy as companies operate in a more and more multifarious business terrain. Effective reputation management strategies are essential in the oil sector due to exposure to high-risks, including operational risks, environmental problems, social situations, stakeholders' opinions and public perceptions. According to Zakiri (2020), effective reputation management strategies demand coordination and cooperation as well as internal communication which requires good communication skills channeled at attaining organisational objectives and goals, thereby minimizing the possibility of crisis from occurring or damaging the reputation of the organisation. There are various communication strategies including Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), media relations, stakeholders' engagement, social and digital campaigns that have been adopted by large firms in the oil industry. Dangote Group Refinery has adopted several strategies to maintain, protect and enhance its corporate image.

Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives serves as a veritable communication tool for organisational reputation management. Dabury (2020) revealed that CSR projects plays a significant role in the performance of oil firms in Southern Nigeria by enhancing public opinion and perceptions as well as diminishing tension within the host communities. Likewise, Odigbo, et.al (2017)

posited that CSR plays a germane role in crisis management as oil firms invest in their host communities, thereby leading to the reduction of youth restiveness and long-term good image. Ekhatior and Iyiola-Omisore (2021) maintained that CSR strategy integration enhances long-term success, stakeholders trust and positive corporate image. Dangote Group Refinery has projected a strong commitment to CSR by implementing programs that intend to support the quality of life in the host communities. The refinery has graded, sand-filled and applied stone base to the entrance roads in 15 host communities to make them more accessible for the locals in Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos State, sunk boreholes and provided generators for the communities with a plan to upgrade them to solar power systems, provided educational scholarship schemes for students and organised vocational training programs which the locals recognized the tangible benefits and positive impacts on their communities (Ibrahim, 2023).

Media relations ensure effectiveness in shaping public narratives by organisation for positive image branding. Zakiri (2020) examined the germane impact of proactive media relationships in managing crises through transparent communication practices to eradicate negative public opinion and tackle crises effectively. Also, Nuortumo, et al. (2024) attest that engagement with traditional and digital media channels enhance corporate reputation and maintain stakeholders' support. Digital communication strategies like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter enhance real-time engagement with relevant stakeholders of an organisation as it fast-tracks information dissemination. Citrawijaya et al. (2024) revealed that digital campaigns allow organisations to quickly respond to misinformation by disseminating positive information to gain public trust and maintain a good reputation in various sectors.

Similarly, Daniel (2020) suggested that digital and social media campaigns address stakeholders' concerns and enhance effective organisational reputation management. Also, Zakiri (2020), suggested in a systematic review that crisis communication through proactive monitoring and timely responses maintains public trust and enhances organisation's good reputation. Dangote Group has adopted transparency and timely reputation management strategies to deal with potential risks as crisis communication and management were widely viewed as transparent and timely (*Chain Reaction Africa*, 2024).

Stakeholders' engagement and management are a crucial component of Dangote Group Refinery's operations, as diverse initiatives that address the local communities' concerns have been initiated. Olajiga et al. (2024), emphasised the essence of building a strong partnership with all relevant stakeholders of an organisation and involvement in all decision-making procedures. In the same way, Alikor and Amadi (2021) found out that stakeholder engagement and collaboration, including forming a partnership with the community leaders and community relations improvement were effective public relations approaches of the Nigerian Agip Oil Company. Ugwuonah and Okonkwo (2018) explored multinational oil companies in Nigeria and the use of PR approaches, including strategic messaging, media relations, community engagement to manage crises and maintain a strong corporate image. The combined efforts of CSR, strategic media relations, stakeholder engagement, and management as well as crisis communication reputation management strategies foster a continuous reputation maintenance, management and enhancement.

Public Awareness of Reputation Management Strategies and its

Contributions to Crisis Management and Corporate Reputation

Public awareness of reputation management strategies is pivotal to the efficiency of such efforts, as the more the public is aware of the activities of an organisation, the better the positioning of its image or reputation. Watson and Kitchen (2015) attest that transparent and proactive communication aids public comprehension and reduction of negative opinion. Citrawijaya, et al. (2024) noted that consistent messaging and transparent crisis communication is important in managing reputational damage across various industries. Dangote Group Refinery have adopted several strategies, including, media engagements and reports, community forums and stakeholder managements/ briefing to enhance awareness and positive image.

