

SHAPING ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF DISRUPTION: A PUBLIC RELATIONS APPROACH.

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Abstract

The study was on shaping organisational resilience in times of disruption: A Public Relations Approach. It aimed at examining how public relations practices can help in shaping organisational resilience amidst disruption. The study was anchored on Organisational Image Management theory and the Excellence theory of public relations. It made use of quantitative method, which involved the survey, employing copies of questionnaire which were administered to respondents. The study's population was 44, 999, while a sample size of 397 were derived using the Taro Yamane formula. A number of 388 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and used for analysis. Findings from the study revealed that effective internal communication, CSR fulfilment, community relations etc., are public relations efforts organisations make in order to withstand disruption, and that disruptions that may require organisational resilience, could result from employees' dissatisfaction, lack of CSR fulfilment, government policies and online character assassination etc. The study recommended among others that, corporate organisations, through the public relations department should create more platforms for effective inter-personal communication among employees to encourage workforce unity, and that a research team be constituted to constantly carry out investigations on trends and developments that are very likely to cause disruption in corporate policies, especially in the contemporary competitive business environment that organisations are faced with.

Keywords: Disruption, Organisational Resilience, Shaping, Public Relations

Introduction

Corporate organisations operate in human environments, with competing resources; a socio-political and economic environment, with laws, regulations, policies, business restrictions, climatic and natural disasters that are imminent and can affect the day-to-day survival of organisations. They are saddled with lots of corporate engagements with segmented stakeholders. In very many ways, organisations, through public relations practices, try to manage their relationships with their corporate audiences to avoid any form of disruption, in the form of conflict or disruption that may affect the operations, policies, sustainability, and by extension, the image and reputation of the organisation. The public relations department of corporate organisations craft messages, conduct research, embark on campaigns, and where necessary, employ lots of case studies that help deal with different challenges that are perennial, and that may disrupt corporate activities, thereby shaping organisational image and ensuring resilience, even in very competitive business environments. Organisational resilience is the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions to survive and prosper (Organisational Resilience Pocket Guide, 2014).

Maor et al (2022) state that resilient organisations don't just bounce back from misfortune or change; they bounce forward. That such organizations absorb the shocks and turn them into opportunities to capture sustainable, inclusive growth. Stressing that when challenges emerge, leaders and teams in resilient organizations quickly assess the situation, reorient themselves, double down on what's working, and walk away from what's not. Maor et al maintain that repeatedly rebounding from disruption is tough, but some companies have a recipe for success: a systems mindset emphasizing agility, psychological safety, adaptable leadership, and cohesive culture.

Further, Aithal and Maiya (2023), cited in Awoyemi et al (2023) provide that public relations (PR) is an essential component of reputation management; that while media serves as an external channel for communication, PR focuses on managing relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. They assert that PR strategies are designed to ensure that an organization's image and reputation are maintained and enhanced through effective communication with key groups, such as customers, employees, investors, media, and the general public. Public relations encompass a wide range of activities, including crisis communication, press releases, event management, internal communications, and community outreach (Nwoke, 2021: In Aithal&Maiya, 2023). They stress that PR professionals are responsible

for crafting messages that align with the organization's core values and mission, ensuring consistency across various communication channels, and fostering positive relationships with the media and other stakeholders. All these help in shaping the image and ensuring the sustainability of organisations.

As the days go by, corporate organisations experience developments that are capable of affecting the productivity and efficiency of operations. The public relations department make frantic efforts in ensuring resilience, through various corporate activities such as the fulfilment of corporate social responsibilities, media relations, shareholders/investors relations, community relations, and so many other corporate engagements. Still, an organisational crisis upsets and challenges an organisation's basic assumptions and decision-making processes (as cited in Kim, 2020). The management of crises is a vital public relations function, and over time, organisations are faced with crises situations that require strategic public relations approaches in ensuring resilience and the management of organisational image and sustainability.

Statement of the Problem

Organisational sustainability requires effective public relations practices that ensure mutual relationships with stakeholders and help manage crises situations that may disrupt corporate activities. In today's fast-changing business environment, organizations are increasingly faced with crises that have the potential to severely impact both their reputation and financial stability. Emphasizing that effective public relations (PR) strategies within the framework of crisis management acquire particular importance. Stressing that many recent academic studies have focused on analysing and systematizing the most effective approaches to organizing PR activities during crises.

Too often, disruption in corporate policies may arise from conflicting views with various interests' groups. This on one hand slows down corporate activities, and by extension, negatively influence the image, reputation and sustainability of an organisation. On the other hand, disruption may force an organisation to step up and strengthen its policies and as well, build resilience in the presence of crises. The public relations department of corporate organisations employ various approaches and strategies in managing relationships with stakeholders. Such approaches may include improving internal communication with employees, revisiting corporate policies with shareholders, organizing press conferences and issuing press releases; engagement community

stakeholders, especially in the planning and execution of community-based projects, etc.

