

Public Relations Strategies of Dufil Nigeria in the Management of Indomie Poison Scare of 2004

Godsgift Odiepiriye Harold, (PhD)
Department of Mass Communication
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
Email: godsgiftharlod11@gmail.com

Andrew Ike Onyekosor, (PhD)
Department of English and Communication Arts,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt,
Rivers State, Nigeria
Email: andykosor@gmail.com

DOI: 10.56201/ijmcs.v8.no2.2024.pg86.102

Abstract

This study investigated the Public Relations Strategies of DUFIL Nigeria in the management of Indomie Poison Scare of 2004. It sought to appraise how the company regained public confidence and patronage after the scare using public relations strategies. It employed the survey technique as research design. Population of the study comprised the management, staff and distributors total 850. Sample size was 20 percent of the population which amounted to 170 respondents. Two sampling techniques were adopted for selecting samples for the study, namely: purposive for selecting key managers for personal interviews and systematic for selecting registered distributors for survey using interview schedule and questionnaire as research instruments. The data collected from personal interview were analyzed qualitatively using explanation building. Data from survey using questionnaire were analyzed with simple percentages. The study found that Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) was adopted successfully which aligns with the Apologia theory; reactive strategies adopted by DUFIL Nigeria agrees with contingency theory; the Public Relations Strategies adopted were very effective as well as the media channels employed. The hypotheses tested revealed significant relationship between the extent to which public relations programmes helped to reduce the fear and the re-acceptance of the company's product and the effectiveness of public relations strategies used is not significantly related to the suitability of the strategies adopted. The study then concluded in line with Apologia theory, which explains, and apologizes without necessarily losing face while at the same time repairing its almost damaged reputation, and the contingency theory, which explains that the measures taken were suitable, and in the interest of the consumers. To prevent future occurrence and promote professionalism, the study recommends instituting a Crisis Communication Plan (CCP) along with the establishment of a functional public relations department that will oversee and implement the action.

Keywords: Public Relations; Public Relations Strategies; Management; Poison Scare

Introduction

The purpose of public relations in a crisis is to help navigate the organization through the shoals of the crisis and this can be possible through effective communication. Communication therefore becomes an indispensable tool in the crisis communicator's arsenal. This fact may have informed Fearn-Bank's (2002, p.80) assertion that "crisis communication is the dialogue between the organization and its publics prior to, during and after the negative occurrence." Jefkins (2000) added, "public relations is a communication function which serves to create a favourable image without which the corporate image of an organization can be jeopardized.

However, Professor Lawrence W. Long and Vincent Hazelton as documented by Wilcox and Cameron (2006, p.78) offered the best definition for today's modern practice of public relations as "a communication function of management through which organizations adapt to, alter and maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goal." In view of this, they aptly stated that their approach represents the somewhat newest theory that public relations is more than persuasion. It should also foster a two way communication and mutual understanding with the idea that an organization also changes its attitudes and behaviours in the process nor just the target audience.

This is in line with the definition adopted in 1978 in Mexico City during the First World Assembly of Public Relations Association and the First Forum of Public Relations that a public relations is the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization's leaders and implementing the line programmes of action which will serve both the organization's and public interest. In this case, the outlined the main roles of the professionals looking at the basic elements that builds up the definition. This includes: analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization's leaders and implementing the programmes of action. These roles fall into the management context in which personnel help to frame, implement, adjust and communicate the policies that govern how an institution interacts with public (Newton & Carell, 1998).

From early days men have faced crises and conflicts. However, their ability to wade through the turbulence without much damage tell the difference between success and failure. In today's complex and multi-dimensional industrial society, conflict is inevitable. Thus, public relations becomes a vehicle to manage and overcome the trauma of crises. Newson et al. (2004, p.10) affirmed that "for society to exist, people must achieve some minimum level of agreement, and this agreement is usually reached through interpersonal and group communication. Today, persuasion is still the driving force of public relations. Although there are varieties of perceptions on the meaning of crisis, contemporary public relations experts appear to see crisis as an "escalated conflict with a potentially negative outcome". The stress on the negative outcome was explained by Fearn-Banks (2002) when the author wrote that crisis is a major occurrence with a potential negative outcome affecting the organization company, or industry as well as its publics, products, services or good name.

The inevitability of crisis informs the need for Crises Management Plan (CMP) in order to be ready for crisis management. This means that the public relations professionals must develop communication strategies and processes to influence the outcome of conflicts to the benefit of the organization and, when possible, to the organization's many consultants (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006). To achieve this feat, dialogue is needed between the organization and its

publics prior to, during and after the conflict. Strategies and tactics are therefore designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization. This is what Fearn-Banks (2000) rightly observed to be appropriate crisis communication, without which the management of crises may not be strategic.