Proactive and transparent communication as well as well-structured communication framework are critical to managing crises and protecting the image of an organisation and maintaining stakeholders' trust (Citrawijaya, et al., 2024). Transparent and consistent communication or dissemination of messages during crisis can help reduce misinformation, thereby allowing the organisation to take charge of the narratives and retain a good image in the public eye (Zakiri, 2020). CSR is an approach utilised for crises management and reputational enhancement. Nigerian Agip Oil Company employed CSR initiatives like infrastructural development, creation of employment and host community interaction to tackle community issues, strengthen the relationship with stakeholders, reduce conflicts, foster goodwill and enhance their reputation (Alikor & Amadi, 2021). Dangote Group's investments in education, healthcare and community advancement has enhanced the image of the oil and Gas Company and the needs of the stakeholders (Dangote Industries Limited, 2021). Finally, reputation

management strategies are vital tools for crisis management and corporate reputation. Dangote Group refinery's crisis management and overall success is fostered by transparency, stakeholders' engagement and implementation of initiatives that enhances community and national development as well as sustenance of a good reputation.

Theoretical Framework: Reputation Management Theory

The Reputation Management Theory (RMT) has been developed by diverse scholars and analyses how organisations build and maintain reputation as well as gives insights into how the Dangote Group's refinery enhances its reputation through effective communication strategies. The theory infers that an organisation's theory can be seen as a valuable asset that demands strategic management, transparency and consistent communication to build a strong and credible reputation among its stakeholders. Olajiga et al (2024), reputational control in high-risk industries involve proactive stakeholder engagement and corporate social responsibility (CSR), alongside transparent communication strategies to enhance positive image. Davies and Miles (1998), postulate that organisational reputation and success are shaped by public perception. The theory proposes that organisations must be proactive in the management of its reputation to influence the perception of the stakeholders positively. Reputation management theory points out organisational construction, maintenance and restoration of their corporate image, utilising strategic communication and stakeholder engagement (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). A positive reputation enhances resilience during a crisis, builds customer loyalty and organisation's growth.

Dangote Group Refinery, as one of the largest in Africa operates in a sector that

requires reputational management as a critical aspect of its sustainability. The RMT principles can be used as an approach to its reputational management. Reputation management theory recommends that there must be consistency between an organisation's identity and their actions/activities (Davies & Miles, 1998). The implementation of the Reputation management theory enables the evaluation of Dangote Group Refinery's alignment of its corporate image with the varying expectations of diverse stakeholders and the effectiveness of its reputation management strategies in shaping the perception of the public.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design, with the descriptive survey design appropriate for evaluating public perception and enabled the collection of data from a representative sample. The descriptive survey design assesses the level of awareness, perception, influence of digital media and specific strategies using structured questionnaire that allowed the generalization of findings across a sample representative of the population in Lagos and Abuja.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), the estimated population of Lagos is 12,772,884 and FCT (Abuja) has an estimated population of 2,702,443. Hence, the combined population for the study is 15,475,327. Lagos was selected because it is where the Dangote Group Refinery is located and includes members of the public who are directly exposed to the oil firm's CSR projects, environmental impacts, economic significance, operational and management strategies as well as high awareness of corporate activities. Abuja as the capital of Nigeria is the political and administrative location and includes key opinion leaders, civil servants, policymakers, communication

experts and well-informed publics who are likely to have national-level perspective and opinion on the reputation management efforts, media narratives and corporate reputation of Dangote Group Refinery. Furthermore, purposive sampling method was initially employed to select Lagos State and Abuja as the population of the study. Then, the random sampling technique was utilised for the respondents' selection from

the public within the identified regions to enable the equal chance of inclusion in the study. Questionnaires were administered to 400 respondents in Lagos and Abuja as well as included closed and Likert-scale questions. The quantitative data obtained from structured questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics and trends in reputation management.