Relatively, Talkwalker (2025) emphasizes that crisis management is a critical aspect of public relations, essential for protecting and maintaining an organization's reputation during unforeseen events. It notes that whether the challenge is a product recall, a corporate scandal, or a natural disaster, the way an organization responds can ultimately determine the strength or weakness of its public image. Further, Talkwalker provides that crisis management involves identifying, addressing, and mitigating the impact of unexpected events that threaten an organization's stability; crises can have significant impacts on organizations, including financial loss, reputational damage, and operational disruptions. In all of the above possible developments, the public relations unit of corporate organisations is required to manage and positively project the image of the organisation for its sustainability. Thus, the study tends to explore the need to shape organisational resilience in the wake of disruption, leveraging on public relations approaches.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine how public relations practices can help in shaping organisational resilience amidst disruption. The objectives of the study are set to:

1. evaluate public relations engagements that can help achieve organisational resilience
2. find out some of the factors that can cause disruption in corporate policies.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do public relations practices help in achieving organisational resilience?
2. What are the factors that can cause disruption in corporate policies?

Scope of the study

The study is focused on the Rivers State University, as a corporate organisation, streamlining various PR strategies in managing relationships with stakeholders and in shaping organizational resilience in the wake of conflicts and crises.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Organisational Resilience

Organisational resilience as it were, entails the ability of corporate organisations to utilize all available resources to survive in times competition, policy disruption, influence of external forces to the sustainability of the organization. Denyer et al (2024) state that organisational resilience is the ability of an organisation to absorb and adapt in a changing environment. That is to say, an organisation exists in an ever evolving environment, therefore, it must have established strategies to handle unforeseen situations that may cause a disruption in corporate activities. They further share the '5 Capitals' of an organisation, upon which resilience is built to include finance, infrastructure, workforce, environment and social.

Klein et al (2003), Paton and Johnston (2006) in Tennakoom and Janadari (2021) are of the view that the term resilience is often used for denoting the ability to bouncing back; stating that it is rooted in the Latin term "resiliere" which gives the similar meaning of jumping back, after a trying period. Tennakoom and Janadari share that organizational resilience is one of such branches that address how organisations can combat the uninvited environmental uncertainties. Similarly, Duchek (2019) provides that in highly volatile and uncertain times, organizations need to develop a resilience capacity which enables them to cope effectively with unexpected events, bounce back from crises, and even foster future success. By implication, organisations through the public relations department must as a matter corporate image management and reputational sustainability make efforts in its engagements to ensure the organisation exhibit high resilience the wake of challenges. They may play out through more effective communication with shareholders, corporate giftings to specific corporate audiences, media relations in the form of press conferences, as well as some philanthropic gestures that could help restore, manage and ensure the organisation attain the needed resilience. Consequently, Horne and Orr (1998, p.31) in Tennakoom and Janadari (2021) state that resilience is a fundamental quality to respond productively to significant change that disrupts the expected pattern of event without engaging in an extended period of regressive behavior." Relatively, Linnenluecke et al (2012, p.18) as reflected in Tennakoom and Janadari (2021) admit that Resilience is the "organizational capacity to absorb the impact and recover from the actual occurrence of an extreme weather event." It means that organizational resilience requires a business to develop

defence mechanisms to be able to withstand trying times, and be able to handle the aftermath of such occurrences.

Image Building and Management in times of Disruption

Image building and management are top corporate goals, especially if sustainability is given a priority. Corporate organisations make conscious efforts towards public acceptance of the image of the organisation. This effort is more predominant during crises situations. Ghibanu (2019) opines that a strategy for building the organizational image must, firstly, aim at achieving and consolidating the organization's identity in the mind of the target-groups relevant for the balance and functioning of the organization. By implication, image building must first sell the name and distinguishing features of the organisation to the publics, which provides a function for goodwill and mutual relationship.

Lievens(2017) states that image establish how an entity is perceived and affects how audiences interact with it. He maintains that image management is an indispensable function to an effective communication link between organizations and its publics. Stressing that its field of action has widened: from an activity centred entirely on business firms to an activity of broader scope and purpose, which now involves all kinds of 'organizations', private or public, from non-governmental organizations to foundations or political parties. Lievens shares that an effective strategy for image building and successful communication involves understanding the on-going process of dematerialization (which implies accepting as well that in some sectors 'access' is becoming more important than 'possession' itself), involves foreseeing its scope and the ability to anticipate the situations that change accordingly. That it also encompasses adapting to the dynamics of virtual media, the cross and synergic exploitation of new media, namely audio-visual, and it entails the creative use of information and communication technologies.

