Community Relations Strategy and Corporate Image: An Analysis of Oil Producing Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

Original research Article

ABSTRACT

From history, the relationship between oil producing firms and their host communities in Rivers State has been frosty, with some oil companies coming out of certain crisis with bad images. What we intend to achieve with this study is determining if whatever negative image of oil producing firms can be reverse to good one through community relations strategy and whether certain community relations strategy can build good corporate image. Using the Yamane formula, we estimated a sample of 399, only using responses of 387 after screening of the questionnaires. We distributed the questionnaire after validity and reliability were confirmed. The estimation of the responses got were performed using descriptive tools of frequencies and percentages. Also, the hypothesized relationship was tested using Pearson correlation method. Our result emphasized the importance of community relations strategy in building good image for oil producing firms. Community relations

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strategy, manifesting in compromising and collaborating strategies ensure the oil producing firms are perceived by the community and employees in a good light. Relaxing the use of forcing strategy also achieved this feat. To be perceived positively, we suggest that oil producing firms should engage with the community through town hall meetings, which should be done regularly, to discuss the interest of every stakeholder and collaborate in ensuring that resolution and programmes are implemented to the letter.

Keywords: Community relations strategy; corporate image; oil producing firms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every organization operation not in isolation but interact with the external environment. This is evident by the fact that, organization have community or neighbour that gave up their lands, either on lease or outright purchase to the organization for its healthy operations. This makes the community an important stakeholder as it plays host to the organization. As the community is likely to receive or benefit from the operations of the organization in terms of employee opportunities, scholarship scheme, provision of road infrastructure and other corporate social responsibility activities, it is also prone to incur certain external diseconomies in the form of pollution or other hazards.

In conducting its operation while within the community, organization interact with plethora of people and the company may be perceived differently by the vast number of the public. In recent times, organization have increasingly focused on the need to maintain its image. According to Oparaugo [1], it is less likely for an organization to satisfy its clientele or members of the public without the public perceiving the company as being dependable and trustworthy. Though an intangible asset, corporate image can enhance customers' stimulation towards the company's product [2]. Scholars have held that, as an intangible asset, corporate image could define the fate of an organization or how it will fare in a market that is competitive; the extent of support that will be accorded it by its shareholders when faced with a crisis; the quality of talents it can attract and keep over time; and the ability to break into new market [3]. According to Agu, Esther & Nonyelum [4], corporate image, as a goodwill, is a source of competitive advantage, providing organization with a wide range of benefits that can accelerate the capacity of the organization to earn profits over and above average level. With these benefits, it is unsurprising that organization now view corporate image as a fundamental element and goal for performance and long-term survival.

In Nigeria, there has been increasing tension and friction among oil companies and host communities, with episodes of this frequently occurring in the Niger Delta region. Over the years and as a reoccurring decima, oil producing communities in the region has voiced their anger and dismay about lack of involvement in the policies and operations of oil companies that directly or indifferently affect them. They have increasingly desired for their involvement in the operations of oil companies particularly the oil exploration and crude oil production aspect of their activities which have impacted the community negatively in the form of environmental degradation, disruption of their livelihood due to the negative effect on the aquatic and agrarian activities, risk of flooding owing to changing climate level [5].

The lack of this has led to conflict between the host communities and the oil companies with both parties suffering severe losses in the form of disruption of operations, vandalization of pipeline installations and office premises, communal crisis, picketing of the premises of the oil companies, and in the extreme loss of lives and properties (Ivorakpo & Odibikume, 2015). The frequency at which this has occurred has created bad image of some oil companies in Rivers State. Oparaugo [1] noted that the occurrence of these conflicts is the result of lack of community relations, as an effective can be advantageous in building the image of the oil companies by communicating and building good relationship with the host communities. The need for community relations is essential as it is suggested that a neighbour that is hardly in contact or lives behind closed doors creates room for speculation, rumour, and fear, and this could lead to distrust. Standing on this, this study tries to explore the influence of community relation strategies on corporate image, focusing on oil producing firms in Rivers State.