Data Presentation and analysis

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 371 copies of the questionnaires were retrieved and analysed for this work.

Table 1: Identified Reputation Management strategies Employed by DORC

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Media relations and press release	252	66.1%
Digital and Social Media platforms campaign	243	63.8%
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects	182	47.8%
Crisis response initiatives	35	9.2%
Community and stakeholders' engagement programs	57	15.0%
Public relations campaign	50	13.1%
Others: Not specified	3	0.8%
Others: Partnership and collaboration	1	0.3%
Others: None	1	0.3%
Total	Multiple Responses	-

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data indicates that DORC utilises a multifaceted approach to reputation management, prioritising media relations, corporate social responsibilities (CSR), digital and social media campaigns for visibility.

Table 2: Awareness Level of DORC's Reputation Management Strategies

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high	106	27.8%
High	67	17.6%
Moderate	152	39.9%
Low	40	10.5%
Very Low	16	4.2%
Total	381	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data present respondents' subjective self-assessment of respondents' awareness of DORC's reputation management strategies as nearly half of the respondents have a strong awareness of DORC communication, public engagement efforts and branding.

Table 3: Sources of Information about DORC

Information Channel	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Social Media	316	83.2%
Newspapers	178	46.8%
Radio	74	19.5%
Television	69	18.2%
Company Website	59	15.5%
Word of Mouth	36	9.5%
Total	Multiple Selections	-

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The vast majority of respondents selected digital media, particularly social media as the primary source of assessing information about DORC, depicting its strategic significance in present-day reputation management, particularly in Nigeria where internet and mobile penetration is on the rise.

Discussions of Findings

The responses obtained from the questionnaire presents valuable insights into public perception and engagement with the reputation management strategies of Dangote Group Refinery (DORC). Research question one identified the reputation management strategies employed by Dangote Group Refinery in Nigeria. The findings disclosed that the topmost identified strategies by respondents include, media relations and press releases (66.1%) and digital/social media campaigns (63.8%) which reflects a firm emphasis on public visibility and information management across digital platforms and mainstream media. These two most widely recognized strategies express Dangote Group's global best practices and aligns with the findings from Odigbo et al. (2017), who pinpoint the heavy dependence on media relations and press releases/coverage by multinational oil companies operating in Nigeria during crisis situations and reputation management. This is also in line with the observations by Egede

et al. (2022) on the strong connection between crisis response efforts and corporate reputation especially when digital platforms are strategically deployed. Furthermore, the findings conforms to Alikor and Amadi (2021) recognition of CSR activities as a powerful tool for relationship building and management in host communities. Dangote Group Refinery needs to focus on enhancing visibility as community and stakeholders' engagement efforts were only identified by only 15% of respondents. In all, this figure can be linked to the research objective one which identifies the specific reputation management strategies adopted by DORC which include media exposure and digital campaigns, with CSR forming a substantial aspect of its reputation strategies. However, a significant gap can be seen in the public perception of stakeholder-level activities such as community engagement and crisis responsiveness.

The second research question examined the levels of public awareness of the reputation

management strategies employed by Dangote Group Refinery, especially in shaping public perception and organisation's image. The findings showed that the respondents rated very high (27.8%) and high (17.6%) which totals 45.4% in response to their awareness of Dangote Group Refinery's reputation management strategies. This is in line with the discovery of Odigbo et al. (2017) who found out that robust media and public relations strategies are utilised by oil firms during crisis to enhance visibility and public awareness, media saturation informs stakeholders' awareness with branding and reputation repair efforts. Meanwhile, the 39.9% who chose moderate might be a reflection of exposure to surface-level publicity but not aware of the effectiveness of the reputation management strategies. Ugwuonah and Okonkwo (2018) described this as visibility versus engagement gap in oil and gas firms approaches in Nigeria. A majority of the respondents are at least moderately aware of the organisation's effort and depicts a successful image-building approach. On the other hand, the result reveals the need to enhance deep, participatory awareness among less-connected segments of the public in Nigeria.