Wilcox and Cameron (2006) advocated the use of public relations to influence the course of conflict, highlighting that such influence can take many forms. Broadly, crisis communication is collection and dissemination of information by crisis management team. This assertion about crisis communication is in line with Fearn-Banks (2002) earlier submission that crisis communication is the dialogue between the organization and its publics prior to, during and after the negative occurrence. Although it is agreed that public relations should proactively employ the methods of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), few practitioners truly comply. This is evident where the organization is in a crisis. There is no doubt that DUFIL Nigeria maker of indomie noodles was confronted with Indomie Instant Noodle Poison Scare when the National Agency for Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) destroyed contaminated Indomie Instant Noodles worth over N20 million. The company had to employ some crisis management strategies to arrest the dwindling fortunes occasioned by lack of patronage and public apathy towards the product. Among these strategies, were public relations strategies in varied forms.

There is the perception that some of these strategies were not appropriately used; some argued that the strategies employed did not exhibit the desired transfer from apathy to interest, from hostility to sympathy, from prejudice to acceptance and in place of ignorance, knowledge; while others assumed that the strategies achieved the desired objectives, by reversing a negative situation to a positive one. This study therefore set out to investigate the public relations strategies employed by DUFIL Nigeria to regain public confidence after the poison scare.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. To find out the public relations plan and programmes adopted by DUFIL Nigeria to reduce the tension generated by Indomie Poison Scare 2004.
2. To ascertain the reactive strategies used by DUFIL Nigeria in the management of Indomie Poison Scare of 2004.
3. To determine the suitability and strength of the strategies adopted by DUFIL Nigeria in the management of Indomie Poison Scare of 2004.
4. To ascertain the effectiveness of the media channels used in the management of DUFIL Nigeria Indomie Poison Scare of 2004.
5. To find out the extent to which the public relations strategies and programme helped to re-instil confidence in the consumers toward Indomie Food and DUFIL Nigeria.

Research Questions

Answers to the following researcher question were sought by the study:

1. What public relations plan did DUFIL Nigeria use to reduce the tension generated by the poison scare?
2. What are the reactive strategies adopted by DUFIL Nigeria, in the management of Indomie Poison Scare of 2004?

3. How suitable were the public relations strategies adopted by DUFIL Nigeria to management the damage created by the poison scare?
4. How effective were the media channels used by the DUFIL Nigeria in the management of Indomie Poison Scare?
5. To what extent did the public relations strategies and programme help to re-instil confidence in the consumers toward indomie food and DUFIL Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories of crisis management that lend themselves for use in this study are: Apologia and contingency theories.

Apologia Theory: Hearit (2005, p.30) underscored the basis of the Apologia theory noting that “a corporate apologia is a response to acquisitions of ethical misconduct in which a company has its reputation and to which it offers discourse in self-defense that denies, explain or apologies for its actions.” Arguing further, he said the apologia theory is not a public apology over an incident that has affected the fortunes of the company, although such actions might imply apologies, rather the apologia is a justification of certain actions presenting a competing interpretation of the facts and, in so doing, repair an organization’s damaged reputation. Nevertheless, the success of apologia in managing reputation has been the object of controversy while its ability to navigate apologetic situations successfully is critical in this turbulent media environment. Among the strategies employed are:

- i) **Denying or rejecting charges by characterizing them as false:** The logic here is that those who cannot or do not find it useful to deny that they intended to do so since scholars have argued that intent is a key element in gauging culpability. Reminders that bolster the constituents of good and positive performances done in the past further enforce these denials and rejections.
- ii) **There is the strategy of redefinition:** This involves differentiation and transcendence. Differentiation is presenting the narrow issue in a broader context while transcendence is redefinition to a broader, more abstract context and often involves religious dimension.
- iii) **Provocation:** Where an organization claims that it simply reacted to the hostility of another.
- iv) **Defeasibility:** Where corporate officers claim that forces beyond their control were at work.
- v) **Good Intentions:** Where a company claims it had good intentions in creating a specific policy that only recently has faced criticism.
- vi) **Minimization:** Where the organization seeks to lessen its responsibility by claiming that criticisms are but an appearance and do not accurately reflect the true fact.
- vii) **Conciliation Strategies:** This represents a major defence used by apologists. A conciliation strategy modifies guilt and seeks forgiveness.

Nevertheless, this theory has gained further currency in relation to the arguments that when a corporation apologizes during a crisis, and accept responsibility, the cost is monumental; hence they are caught in these defensive management strategies. This theory finds relevance in the management of the 2004 poison scare. DUFIL Nigeria initially denied the incident, but later

issued statements that reflected the approach of this theory and the various strategies that could be employed. Of course, DUFIL Nigeria could not have contaminated foods knowingly and send them into the market; but something went wrong with the quality checks according to DUFIL Nigeria management.