Theoretical Framework

Organisational Image Management theory

Organizational image management refers to the actions taken to create, maintain, and when necessary, regain a desired image in the eyes of organizational stakeholders (Willi et al, 2014: In Massey, 2015). An organization's image "is a holistic and vivid impression held by an individual or a particular group towards an organization and is a result of sense-making by the group and communication by the organization" (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p. 359: In Massey, 2015). By implication, the theory unravels the conscious efforts by multinationals towards

projecting their image positively, in such a way that it is positively perceived and can provide a competitive advantage, even in times of conflict and crises that may disrupt corporate activities. Massey (2010, 2011) as reflected in Massey (2015) shares that the theory of organizational image management argues that a primary goal of IMC is the creation and maintenance of an organization's image; that organizations communicate strategically with stakeholders to encourage desirable images and discourage undesirable ones. Organizational image management theory is developed from theories of image management and self-presentation at the level of the individual; organizations must sustain an effective image with their stakeholders in order to maximize their chances for success (Goffman, 1959; Tedeschi & Riordan, 2013; Garbett, 1988; Mason, 2014: In Massey, 2015)

Continuing, Frandsen (2017) states that organizational image is a concept that bridges organizational communication, corporate communication, corporate branding, public relations (PR), and organization studies and has occupied researchers from these different schools of interest because of its central importance in linking organizations with their audiences. He maintains that corporations today spend an increasing amount of resources on building attractive, distinct, and legitimate organizational images using corporate branding, corporate communication, or corporate reputation management tools as well as culture management to align the organizational behaviour with the strategically communicated official self-images. It means that the theory presents regular efforts made by corporate bodies, through the public relations unit or corporate communications approaches, in securing good public perception of their agencies, especially efforts made in times organisational instability.

However, criticisms to organisational image management theory exist in that, stakeholders are not passive recipients of organisational messages; that they actively interpret, resist, or reinterpret them, often in unpredictable ways (Brown et al, 2006). Also, critics like Coombs (2007) argue that the effectiveness of image management strategies is highly context-dependent, and the theory offers little guidance on when certain strategies will succeed or fail. Further, Fleming and Spicer (2007) opine that organisational image strategies typically cater to influential audiences, side-lining the concerns of less powerful stakeholders.

The theory is relevant to the study as it uncovers efforts organisations make to manage their image, especially in times of very perennial challenges, for the sustainability of the organisation. It unravels various public relations approaches employed by corporate bodies in shaping and managing their image before various interests' groups, mostly in

very competitive and trying times. Thus, the validity of its relativity to the study.

Excellence theory

The excellence theory is a public relations theory that looks at the place of effective communication, in managing and sustaining relationships with stakeholders or an organisation. Grunig and Grunig (1992) in Bagley (2021) define Excellence theory as a method used in the public relations industry to determine how companies can use an organized system to better manage efficiency and environment. They share that the theory has multiple processes to see how a company performs and how it can be fixed to make the organization better. Stressing that the multiple processes include a public relations evaluation which determines the strategic management, the models they use for public relations, employee communication, gender, diversity, ethics, and social responsibility.

Also, the excellence theory is a general theory of public relations that resulted from a 15-year study of best practices in communication management funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation. He provides that three books were published from the research (Grunig 1992; Dozier et al. 1995; Grunig et al., 2002: In Grunig, 2008). He maintains that excellence theory is a general theory which incorporates a number of middle-range theories of public relations, strategic management, models of public relations, evaluation of public relations, employee communication, public relations roles, gender, diversity, power, activism, ethics and social responsibility, and global public relations. Further, the excellence theory first explained the value of public relations to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics. Stating that for an organization to be effective, according to the theory, it must behave in ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of stakeholders as well as of Management-Stakeholder Theory (Grunig, 2008). Implying that managing relationships with stakeholders amidst disruption plays vital roles in shaping organisational resilience and sustainability. Accordingly, Grunig shares that based on the theoretical premise about the value of public relations, the excellence theory derived principles of how the function should be organized to maximize this value; that research showed that involvement in strategic management was the critical characteristic of excellent public relations; asserting that public relations executives played a strategic managerial role as well as administrative manager role; moreover, public relations

also was empowered by having access to key organizational decision-makers- the dominant coalition.