The third research question evaluated the influence of digital media platforms on shaping public perception of Dangote Group Refinery. The findings revealed the key role of digital media in influencing perception as 83.2% of respondents opined that they receive information about Dangote Group Refinery from social media platforms. In addition, the respondents acknowledged that digital media remarkably influences their perception of the oil refinery, while 49.1% frequently engage with companies online content and 27.0% stated that they engage occasionally. These outcomes attest that social media is not just a mere brand visibility mechanism but a strategic platform for

enhancing public perception. This aligns with the position of Sirzad's (2022) that social media functions as tools that frame public attitudes, particularly with great online penetration and connectivity. Egede et al. (2022) also noted that digital platforms, properly used, can serve as a tool for building a positive reputation. Digital media serves as an impactful communication channel that can strengthen its online reputation. Moreover, Dangote Group Reputation must enhance the creation of interactive and feedback engagement content such as influencer collaboration, digital corporate social responsibility storytelling and feedback-influencing campaigns that create public loyalty. Thus, this study fills the vacuum in the analysis of local oil refineries instead of the predominant multinationals that were the focus of previous studies.

Conclusively, the findings depicts that Dangote Group Refinery is actively utilising a combo of traditional mass media and digital and corporate social strategies for reputation management. Awareness and perception of these strategies are significantly high and digital media emerged as the most influential source in building opinion. Nevertheless, Dangote Group Refinery has the chance to enhance its visibility in stakeholder engagement and deepen communication at the community level as well as promote inclusiveness in deploying reputation strategies across various segments of the public.

Conclusion

The study evaluated the public perception of the reputational management strategies adopted by Dangote Group Refinery (DORC) in Nigeria, with insights obtained from 381 valid responses from the survey. The data revealed that a notable segment of the public, over 70% were aware of the reputation

management strategies adopted by DORC and this is to a great extent steered by media visibility, especially through digital media platforms (social media) and traditional media such as Television and newspaper. This aligns with existing studies that suggest that media visibility is a significant pillar of stakeholder engagement and public trust in a sector where the organisation's image is susceptible to public scrutiny. Corporate social responsibilities (CSR) initiatives also glean moderate recognition due to the low visibility of participatory and responsive strategies. This suggests that DORC reputation management strategies may not be relational but more focused on promotion in its dissemination. This highlights a gap where the organisation might have implemented such strategies internally but not adequately communicated to the public.

All things considered, DORC has made commendable efforts in media visibility and digital engagement but there is a need for greater balance and inclusivity in its reputation management strategies. The findings from this study disclose that DORC has implemented diverse reputation management strategies, with significant progress in public awareness and brand visibility. Still, effectiveness perception is mixed as many stakeholders are aware of DORC reputation management strategies but not all of them are persuaded of their impact. DORC's strength lies in its utilisation of mass media and digital media platforms for brand promotion. Yet, there seems to be lapses in participatory communication and stakeholder engagement as there are no personalized communication strategies like local feedback, community consultations and crisis transparency which hinders the ability to model holistic and trustworthy corporate reputation. Lastly, while DORC is doing well in external image projection, there is need for a downreaching, inclusive and direct

engagement with its diverse public to enhance long-term positive reputation sustainability

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn from this study, the following recommendations were made for future consideration

1.DORC should enhance a two-way communication approach that is more interactive such as Q&A sessions, feedback loop and forum, town hall meetings, especially with stakeholders and host communities at the grassroots level. The DORC official website should be optimized and updated regularly with ready to use and appealing content such as performance dashboards, useful tips, videos and infographics to expose stakeholders to firsthand sources of corporate communication.

2. Crisis communication approach should be strengthened to enable the organisation to incorporate stakeholders' meetings and public apologies as well as clear-cut action ground plans during threats as the tools can be used to build affinity and revive trust.

3. DORC should carry out internal communication assessment, reputation audits and surveys on public perception to determine the level of effectiveness of its strategies and adjust where necessary.

4. Dangote Group Refinery should enhance its community engagement and stakeholder dialogue to foster public trust and generate goodwill.

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