Application of Public Relations Tools in Crisis   Management of Major International Oil Companies In Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study was on a critical analysis of the application of public relations tools in crisis management by major international oil companies in Nigeria. It was motivated by the dilemma of ceaseless clashes and crises involving international oil corporations and their host community publics, which usually result in killings and shutdown of oil facilities, militancy, kidnapping of oil workers, vandalization of facilities, with the consequent loss in revenue generation by the country. The research aimed at exploring the various public relations crisis management tools used by the IOCs in Nigeria in dealing with their host community publics; evaluate the effect of the PR crisis management tools the companies use to maintain a healthy relationship between the IOCs and their host community; as well as assess how the identified crisis management tools affect the corporate performance of IOCs. For the methodology opinion survey design of interviews was adopted in the study. A non-probability sampling method of purposive or judgmental sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample size. The data procured were analyzed qualitatively. Results indicate that: the international oil corporations operating in Nigeria, have a wide array of public relations tools and strategies for checkmating and managing crises and conflict with their host community publics. That the public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs do not have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and majority of their host community publics. That the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs have contributed significantly to their corporate performance over the years. Based on this it was recommended among other things: The IOCs in Nigeria must do everything possible to win over and carry along the aggrieved youths by means of shrewd public relations crisis management strategies.

Keywords: Public relations, crisis management

1. Introduction

Over the years, major oil firms in Nigeria have been facing one crisis or the other with their host communities, often leading to militancy, kidnapping of oil workers, vandalization of facilities, killings and shutdown of facilities (Nkwocha, 2010). This has sometimes raised some question marks on the public relations crisis management strategies of the oil firms. Meanwhile, the British Institute of Public Relations (BIPR) defines public relations as the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (Yaroson & Asemah, 2007). It is a process that must be deliberately planned, carefully implemented and assiduously monitored to achieve a given goal or objective, targeted mainly at building and sustaining mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (Onwunali *et al*, 2006). Every organization has both internal and external publics with whom mutual understanding must be nurtured and maintained for the growth of the organization. It is the duty of the corporate communications or public relations manager to professionally ensure that public relations serves as an intermediary between the organisation that he or she represents and all its

publics (Meintjes, 2011). One of the critical areas of his/her duty is issues and crisis management, without which the organisation could be blown down one day.

Issues management in public relations practice is the proactive monitoring and resolving of simmering issues with negative potentials before they balloon into crisis (Odigbo *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, crisis management is the coordinated effort to handle effects of unfavorable publicity and ensuring fast and accurate communication in times of emergency (Uduji, 2012). It involves the communications management function used to convey accurate facts and data to the general public and to specific publics during a crisis situation in order to minimize negative publicity that could adversely affect the success of the organization/company. It involves identifying crisis, planning a response to the crisis and confronting and resolving the crisis. Crisis Management can be applied in almost any field of endeavour, but it is most commonly used in international relations, political sciences, business and management (Coombs, 2007). International oil companies (IOCs) operating in Nigeria's oil and gas industry employ various strategies to address and redress reputation, issues, challenges and crises that arise in the course of their operations – exploration, exploitation and distribution of petroleum and gas products (Nwosu & Uffor 2005).

Today's business World has become very competitive. To survive in this ever-changing and ever-challenging business environment requires the recognition, as well as, acceptance of public relations crisis communication tools as vital weapons in the hands of all organizations in all modern societies (Asemah, 2011). The Mexican Statement 1978, as stated in Uduji (2012), must have borne crisis management in mind when it defined public relations practice as "the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders and implementing planned programs of actions which will serve both the organization's and the public interest." In this very definition, "analyzing trends, predicting their consequences and counseling organization leaders" entails proactive crisis management approach.

A crisis can be defined as an incident or event with consequences, which pose a significant threat to the strategic objectives of an organization (Hale *et al.*, 2005). These include downsizing, corporate lawsuits, negative media coverage, government probes, insurgency, political crisis, quality problems, product recalls, boycotts, and strikes. Crisis Management works to minimize all these and the consequent damage to a company's reputation. At the same time, it tries to take advantage of any benefits that can be obtained from crisis (Bernstein & Rakowitz, 2012). It includes communication that occurs with response phase of emergency management methods of a business or an organization (Hazarika, 2013).