There exist criticisms to the excellence theory. Some scholars argue that the theory is based on Western corporate context and may not apply universally, especially in non-Western, collectivist, or authoritarian societies (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001). Relatively, Pieczka (1996), Holtzhausen (2000) concur that the two-way symmetrical model which the theory provides is considered idealistic and rarely achievable in real-world organisational settings. It makes sense to state that the criticisms to excellence theory provide a gap for advancement in research and academics. The theory is relevant to the study as it explains a two-way effective communication flow with stakeholders, as a pre-requisite for the shaping organisational resilience in times of disruption. Both individuals and organisations experience challenges and trying times in course of social and economic engagements. It is the element of effective communication that keeps parties glued towards achieving a common goals and collective interests. Hence, the veritable place of excellence theory in the study.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative method, utilizing survey as its design. The survey involves copies of questionnaire, drafted and purposively administered to the students of public relations department, Rivers State University. The survey was used as it effectively studies the attitudes and opinions of people. Equally, the use of survey grants the researcher the opportunity to access primary data directly from the respondents who are the basic elements in the study. A population of 44, 999, which is the students' population of Rivers State University (www.rsu.edu.ng), is used for the study. By applying the Taro Yamane formula, a total of three hundred and ninety-seven (397) was obtained which constituted the sample size for the study. However, the researcher purposively administered the retrieved copies (388) of the questionnaire to the students of public relations, Rivers State, as they seem to be in right place to provide the needed responses.

Data Presentation

The researcher retrieved 388 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and used for analysis.

Research Question One

In what ways do public relations practices help in achieving organisational resilience?

Table 1: Effective inter-personal communication among employees, corporate social responsibility fulfillment, community relations and media relations are some public relations practices that help organisations achieve resilience in times of challenges.

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly Agreed	156	624	1.6	
Agree	132	396	1.0	
Disagree	56	112	0.3	
Strongly Disagree	44	44	0.1	
Total	388	1,176	3.0	Accepted

Table 1 shows that greater number of the respondents strongly agreed that effective inter-personal communication among employees, corporate social responsibility fulfillment, community relations and media relations are some public relations practices that help organisations achieve resilience in times of challenges, while smaller number of the respondents strongly disagreed. Implying that public relations approaches like effective internal communication, CSR fulfilment, community relations etc., are parts of efforts organisations make in order to withstand disruption.

Research Question Two

What are the factors that can cause disruption in corporate policies?

Table 2: Employees' dissatisfaction, lack CSR fulfilment, government policies and online character assassination etc, are possible factors that cause disruption in corporate activities

Variables	Frequency	Weighted Score	Weighted Mean Score	Decision
Strongly Agreed	163	652	1.7	
Agree	143	429	1.1	
Disagree	54	108	0.3	
Strongly Disagree	28	28	0.1	
Total	388	1,163	3.2	Accepted

Table 2 indicates that a greater number of respondents strongly agreed that employees' dissatisfaction, lack of CSR fulfilment, government policies and online character assassination etc., are possible factors that cause disruption in corporate activities, but a smaller group of respondents disagreed. Therefore, disruption that may require shaping organisational resilience could result from employees' dissatisfaction, lack of CSR fulfilment, government policies and online character assassination etc., are possible factors that cause disruption in corporate activities.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question was designed to assess ways public relations practices help in achieving organisational resilience in times of disruption, especially one that requires the public relations department to strategically manage the image of the organisation. Findings from the study indicated that effective internal communication, CSR fulfilment, community relations etc, are parts of efforts organisations make in order to withstand disruption. Organisations are faced with numerous challenges in recent times, especially with the advancement in information communication technology, thus, the need to exhibit high level of resilience or agility in its operations. Werder et al (2021) in Osman et al (2025) state that organisational agility is the capability of an organization to rapidly sense and respond to environmental changes with speed and flexibility, ensuring sustained competitive advantage. Stressing that it encompasses strategic, operational, and structural dimensions, highlighting agility as a holistic construct that drives adaptation and innovation. By implication, the ability of an organisation to adapt and as well be innovative is a desired corporate goal, amidst disruption.

The second research question was crafted to examine factors that can cause disruption in corporate policies. The outcome of the study showed that disruption that may require the shaping of organisational resilience could result from employees' dissatisfaction, lack of CSR fulfilment, government policies and online character assassination etc., are possible factors that cause disruption in corporate activities. Hariyana (2024) provide that organizational failure is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of internal and external causes. They further state that understanding the specific causes of failure is crucial for both academic research and practical management. Additionally, Ofoegbu (2016) as seen Hariyana et al (2024) shares that disruption corporate activities may span from the company's inactivity, financial losses, un-competitiveness, business problems etc.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The outcome of the study showed that public relations approaches like effective internal communication, CSR fulfilment, community relations etc, are parts of efforts organisations make in order to withstand disruption; and that disruption that may require shaping organisational resilience, could result from employees' dissatisfaction, lack of CSR fulfilment, government policies and online character assassination etc. The outcome of the study gave rise to the following recommendations:

1. That corporate organisations, through the public relations department should create more platforms for effective internal and inter-personal communication among employees to encourage workforce unity; engage more with host community stakeholders through corporate social responsibilities' fulfilment, and as well keep the media abreast with the happenings in their organisations via press conferences and releases.
2. That a research team be constituted to investigate on factors that are most likely to cause disruption in corporate policies, especially in the digitalized business environment that organisations are faced with.

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trends and opportunities from the research literature.

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