Contingency Theory: This concept of crisis management which is called contingency theory of conflict, Wilcox and Cameron (2006) argued that it is the stance the organization takes towards the public and conflict situation, understanding the fact that all practitioners shared an unstated, informal approach to managing conflict. Considering their stance on organization, contingency theory establishes that much of public relations management involves anticipating or managing conflict and that this function is among the most important areas of strategy for the profession. Arguing further, they reasoned, that managing conflict includes the ongoing challenges for public relations professionals to deal with competitors in the same line or with similar mission and this could be both internal and external environment (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006).

This theory finds relevance in the management of indomie poison scare of 2004 as it argued that the stance which the organization takes towards the public and conflict situation matters more than the attitude of denial. DUFIL Nigeria crises management approach involves anticipating or managing conflicts as core public relations functions.

Conceptual Review

Communication, Its Meaning

Communication is a complex and complicated phenomenon and any attempt by one scholar to define it is usually met with criticism from other scholars. The divergence in these perception does not alter the nature of communication but rather explains the difficulty in demarcating the bounds of the concept. Gamble and Gamble (2002) saw communication as the deliberate or accidental transmission of meaning. The process occurs whenever someone observes or experiences behaviour and attitudes meaning to that behaviour. They also opined that it does not matter whether the observed or experienced behaviour is intentional or accidental, conscious or unconscious as long as what someone does or says (his or her symbolic behaviour) is interpreted as a message or as long as the behaviour of one person affects or influences the behaviour of another, communication is occurring.

Rodman (2004) complemented this view by asserting that communication refers to the process of human beings sharing messages. The messages might be entertainment, information, or persuasion; they might be verbal, non-verbal, visual, intentional or unintentional. This is in line with the earlier submission of Gamble and Gamble (2006) that communication is the deliberate or accidental transmission of meaning, adding that it is a process that occurs whenever someone observes or experiences behaviour and attributes meanings to that behaviour. Ikpe (1996) identified three existing broad categories of definitions with each representing various schools of thought. These are:

- i. Definitions that stress sharing;
- ii. Definitions that stress intentional influence;
- iii. Definitions that stress influence and response.

However, the stress on “sharing”, intentional “influence” and “response” are relevant to this study even with the implication that “sharing” in particular has a bearing with the Latin word

“communicare” which means “to make common”. The term “meaning” on the other hand suggests the need for people to have an understanding while communicating, whether in conflict situation or in peace time. This presupposes that communication in its very nature is give and take, a transaction. In essence, during the transaction, there is no distinction between the source and destination as each of them interchanges their roles.

Schramm (1954) saw communication as a purposeful effort to establish commonness between a source and receiver, noting that the word communication comes from the Latin word “commis” which means common. The persuasive intent of communication determines whether it is of any functional or dysfunctional use. Intentional influence of communication is stressed in Rivers et al. (1972) definition that communication means all the way by which a person influences another and is influenced in return.

Nature and Forms of Crises

Public relations takes different dimension when an organization is enmeshed in crisis. In this instance, for public relations to survive, it must do more than help satisfy the wants and needs of both the internal and external publics. A concrete Crisis Management Plan (CMP) is required. Conelissen (2004) as documented by Tench and Yeomans (2006) posited that as a starting point, it is important to define the area, describing crisis management to a point of great difficulty or danger to an organization possibly threatening its existence and continuity that requires decisive change. Accordingly, Seymour and Moore in Tench and Yeoman (2006) who used snake metaphor to argue that crisis came in two forms:

- i) **The Cobra – The Sudden Crisis:** This is a disaster that hits suddenly and takes the company completely by surprise and leaves it in a crisis situation.
- ii) **The Python – The “Slow-Burning” Crisis or “Creeping” Crisis:** A collection of issues that steal up on the company one-by-one and slowly crush it.

Centre et al. (2008) identified four causes of crisis. These they referred to as:

- a. **Acts of God:** This refers to natural disasters such as; storms, earthquakes, volcanic action, etc.
- b. **Mechanical problems:** This is what they consider as ruptured pipes, metal fatigue, faulty appliances etc.
- c. **Human errors:** The wrong valve was opened, miscommunication about what needed to be done etc.
- d. **Management decisions, actions, or inactions etc:** This is a situation or problem that is not serious, nobody will find out or notice this problem when it is happening until it generates into crisis.

Tench and Yeemans (2006) capped it up by adding that there are two basic types of crisis depending on the amount of warning time. These include:

- i) **Sudden crisis:** This comes without warning. Examples are; employee injury, death of a key executive, oil spills, product tampering, etc.
- ii) **Smouldering crisis:** This is generally not known internally or externally until it goes public and generates into negative news coverage.

Black (1989) in his contribution, categorized crisis as the “known unknown” and “unknown unknowns”. “Known unknowns” describe the type of misfortune that might occur because of the nature of business or service. For example, if an organization manufactures motor cars or mechanical equipment of any kind, ‘product recall’ is always a possibility. But if the product is in form of chemical or nuclear field, then a radioactive or lethal discharge is a potential danger. Shipping, rail, road and aviation have their known dangers. In all these instances, and many similar fields, it is known that a catastrophe may occur but it is unknown if or when it will take place.