This survey is structured in five sections. Apart from this section, Section 2 addresses conceptual issues, theoretical basis for the study

and review earlier works. In Section 3, the methodology employed are discussed. The presentation of result and discussion are done in Section 4 and Section 5 provides conclusion and recommendations.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The study examines the effect of community relations strategies on corporate image of oil producing firms in Rivers State. This broad objective is broken down into specific ones, which include to:

i. Investigate the effect of compromising community relations strategy on corporate image perceived by the community.
ii. Examine the effect of compromising community relations on corporate image perceived by employees.
iii. determine the effect of collaborating community relations strategy on corporate image perceived by community.
iv. examine the effect of collaborating community relations strategy on corporate image perceived by employees.
v. investigate the effect of forcing community relations strategy on corporate image perceived by community.
vi. determine the effect of forcing community relations strategy on corporate image perceived by employees

1.3 Research Hypotheses

From the objectives of the study, the hypotheses below were tested:

H_{01}: Compromising relations strategy does not significantly impact on corporate image perceived by the community.

H_{02}: Compromising relations strategy has no significant effect on corporate image perceived by employees.

H_{03}: Collaborating community relations strategy has no significant effect on corporate image perceived by the community.

H_{04}: The use of collaborating relations strategy does not significantly influence corporate image perceived by employees.

H_{05}: The adoption of forcing relations strategy has no significant influence on how the oil producing firm is perceived by the community.

H_{06}: The use of forcing community relations strategy does not significantly influence how the oil producing firms are perceived by employees.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Community relations strategy

The operations of every organization are conducted within a community or communities and as such the community has become an important stakeholder. Community relations, in its narrow sense, refers to the company's interaction with her community. This term has been used in the media, by businesses and disciples of businesses, to refer to something beyond relationship with the host community, but has now transcended to meaning voluntary actions taken by the company to better the lot of the community.

Through the lens of Head [6], community relations may take a proactive form where it becomes a defensive strategy that can be employed by the organization. In this sense, companies engage or initiate certain programmes, which are exploited to the highest level through community relations, with the intent of reversing a particular problem or white washing the image of the organization or dousing certain tensions. According to Asante [7], there are four components of community relations, namely, grassroots support, internal change, ethics and legality, and proactive problem solving. In the contemporary business landscape, it has become imperative that companies who wish to succeed needs to implement community relations, where the company design and implement programmes, extending them to the community in order to maximize gains. In order to build cordial relationship with the community and improve their image standing with the community and other stakeholders, companies must create community officers who will act as direct link between the community and the organization. Center, Jackson, Smith & Stansberry [8] identified four major objectives of community relations strategies, namely, creating favourable behaviour and attitude among the community, changing the community's unfavourable behaviour and attitude towards the company, modification of unwanted behaviour and attitude which the community may have, and reinforcing existing behaviour among community members.

2.1.2 Corporate image

Every organization wish to project a good face or image in the public space, as such underscores an organization that is friendly, as the lack of it

can have disastrous consequence for the brand of the company, its share price, profitability and survival. Corporate image describes the perceptions which the community or stakeholders have towards the organization. As noted by Mandina, Maravire & Masere [9], corporate image is the perception the public have of an organization/business when their name is mentioned. The image is the result of personal histories, plethora of facts, advertising, and events that blend to form the opinion of the public about a company. For Singh [10], corporate image is a reflection of the organization's history that function to inform the public about the quality of the organization's products relative to its rivals. A good corporate image is forged from been trustworthy and as an intangible asset, it is very delicate as a bad act wields greater influence on customers compared to a good one. A company consistent in fulfilling her promises to her customers, would have good corporate image on one hand, and on the other an unfavourable corporate image when it fails in expressing its genuine goals. Good corporate image has several benefits, namely, it is an efficient promotional and marketing tool, it brings integrity and credibility to the organization, builds customer loyalty and trust, and can function as an instrument for creating business opportunities [9].

2.2 Theoretical Background

In examining if community relations strategy does help build corporate image, the study relied on three theories, namely, the conflict theory and stakeholder theory. What these theories does is provide a basis in understanding how corporate image can be built through adopting community relations strategies.

The conflict theory for example, emphasized that, in organizations and even in societies, there is always struggle between groups and/or participants and this rift is driven by the innate desire of humans to maximize a particular benefit and this struggle, most times, are the source of social change, manifesting in the form of revolution, class struggle and/or political struggle. The main theme of this theory is that, the theory emphasizes the ability of a group or person to control or exercise influence over the next person in order to orchestrate a social order.

Proponents of this thinking, referred to as conflict theorists, hold the opinion that the society is in constant struggle. Also, these theorists perceive society or liken it to an arena where individuals/group contend for dominance through power. To ensure conflict is controlled, the theory contend for dominance through power. To ensure conflict is controlled, the theory contend that, this is only possible when a group suppresses a rival. The theory focuses less on creating equilibrium through cooperation and interdependence but on shifting power among rivals in the society. The situational theory credited to Grunig & Hunt (1984) helps in identifying the various parts of a community and determine whether their dealings with organization or how organization relates with them differs. Grunig & Hunt (1984) identified one as an active public, referring to them as those who seek and process information about an organization. In identifying an active individual, such person exhibits certain behaviour. First, the individual recognizes a problem and whether it has potential of affecting them. Second, identify the challenges or obstacles they might face in addressing the problem. Third, they individual fully participate in addressing the issue. Otherwise, the individual is passive.

The stakeholder theory by Freeman & Reed (1983) holds that organization operating in an area generally have individuals and group, both internal and external, that benefits from actions of the organization or are harmed by such actions. In addition, the theory advocates the need to identify these stakeholders and proposes methods on how the interests of each group can be catered for, in order to ensure smooth operations of the organization.

2.3 Empirical Review

Singh [10] examined the effectiveness of public relation in building corporate image or improving corporate image and its role in crisis management. What the author sought to achieve through this study was determining whether an effective public relation can translate into boosting the image of the companies studied and is capable of managing crisis that may arise in the course of the company's operation and interacting with the stakeholders. The approached followed was engaging in rigorous review of literature and focusing on four companies, namely, Mattel, Odwalla Foods, Pepsi, and Tylenol. Interviews were relied on in obtaining data to established if there is a link between engaging in public relations and improved corporate image and the author maintained that having strong public relations

can help shape the image or reputation of the company for better, giving the company competitive edge in the contemporary competitive business space.

Oparaugo [1] in an empirical work, x-rayed the twin objectives of the role public relations plays in building the image of organization and whether the practice or adoption of it is capable of sustaining the image of an organization. The approach which was adopted entailed reviewing empirics on the subject of interest and public relations was attest to being an important tool for building corporate image and sustaining such image and the effective application of public relations can mold the public to think in positive view of the organization.

In their empirical essay, Ugwunwanyi, Nwosu, Otika & Osuagwu [3] x-rayed corporate reputation and its ability in influencing customer satisfaction among users of telecommunication services in Nigeria. Specifically, this group of scholars explored how CSR, reliability, trustworthiness, and credibility, all indicators of corporate reputation, affect customer satisfaction. To get responses that when analysed will provided understanding of how the variables relate, questionnaire was employed to get these responses from 135 people, whose participation was random. Combining the estimation tools of regression and correlation methods, all indicators of reputation showed signs of significant correlation with customer satisfaction. The regression outcome mirrored those of the correlation as they more trustworthy, reliable and credible the telecommunication companies are, the more they are able to get their customers satisfied.

Ifeoma, Purity & Patient [11] sought to gain knowledge on if a good corporate image or reputation does help boost performance of companies. The companies focused on were telecommunication companies in Nigeria, the likes of Airtel, MTN and Globacom. One hundred and twenty-one (121) employees from all three companies were targeted from the 176 employees engaged with the big three firms. The selection of these participant was done randomly and their responses were solicited through questionnaire. With Pearson correlation method preferred for estimation, result suggest improving managerial reputation will foster employee retention and customers are expected to be satisfied provided the service or product are of higher quality.

Ibrahim & Abubakar [12] selected a firm from the Nigerian food and beverage industry, particularly Flour Mill, for their investigation. This inquisition centered on exploring the essentialness of CSR activities for organization image as they try to uncover whether engaging in CSR activities is a significant medium in increasing their appeal to the public or improving their image and how they are perceived by the public. They used questionnaire to gather data from the field as they engaged in survey research and 180 persons that are bakers and dealers for the company randomly participated in the survey. The correlation result was consistent with theory as they found CSR activities significant in boosting positive image for the company. They outlined indirect benefits of engaging in CSR activities such as brand loyalty, and increased sales revenue, owing to positive image.

Abdulkareem & Abdulfatai [2] from a population 15,000 students randomly selected 390 students of Kwara State University to test their hypothesis. The object of their empirical work was determining whether performance of the school can be associated with the reputation of the institution or whether perceived reputation of the institutions decides how businesses perform. Using corporate identity and image as reputation indexes, customer loyalty, their indicator of corporate reputation was modeled, linearly, to vary to how the aforementioned indexes change. The regression results revealed difference in marginal effect of the two reputation indexes on how businesses perform, though both are significant in how they spur performance. Unlike corporate image whose positive contribution to performance is lower, corporate identity enhanced greater performance.