“Unknown Unknown” described sudden events that cannot be foreseen by anybody. An example was a case of Tylenol incident that took place in 1982 in Chicago when someone injected cyanide into some of its product whereby seven people were reported dead after using the product. However, the capsules were quickly withdrawn from public consumption. Johnson and Johnson moved into action, by establishing a Crisis Communication Plan (CCP), this actually helped them to deal with the matter professionally (Black, 1989; Fearn-Banks, 2004 & Yeomans, 2006).

Tench and Yeomans (2006) went further to divide the life cycle of a conflict into four strategic phases.

- (i) The proactive phase
- (ii) The strategic phase
- (iii) The reactive phase
- (iv) The recovery phase

Basically, the Proactive Phase as a first step is preventive in approach. Fearn-Banks (2000) advised media practitioners to plan a system in advance whereby they are notified of erupting crisis. Her belief is that most crises usually give out warning signals which are called “prodromes”. These prodromes are crucial because prevention is the best cure for crisis. Strong community relations programmes that get played in the media that endear the company to its publics will help this effort. Actually, ongoing proactive public relations programmes of any kind are insurance policy against crises (Fearn-Banks, 2006). Wilcox and Cameron summarily recommended three broad strategies in the phase. First is through risk communication whereby dangers or threats to people or organization are conveyed to forestall personal injury, health problems and environmental damage. The risk communication continues so long as the risk exists or until the risk escalates into a crisis.

The next phase is Strategic Phase. This strategy enables the organization to position itself favourably in anticipation of actions such as litigation, boycott, adverse legislation or similar events that will play itself out in the court of public opinion. Finally a specific crisis management plan is developed for that particular issue. This is what Fearn-Banks (2000) referred to as a Crisis Management Plan (CCP). The reactive phase of strategic conflict management is useful when once the issue or imminent conflict reaches a critical level of impact on the organization. This is the point when the public relations professionals must react to events in external environment as they unfold. A strict adherence to and the implementation of Crisis Management Plan as recommended by Wilcox and Cameron (2006, p. 245) suggested that:

Crisis management includes the implementation of crisis management as well as the hectic 24/7 efforts to meet the needs of the public such as disaster, victims, employees, government official and the media. When conflict has emerged but is not getting out of control, conflict resolution techniques are used to bring a heated conflict such as collapsed salary negotiation, to a favourable resolution.

However in the aftermath of a crisis or a high profile heated conflict with a public, the organization should employ strategies to pair its reputation in the eyes of the public. This is the recovery stage or reputation management. This stage adopts systematic research to assess the state of the organization before and after reputation state and then takes steps to improve on it. As even and conflict occur, the company responds with appropriate actions and communication (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006).

Public Relations Persuasive Tools

Like every other profession, public relations professionals perform their function using a variety of tools. According to Rodman (2006), some of these tools include brochures, newsletters and company memos. Wilcox and Cameron (2006) preferred the term “news-release” in the place of newsletters and further categorized the tools under public relations tactics. However, despite the divergence in semantics, some specialized tools, especially those used to reach out to external publics are: press releases, video news release, press kits, special events, and corporate sponsorship. Interestingly, Rodman (2006) said a press release also known as news release, is a short document, written in standard news format that contains the information need to write a news report.

This assertion is in consonance with Hansen and Paul (2004, p.11) when he opined that:

Public relations is a major source of news. This is not a slander against news professionals. A significant routine for news professionals is to monitor and use news releases generated by public relations specialists, attend news conferences organized by public relations professionals, cover events sponsored by public relations strategists and use material from media kits that public relations firms create for their clients.

Indeed, a great deal of information we read in the daily, weekly newspapers originate from news release. The reason for media reliance on news releases is clearly explained by Wilcox and Cameron (2006). They asserted that the media rely on news releases for several reasons. First, the reality of mass communication today is that reporters and editors spend most time processing information not gathering it. Second, no media enterprise has enough staff to cover every single event in the community.

Related to the news release is the video release which is a ready-to broadcast tape designed to use in television news programme. Public relations professional create these videos to feature good production values and they have become an integral part of crisis management. For instance, during the Tylenol poisoning incident that cost seven people their lives, Pepsi sent

out VNRS (video news releases) showing how their high speed canning lines actually worked, with cans moving by at the speed of 2000 per minute, too fast for any tampering to occur.

Another useful tool or tactic available for public relations practitioners is the press kit. Whereas a press release is a simple document, usually no more than two or three type written pages long, a press kit is an elaborate collection of publicity photographs, colour slides, product samples and fact sheet. Rodman (2006) indicated that many press kits also contains backgrounders. News releases are often accompanied by photographs, but a media kit is usually prepared for major events and this implies that a shrewd public relations professional should be able to anticipate occurrences. But then some special events like the Coke anniversary are planned from the start, whereas others take advantage of unforeseen circumstances.