Muthoni & Kinyua [13] explored whether corporate reputation influences how motor vehicle assemblers perform. The object of their work was to determine whether how motor vehicle assemblers are perceived or how their image or reputation of the company are perceived by the public does affect their performance. Eight (8) motor assemblers were the key targets of the study and all eight had an employee strength of 328. With proportionate stratified sampling, only 180 employees were made to participant in their survey and were presented with questionnaire from which data to test their thesis was obtained. In determining if corporate reputation predicts performance of the assemblers in Nairobi city county, the data so got were estimated, primarily with regression

method, mean and standard deviation. The output from the regression analysis confirmed the positives from having a good corporate reputation as it significantly enhanced how the motor assemblers performed.

Ahmed, Khan & Minhas [14] while undertaking an empirical exploration considered the importance of public relation and pried into the realm of its ability to mold public perception of the public in Pakistan toward Coca Cola in a positive light. Among other things, their work sought to gain insight to the use of public relations to build the public image of Coca Cola. To test this thesis, feedback or information was needed which they obtained through survey approach by using questionnaire, with close-ended options. They distributed the questionnaire to forty-six (46) persons and after analysis, result emphatically stressed that public relations are an effective tool that can build up company's reputation and birth positive image for it.

Ogheneruemu [15] favoured the descriptive research approach and employed questionnaire to obtain responses to an array of questions pertaining to his study interest. The theme of his investigation hinged on uncovering how community relations influences the corporate image of the Warri petrochemical and refining company (WRPC). The work seeks to assess whether the community relations programmes adopted by WRPC has helped shaped its public image. The author used questionnaire to solicit responses from 400 individuals that reside in Ubeji community, purposively sampling these individuals from 311,970 people that reside in the area. Promising revelations were made as analysis indicated presence of cordial, positive and progressive relationship between Ubeji and WRPC. The image of WRPC in the area was positive and this was linked to the CSR activities which the company embarked upon. Also, report praised the community relations activities of the firm as boosting their corporate image.

Agu, Esther & Nonyelum [4] explored the performance of banks residing in Enugu State, Nigeria, with critical attention to improving performance through good corporate reputation. The focus of their study was on two banks, namely, First and Union Banks Plc. The two banks had an employee size of 355 and they randomly selected 188 employees for their probe. Designing their questionnaire in the 5-point Likert scale, they employed the instrument to get responses from the 188 employees on the connection between the matter investigated. The

data were subjected to analysis, favouring the regression and Pearson correlation methods. The result emanating from the use of the Pearson method divulged that a good working environment stimulates productivity and that productivity of the bank is expected to increase the better the quality of their products. They exposed social responsibility as significantly facilitating innovations and creativity in the banks studied.

The research of Nwaonu & Ahamefula [16] analyse whether CSR is an effective tool that can be employed by Dufil Prima Foods limited to build a positive and good image or rebrand their reputation or image. The study which was carried out in Port Harcourt, targeted the 214 employees of Dufil Prima Foods Ltd, of which those that were finally picked for the survey numbered 143 employees. Questionnaire of similar number were distributed to the employees of the company to fill out and the information sieved and screened and subjected to analysis, using the Pearson correlation and regression methods. Engaging in CSR activities significantly does build up reputation of the company, as suggested by the correlation result. Their study established, through regression analysis, that performing CSR activities can improve the reputation of the company for the better and this is true for CSR activities relating to the host communities, customers, and employees.

Agboola, Olabowale, Osunde, Akinbode & Borishade [17] examine the potency of public relation in building up the corporate image of a firm. They assessed the effectiveness of public relations strategy as a tool capable of reshaping the image of a company and putting it in a positive light. They identified the need for genuine public relations due to its strong influence on corporate reputation and its ability to serve as a tool in creating positive perception of the company in the minds of stakeholders.

Mandina, Maravire & Masere [9] concerned themselves with corporate image of Unki mine (UM) through the lens of corporate social responsibility. The object of their work was assessing whether engaging in CSR activities does boost or can boost the corporate image of Unki mine. With the stratified method, they split the population into four stratums of Tongogara council employees, local community, UM employees, and UM management, from which 208 respondents were sampled as participants in the survey. Opinions of these 208 respondents were ingredients for the survey and they solicited

these through administering questionnaire. Complementing the stratified method with convenience sampling, they also relied on interviews to get relevant data. Their result espoused the benefits of engaging in CSR activities as they showed it enhances both company image and the company-community relationship.

Amujo, Laninhun, Otubanjo & Ajala [18] assess whether engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) can transform the reputation or image of multinationals in the Nigerian oil sector. The object of their work was to address the image or reputation of oil multinationals and probe how CSR activities affect such image. They designed their survey to uncover how the image or reputation of oil companies from the Niger Delta region is influenced by how stakeholders perceive the corporate social irresponsibility of the oil companies. To ensure the objective of their study is realized, open-ended questionnaire was used to gather data and the participants in the survey were 250 men and women aged between 25 and 56 and residing in Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Lagos, and Asaba. The sampling of these participants was achieved using consecutive method and they prioritized content analysis method in analysing the data gathered. Strong revelations were made by the investigation as they report that the public are fully aware of the corporate irresponsibility of the oil companies and their work exposed the lack of strong corporate governance in Nigeria as officials of the companies evade laws of the law and engage in unwholesome practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The nature of this research, which focused on examining whether the adoption of community relations strategy can help build corporate image, required first-hand information and not historical data. For this purpose, the survey design was used. This design enables the researcher to gather information to answer certain queries.

3.2 Population

Population is seen as the group of individuals who have common characteristics and are of particular interest to the researcher. Essentially, the staff and the host community members of the oil producing firms in Rivers State constitute the population for this study. The oil producing firm are Belema oil, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Shell, and Total.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

There is always difficulty in dealing with the entire population when conducting research, necessitated the use of a sample size (Akinade & Owolabi, 2009). This study following earlier works in using a sample. The Yamane's sample size method was used in arriving at a sample size of 399. The study combined the stratified simple random and purposive sampling techniques.

3.4 Nature and Source of Data

Primary data was employed for this study. To assess the role of community relations strategy in build good corporate image, we sought responses from 399 employees and host community members of the oil producing firms in Rivers State. These opinions were obtained through the use of questionnaire, which were administered with the help of research assistants and some local community members. The design of the questionnaire reflected the Likert 5-point scale. We ensured validity of the instrument using content validity and reliability was ascertained using the test-retest method, assisted with the Cronbach Alpha method. We estimated Cronbach coefficient above 0.70 for the questionnaire items.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The duo methods of descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used in estimating the data. We used the percentage and frequency distribution for descriptive analysis. To test the hypotheses, the Pearson correlation method was employed to ascertain correlating relationship between indexes of community relations strategy (compromising, collaborating, and forcing strategies) and the indicators of corporate image (corporate image perceived by community and employees).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of whether community relations strategy matters for corporate image required getting responses from a group of randomly selected participants. The respondents were asked demographic questions relating to gender, education attained, and how long they have worked for their current employer, among others. This is necessary to get informative background knowledge of those they were involved in the survey. We presented the analysis of these characteristics in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic statistics of respondent

Details	Classifications	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	251	64.9
	Female	136	35.1
Age	18-29 years	133	34.4
	29-39 years	117	30.2
	40-49 years	91	23.5
	50 years and above	46	11.9
Marital Status	Single	158	40.8
	Married	205	53.0
	Divorced	13	3.4
	Separated	11	2.8
Education	OND/HND	123	31.8
	Bachelors	169	43.7
	Masters	88	22.7
	PhD	7	1.8
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	6	1.6
	1-5 years	136	35.1
	6-10 years	115	29.7
	11-15 years	83	21.4
	16 years and above	47	12.1

Source: Field Survey (2023)

On the characteristics of the respondents, we discovered majority of the respondents are male, constituting 64.9% of the 387 respondents whose opinions were screened and found to be valid. This reflects the male dominance in the oil and gas industry. As expected, our results show 35.1% are female. Also, more of the respondents are married and as a proportion of the sample, they constitute 53.0%. This suggest that, the respondents may be more familiar with relations strategies and be able to identify the strategy/strategies that is effective. We find that next higher proportion are those that are single, as 158 individuals, which reflect 40.8% fall in the singlehood category. Only 3.4% of the respondents are divorced, and 2.8% have been separated from their partners.

In addition, Table 1 provides vital information on the level of education attained by the respondents, as the need for formal education for this study is necessary, as with formal education, it will mean that respondents could comprehend the questions posed to them and be able to provide constructive answers. Concerning this, we gathered that 43.7% have bachelor's degree, and 31.8% have OND/HND degrees. Also, we gathered that, some of the respondents have been able to push their education further to the postgraduate level, as 22.7% of the participants hold master's degrees and 1.7% have doctorate degree. We were able to demonstrate that, those surveyed for this study have formal education and are placed to give answers to the questions raised.