Ethical Principles of Public Relations Crisis Management

The principle of ethics has to do with what is morally right or wrong. This is simply explained as the “does” and “don’t” of every profession, society or group. Like every other profession or discipline, public relation has its basic ethics which guides this profession.

The creation of ethical messages precedes modern times by many centuries. Early scholars acknowledged advocacy as a core value in the field. Accordingly, Grunig et al. (2001) as documented by Petterson and Wilkins (2008) stated that advocacy also means communicating those perceptions to other publics, an effort that has become more complex because it involves relationship with multiple stakeholders in a world of increasing diverse and more active publics.

Scholars such as Fitzpatrick and Bronstein suggested that there is direct relationship between effective advocacy and ethical advocacy, because the need to value and understand the perception of publics inside or outside organizations lies on three basic principles:

- (i) **Access:** This is the ability of all stakeholders to participate in the resolution of crisis. However, this is premised on two assumptions. One is that participants in resolving a crisis must have what is required to gain access to the “market place of ideas”. The other is that unpopular ideas deserve a forthright presentation.
- (ii) **Disclosure:** The provision of complete information about the nature of crisis. In this case, the indomie poison scare. This will enable the stakeholders such as the publics, distributors, and consumers inclusive make informed and rational choice based on this. This will in turn engender trust among and between various publics.
- (iii) **Truthfulness:** This principle is perhaps the most important and ethical. Even though, it is an elusive concept, the public relations strategist should be able to verify claims of various publics in a crisis situation on the need to tell the truth as a way of managing a crisis. Peterson and Wilkson (2008, p.125) wrote that:
This concept of telling the truth in times of crisis, or becoming an advocate for the long term health of a particular client has become one of the foremost professional principles for public relations practitioners engaged in crisis communication ... That was the lesson that public relations practitioners learned a generation ago - from Johnson and Johnson handling of the Tylenol scare.

In essence, in managing and resolving crisis, no matter the strategies employed, whether reactive or not, public relations practitioners should be guided by these principles. This is in line with Ivy Lee's famous Declaration of Principles (1906), which stated in brief that "our plan is to supply to the press and public, prompt an accurate information concerning subjects which is of interest and value to the public to know about".

Research Method and Procedure

The survey research design was adopted for this study. Survey allows a researcher to study population in its natural setting. It deals with respondents opinions, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, etc. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). It was complemented by personal interview for the purpose of generating more data for the study. The population of the study comprised the management, staff and distributors of Indomie Instant noodles in Port Harcourt City. The management, staff and distributors totaled 850 in the Port Harcourt area alone comprising:

| | | |
|---------------|---|-----|
| Management | - | 62 |
| Distributors | - | 170 |
| General staff | - | 628 |

The sampling size comprised 20 percent of the population amounting to 170, which were selected systematically with an interval of five using the company's registered distributors' list. The distributors were contacted through the marketing manager. Five key managers were selected purposively for interviews on the basis of having witnessed the poison scare and participated in building consumers confidence. Research instrument for data collection were the interview schedule and the questionnaire. Interview schedule was directed at five managers who were purposively selected because they were involved in the management of indomie poison scare of 2004.

To ensure validity, and reliability, the questionnaire and personal interviews were assessed and approved by research colleagues. The evaluation included checking for content validity relevance, sequence of questions, clarity and structure of the questionnaire. To ensure reliability, the instrument was pre-tested on a convenient sample of the population. The responses received from the tested respondents were used to scrutinize the instruments. Data collected through personal interview were analyzed using explanation building, while data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed through simple percentages and frequency tables.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Descriptive Analysis of Personal Interview

Descriptive analysis (a transcription) was on the interview the researchers had with the Credit Controller of Multipro, a subsidiary of DUFIL Nigeria producers of the Indomie Instant Noodles. The interview was on the Indomie Instant Noodles Poison Scare of 2004.

The interviewee, Mr. Amos Gbobo, the Credit Controller informed the researcher that the company (DUFUL Nigeria) started operation in 1995. According to him, even though the company had no public relations outfit, multipro effectively handled the poison scare of 2004. Multipro is also in charge of distributorship. The company was able to prove to its numerous customers that the poison did not have a negative effect on the acceptability and consumption

of the Indomie Instant Noodle. In the heat of the crisis, the company was able to convince celebrities and personalities to visit the factory. During the visit, Indomie Instant Noodles was cooked and served. The event was televised, thereafter promos were embarked upon purposely to win consumers' confidence in the sale and consumption of the instant noodle.

Mr. Amos Gbobo narrated how the poison scare came about. He said the genesis of the crisis was as a result of ensuring quality control and safety. Pesticide was used to fumigate the store where the Indomie Instant Noodles were stocked. Accidentally, the pesticide contaminated the product. The credit controller confirmed that NAFDAC officials actually destroyed the affected stock in the presence of staff and customers of DUFIL Nigeria. The affected stock was estimated at ₦20 million.