The study further analysed the years of experience gained or acquired by the respondents. Among the participants, 1.6% have devoted less than 1 year working for their employer, 35.1% have 1 – 5 years' experience, 29.7% have been at their current company for 6 – 10 years, 21.4% have acquired 11 – 15 years' experience and 12.1% have at least 16 years' experience under their belt. This analysis shows that the respondents are experienced and vast in community relations issues and can provide reasonable answer and be abreast with the particular relations strategy that builds and undermines corporate image.

This study in experimenting whether community relation strategy is an effective tool that can be used to build the corporate image of oil and gas companies considered six hypotheses, which were tested using the Pearson product method. The study tested the influence of three community relations strategy (compromising, collaboration, and forcing strategies) on the variables we used in measuring corporate image, namely, corporate image perceived by community and employee. We reported the outcome of the analysis in Table 2.

Table 2. Result of correlation

		Corporate Image perceived by community	Corporate Image perceived by employee
Compromising Strategy	Pearson Correlation	0.755**	0.681**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000
	N	387	387
Collaboration Strategy	Pearson Correlation	0.825**	0.819**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	387	387
Forcing Strategy	Pearson Correlation	-0.620**	-0.592**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001
	N	387	387

*Note: * & ** represent significance at 0.05 and 0.001 level, respectively*
Source: Authors' compilation (2023)

Our empirical results indicate that compromising strategy is positively and significantly related to corporate image perceived by the community ($r = 0.755$, $p < 0.05$). This hints that oil producing companies that employ compromising strategy when relating with the external environment or stakeholders or compromising on certain issues when embroil in conflict or entanglement with stakeholders are expected to be view in good light by the community in which they operate. This increase reputation and good corporate image earned from adopting this strategy may come from the community perception of the company has not been defiant in pushing through their position and that they can be reasonable at the negotiation table. This good corporate image that resonates from adopting the compromising strategy also increases before employees as adopting this strategy ensures employees of the company perceive the company in a good light ($r = 0.681$, $p < 0.05$). We find these results consistent with those made by Singh [10] and Oparaugo [1].

In Table 2, oil and gas companies that adopt collaboration strategy can experience improvement in their corporate image. Comparing collaboration strategy with how the community perceive the company, we found the correlation to be positive and significant ($r = 0.825$, $p < 0.05$). The community is likely to perceive the oil and gas companies as been responsible and trustworthy, increasing their corporate image, when community are not isolated from the operations and decisions of the oil and gas companies, but rather are consulted and their opinions on certain managerial decisions and community projected are sort before such actions are taken. Such collaborative strategy also builds good image among employees as companies that involves employees and community members in the decision-making process and have the community and/or employee representative in the operation process will be perceived in positive light by employees, shoring up their image ($r = 0.819$, $p < 0.05$). These results are in tandem with those made by Ahmed, Khan & Minhas [14].

Table 2 reveals that the adoption of forcing strategy by companies when relating with community and other stakeholders will be counter intuitive and productive as doing so is likely to diminish their image and reduce their popularity and goodwill among community members and employees ($r = -0.620$, $p < 0.05$). Compared with how the community members will perceive the company when the company fails in involving stakeholders in her operations and refuses to honour the memoranda of understanding, we found that the company will be held in less esteem by the community and their reputation and image will be ruined. When we compared the adoption of forcing strategy, where the company adopts a win-lose outcome with the community and employees or the company ensures her stance or position must be honoured in all circumstance, will have their image diminished before her employees ($r = -0.592$, $p < 0.05$). These results corroborate the results of Ogheneruemu [15].

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this survey was x-raying the nexus between community relations strategy and corporate image. We concerned ourself with investigating the importance of adopting certain community relations strategies in promoting good

corporate image. Further, our study examined how each relations strategy (compromising, collaborative and forcing strategies) influence how oil producing firms in Port Harcourt are perceived by the community members and employees. Our analysis showed satisfactory results, as we found that the practice of utilizing compromising and collaborative strategies does significantly ensure the oil producing companies are perceived in a good sense by the community and their employees. Our result appears to be against employing forcing strategy as a community relations strategy as it diminishes the corporate image of oil producing companies. To be perceived positively, we suggest that oil producing firms should engage with the community through town hall meetings, which should be done regularly, to discuss the interest of every stakeholder and collaborate in ensuring that resolution and programmes are implemented to the letter. Also, the oil firms must abandon the use of forceful tactics such as inviting military forces to the community and rather build harmonious relationship with the community.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
https://prh.globalpresshub.com/review-history/1480