On the issue of regaining confidence of its nationwide customers, Multipro employed the mass media such as newspapers, billboards, radio and television to disseminate its sales promotion strategies. He said there were also publicity, public relations, advertising and personal selling strategies employed during the period. Mr. Gbobo added that apart from media approach in redeeming the company's image, free packets of Indomie Instant Noodles were given to customers and potential customers. As a result of the effectiveness of the Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies there was a great significant difference in the acceptability level of Indomie before and after the poison scare, those who did not know about Indomie, became consumers of the meal. Indeed, the credit controller averred that the reactive strategies adopted by the management to handle the crisis, went a long way in reducing fear of consumers as to the safety of Indomie Instant Noodles. In his view, the company would have been closed down if NAFDAC and consumers were not convinced of the crisis management approach adopted.

He further said that the media channels used were very affective as they played significant role in stimulating consumers and distributors to continue to repose confidence in the product and its producers. Mr. Amos Gbobo conceded that the company would devise a more encompassing quality control strategies in the preservation and protection of Indomie Instant Noodles especially in stocking and warehousing. This according to him will ensure that such accidental contamination will not occur again.

In response to the extent to which the public relations strategies and programmes helped to re-instill confidence in consumers of Indomie Instant Noodles Foods and DUFIL Nigeria, the interviewee said the strategies adopted went a long way to re-instil confidence in consumers as well as get more patronage from consumers. Infacts the credibility of the company rose to the extent that an Emir in the northern part of the country gave a testimonial on television and radio reassuring consumers that Indomie Instant Noodle is safe for consumption. Infact, the Indomie Scare of 2004 initially reduced sales but after the public relations strategies and programmes were unleashed, the Indomie Instant Noodles returned to the number one position as leading brand in the instant noodle food production and distribution in Nigeria.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: Percentage Responses to Public Relations Strategies used to tackle the Poison Score

| Public Relations Strategies | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|---|--------------------|------------------|
| Demonstration on National TV | 42 | 31.1 |
| Campaigns, Resolutions | 37 | 27.4 |
| Testimonials, persuasions and convictions | 45 | 33.3 |
| Words of mouth in sales promotion | 17 | 12.6 |
| Words of mouth in personal selling | 01 | 0.74 |
| All of the above | 3 | 2.2 |
| Total | 135 | 100 |

Table 1 shows the response to public relations strategies used to tackle the poison scare. A total of 31.1% of respondents agreed to adoption of public relations strategy of demonstration on national television as the most effective approach; 27.4% preferred the explanatory campaigns and resolution in newspapers as a better public relation approach; 33.3% opted for testimonials, persuasions and conviction in media advertising; words of mouth in sales promotion got 14.1%, while the rest 2.2% chose all of the listed public relations strategies.

Table 2: Percentage Responses to DUFIL's response Strategies to the Scare

| Response Strategies | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Above –the-line-advertising | 11 | 8.2 |
| PR Plans and programmes | 65 | 48.2 |
| Advertising | 14 | 10.4 |
| Publicity | 16 | 11.9 |
| Sales promotion | 18 | 13.3 |
| Public relations in newspaper | 11 | 8.2 |
| Total | 135 | 100 |

Table 2 shows DUFIL's response strategies to the scare. Responses by the respondents from the table indicates that 8.2% said they were aware that the company used above-the-line advertising; 48% said the company used public relations plans and programmes; 10.4% opined that the company diffused the tension of the poison scare using advertising. Sixteen other respondents, representing 11.9% said the company used publicity; 13.3% said the company used sales promotion. The remaining 8.2% said DUFIL Nigeria responded by using public actions in newspapers.

Table 3: Percentage Responses to Respondents Description of the extent the Public Relations Programmes reduce their fear about Indomie

| Responses | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| A very great extent | 59 | 43.7 |
| A great extent | 47 | 34.8 |
| Not a very great extent | 09 | 6.7 |
| Not a great extent | 06 | 4.4 |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Undecided | 14 | 10.4 |
| Total | 135 | 100 |

Table 3 shows percentage responses to respondents' description of the extent the public relations programmes reduced their fear about indomie. On the extent to which these programmes helped to reduce the fear of respondents about the poison scare of 2004, 43.7% said the programmes helped a very great extent; 34.8% said the PR programmes helped to a great extent; 6.7% said the programmes used did not help largely; 4.4% said the programmes used did not help a great extent; while 10.4% were undecided.

Table 4: Percentage Responses to Respondents' Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Public Relations Strategies

| Options | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Very effective | 46 | 34.1 |
| Effective | 37 | 27.4 |
| Not very effective | 23 | 17 |
| Not effective | 27 | 20 |
| Undecided | 8 | 5.9 |
| Total | 135 | 100 |

Table 4 shows the responses to the question of the effectiveness of the public relations strategies employed by DUFIL Nigeria during the poison scare. To this, 34.1% said the strategies were very effective; 27.4% said the strategies were effective; 17% said the strategies were not very effective; 20% said the strategies used were not effective; while 5.9% were undecided.

Table 5: Percentage Responses to Respondents' Assessment of the Suitability of the Public Relations Strategies

| Suitability | No. of Respondents | % of Respondents |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Very suitable | 39 | 28.9 |
| Suitable | 45 | 33.3 |
| Not very suitable | 21 | 15.6 |
| Not suitable | 19 | 14.1 |
| Undecided | 11 | 8.2 |
| Total | 135 | 100 |

Table 5 shows respondents responses to the question of suitability of public relation strategies employed by DUFIL Nigeria during the scare. 28.9% said they were very suitable; 33.3% said the strategies were suitable; 15.6% said the strategies were not very suitable; 14.1% said the strategies were not suitable, while 8.2% were undecided.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings of this study was done on the basis of the research questions with a view to achieving the stated objectives of the study.

Research Question One: What public relations plan did DUFIL Nigeria used in reducing the tension generated by the 2004 poison scare?

The findings from analysis of personal interview with the Credit Controller of Multipro, a subsidiary of DUFIL Nigeria, indicate that in order to diffuse tension of the poison scare of 2004, integrated marketing communication was used. This comprised the use of newspapers, billboards, radio, and television to disseminate its sales promotion strategies. The analysis of results also showed that there were the use of public relations, advertising, and personal selling strategies. This means that DUFIL Nigeria effectively used the reactive phase of conflict management in line with Wilcox and Cameron (2006) who wrote that a strict adherence to and the implementation of Crisis Management Plan (CMP) to “meet the needs of the public such as disaster victims, employees, government officials, and the media” are necessary. Using the integrated marketing communication (IMC), DUFIL Nigeria was able to carry out its reputation management strategies which included responding with actions and communicating about those action. These findings were in line with the first theoretical base of this study, which is the apologia theory which states that: “a corporate apologia is a response to acquisitions of ethical misconduct in which a company has its reputation and to which it offers discourse in self-defense that denies, explains or apologies for its actions.”

The result of data indicated that the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) adopted, successfully managed the poison scare situation of 2004, as DUFIL Nigeria initially denied the incident but later issued statements that reflected the approach of this theory and effectively used various strategies to diffuse tension generated (Hearit, 2005).

Research Question Two: What are the reactive strategies adopted by DUFIL Nigeria in the management of Indomie Poison Scare of 2004?

The findings of analyzed data indicate that DUFIL Nigeria used reactive strategies approaches in the management of the poison scare of 2004. This is in compliance with NAFDAC’s policy that stipulates that suspected contaminated products be publicly destroyed. Indomie products worth over N20 million were destroyed publicly in the presence of NAFDAC officials. This was aired by radio and television stations. Contaminated products were also recalled from distributors, wholesale and retail outlets all over Nigeria.

One reactive strategy that was particularly effective was the public demonstration of the safety consumption of Indomie Instant Noodles, as submitted by the Credit Controller and administrative officer of Multipro, a department in DUFIL Nigeria. The factory where the product was produced was opened to the public to see and it was clearly convincing that the product was still a leader in the instant noodles manufacturing business in Nigeria. Schools, churches, community leader, community youth leaders and concerned civil society groups also visited the factory, as revealed by the findings of the study.

The findings of the study also revealed that the reactive strategies of informing the media effectively reduced fear and doused the tension generated as this culminated into a testimonial by the Emir of Sokoto who appeared on a national television to confirm that Indomie was still a consumable product. This is alignment with the statement of the interviewee the (Credit

Controller) that Indomie instant noodles is well accepted and remains a leading brand among other noodles in Nigeria market.

Reactivity as a strategy thrives on advocacy (Grunig et al., 2001) and truthfulness (Patterson & Wilkson, 2008). The effectiveness of reactive strategies paid off since according to the Credit Controller of Multipro who stressed that there was a great significant difference between the acceptability of Indomie product prior to, during and after the negative occurrence of poison scare of 2004.

The reactive strategies adopted by DUFIL Nigeria agrees with the contingency theory as put forward by Wilcox and Cameron (2006) since the company tried to explain that measures taken were in the consumer's interest and were the most suitable in that conflict situation.

Research Question Three: How effective were the public relations strategies adopted by DUFIL Nigeria in the management of the Indomie Poison Scare 2004?

The findings of data analyzed showed that the strategies adopted were very effective. DUFIL Nigeria withdrew its products from the markets. DUFIL Nigeria was also open to the media as well as cooperated with officials of National Agency for Foods, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) to destroy recalled products worth over ₦20 million. DUFIL Nigeria kept the public updated on developments on the investigation providing complete explanations and “apology” for the occurrence of the poison scare.

The effectiveness of the public relations strategies as revealed by the findings of the data analyzed agrees with the theoretical framework of the study. It confirms the application of the “apology” theory to this study.

Research Question Four: How effective were the media channels used by the DUFIL Nigeria in the management of Indomie Poison Scare?

The analysis of data of the study indicated that the media channels used by DUFIL were very effective. This agrees with Benson-Eluwa's (2003) assertion that “at all spheres of human activity, political, economical, social, educational, cultural, industrial, communication is the pivot of progress.

Simply put, the mass media channels used by DUFIL Nigeria confirmed the effectiveness of the mass media in shaping opinion and repairing the image of DUFIL Nigeria. This is also in line with the earlier submission of Akpan (1987) that communication is the basic human survival skill. The findings have confirmed the belief that public relations effective use of mass media channels as a strategy of public opinion formation relies on the communication process including the media to set agenda that advances the set objectives.

Research Question Five: To what extent did the public relations strategies and programmes help to re-instil confidence in the consumers toward Indomie Food and DUFIL Nigeria?

The analysis of data from the questionnaire and the interview schedule indicate that the public relations strategies and programmes helped tremendously to re-instill confidence in the

consumers toward Indomie Food and DUFIL Nigeria. The responses confirmed the effectiveness of reactive strategies in managing unexpected conflict situations such as the indomie instant noodles scare of 2004. The analysis of data and the interview responses undoubtedly confirmed the suitability of the contingency and apologia theories for managing conflicts between internal and external publics and the organization.

Equally, studies by eminent scholars like Fearn-Bank, 2002, Jefkins (1998) and Hansen and Nora (2004) had earlier established that public relations strategies at managing crises are a most likely to produce positive result. This position was re-emphasized from data in this study that confirmed the effectiveness of public relation strategies. Since the strategies were suitable and effective, the concomitant result is that confidence was re-instilled in the product Indomie instant noodles and DUFIL Nigeria. Record of sales confirmed this position as Indomie instant noodles has returned to the number one position as the best nutritious and most consumed instant food product in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study showed that public relations strategies, if adopted strictly could help any organization involved in a crisis situation. The study thus concluded that DUFIL Nigeria used integrated marketing communication strategy to react and manage the poison scare of 2004. The study also debunks the allegation that DUFIL Nigeria produced substandard and unsafe products. In other words, the conclusion of the study is that DUFIL Nigeria is a socially responsible company that produces safe consumable Indomie instant noodles.

Recommendations

In order for institutions and organisations to manage their crisis, it is recommended that they put in place a crisis management plan to deal with the crises when they arise. This plan is going to be a blueprint detailing what actions an institution should take when they have crisis. This plan for example specifies in detail who will say what as well as various channels through which the organization can reach its publics and stakeholders.

Once a company is confronted with crisis, the study recommends that they should outrightly admit that they have the crisis on their land and not to live in denial. If a crisis arises out of people eating a poisonous company's product, the company should not only admit and accept that poison scare, they should also admit they have crisis on their land, they should also recall the products from the distributors, wholesale and retail, outlets all over the country. In the case of Indomie, (DUFIL) Nigeria denied initially but later accepted their faults for doing so because they did not have Crisis Communication Plan (CCP) that is supposed to guide them in crisis. Public relations practitioners should also learn a lesson of the lapses of the strategies used by the company and this will guide other corporate organizations in crisis management. The company should be able to institute a crisis communication plan that will guide them when they have crises and also oversee and implement that crises plan.

References

- Benson-Eluwa, V. (2003). *Opinion research*. Virgin Creation.
- Black, S. (1989). *Introduction to public relations*. The Modino Press Limited.
- Centre, A., Jackson P., Smith S. & Stansberry F. (2008). *Public relations practices; managerial case studies and problems*. Pearson and Prentice Hall.
- Fearn-Bank K. (2002). *Crisis communication: A case study approach*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hansen R. (2005). *Mass communication: Living in a media world*. The McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Hansen, K. & Nora P. (2004). *Behind the message: Information Strategies for communicators*. Pearson Educational Inc.
- Ikpe, E. (1999). The role of communication in management of the 1993 conflict between ASSU and the Federal Government of Nigeria. *Unpublished Doctorate Thesis*, Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, Uyo.
- Jefkins, F. (2000). *Public relations techniques* (2nd ed). Butherworth-Heinemann.
- Newton, D. & Carrell, B. (1998). *Public relations writing forms and styles*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Newton, D., Turk J. & Kruckerberg, D. (2004). *This is PR: The realities of public relations*. A Division of Thompson Learning.
- Peterson, P. & Wilkins, L. (2008). *Media ethics*. McGraw Hill Company.
- Shramna, W. (1954). Mass communication control and public policy. *International Encyclopaedia of Social Science*.
- Tench, R. & Yeomans, L. (2006). *Exploring public relations*. Pearson Education Ltd.
- Wilcox, D. & Cameron, G. (2006). *Public relations strategies and tactics*. Pearson Education Inc.
- Wimmer, R. & Dominick, J. (2000). *Mass media research: An introduction*. Wardworth Publishing Company.