2. Statement of the Problem

International oil companies (IOCs) operating in Nigeria's oil and gas industry employ various strategies to address and redress reputation, issues, challenges and crises that arise in the course of their operations – exploration, exploitation and distribution of petroleum and gas products (Nwosu & Uffor 2005; Obeta 2008). The credibility and reputation of the oils companies is heavily influenced by the perception of their target publics during crisis situations. The public relations tools they employ in responding to crises in timely fashion, undoubtedly aids their corporate performance, while the reverse leads to attritions. There must be open and consistent application of public relations tool throughout the hierarchy, to contribute to a successful crisis management

process. The public relations crisis management strategies of the IOCs in Nigeria are supposed to engender positive perception and response from their critical publics namely employees, customers, distributors, suppliers, contractors, bankers, regulatory agencies, the media, and most importantly their host communities. However, the intractable Niger Delta crisis points to the fact that something is still wrong somewhere, hence, the motivation for this study, to critically appraise the application of public relations tools in crisis management by select major oil firms in Nigeria.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the application of public relations crisis management tools by international oil companies (IOCs) in Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows:

i. To identify the types of public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs in Nigeria in managing their host community publics.
ii. To appraise the effect of the public relations crisis management tools employed in maintaining mutual understanding between the IOCs and their host community publics.
iii. To evaluate the effect of the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs on their corporate performance.

4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

i. What are the types of public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs in Nigeria in managing their host community publics?
ii. Do the public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and their host community publics?
iii. Do the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs contribute significantly to their corporate performance?

5. Significance of the Study

This study will enhance the practice of public relations crisis management by Nigerian corporate organizations, especially the oil firms. To the body of knowledge, it is expected to contribute immensely to literature that will help in managing crisis in the volatile Nigerian oil and gas industry. It is also expected that this research will help provide data and information to other scholars and students that would embark on researches about different aspects of public relations practices and other issues bugging the Nigerian oil industry. This will ultimately help to build and sustain a climate of peace in the Niger Delta region, for enhanced economic growth for the nation.

6. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical construct for this study is founded on two principal public relations theories: the issues management theory and the two-way symmetrical communications theory.

6.1.1 Issues Management Theory

The public relations issues management theory holds that every issue or problem gives some early-warning signals, before snow-balling into crisis or conflict. Nipping such issues or problems in the bud will either prevent it from growing into crisis or drastically reduce the strength of the crisis (Black, 1989; González-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). Issues management is a proactive public relations strategy for crisis-prevention (Haastrup, 2007). González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) posit that although the onset of a crisis can be sudden, there are situations when organizations are aware of and prepare for such an event. Smits and Ezzat (2003) posit that preparation is one of – if not the – most important steps in the prevention of a crisis, and that effective crisis management depends upon planning and people. According to Penrose (2000: 155), organizations that practice proactive crisis management will lessen the damage of a crisis.

González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) add that crises have early signals and sensing these potential problems is the first step toward avoiding or resolving them or minimizing their impact. Issues management helps an organization become aware of possible crises and plan accordingly. One facet of this awareness involves ascertaining the publics whose actions or inactions could lead or contribute to a crisis. Grunig and Repper (1992) explained that if an organization can identify these groups it can attempt to dispel or counteract their damaging behaviors. This way, issues management helps remove the unexpected and sudden factors of the crisis; the situation can be defused before it occurs.

González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) observe that issues management is a tool to identify and anticipate potential issues before they balloon into a threat. Thus, issues managers should be forward-thinking. The longer an organization is aware of the possible issue, the better it can prepare. Ewing (1987) posits that practicing issues management improves an organization's awareness of its community and ways to positively involve itself.

6.1.2 Two-way symmetrical model

Developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), the two-way symmetrical communication between an organization and its publics epitomizes the ideal practice of public relations. The model emphasizes that dialogue must be initiated in order to determine the stance of an organization's publics. Neither side can really know the morality or reasonableness of the other side's interests without talking with each other (Grunig, 2001). The author further posits that accommodative techniques should only be used during this conversation.

As a form of crisis preparation tool, two-way symmetrical model suggests building communication relationships and alliances with an organization's internal and external publics on an ongoing basis prior to a crisis. Organizations which have positive relationships with their stakeholders are more likely to survive a crisis or less damage (Pearson and Clair, 1998; Ulmer *et al.,* 2007; Ulmer, 2001). Organizations in a crisis should not just listen to stakeholders they agree with, but rather identify all potential stakeholders and establish processes to include all, even those the organization does not agree with (Jaques, 2010).

6.1.3. Application of the Theories to this Study

The implications of the public relations issues management theory for this study is that the multinational oil firms in Nigeria can totally avoid or minimize crisis by adopting proactive public relations strategy. This will help improve relationship with their host communities. Issues management practice will keep them abreast and aware of the feelings, moods and opinions of the host communities, so as to be in a better stead to package the right public relations strategies to address such. Issues management can also present the oil firms with opportunities to showcase their positive contributions in those communities.

The two-way symmetrical communications on the other hand, suggest that the oil firms must be open and transparent with their host communities. They must accommodate them and listen to their complaints, and jointly come up with the best solutions to their problems. Denial strategies when there is a crisis like oil spills will not yield any positive result in the long run. It tends to suggest the organization's rejection of responsibility for the crisis. While the two-way symmetrical communications strategy try to improve the organization's reputation. It shows concern for the victims and reflects on how much responsibility the organization accepts for the crisis. Research even shows that organizational publics when won to your side, can be used as support groups for organizations in crisis periods (Ulmer, 2001; Ulmer et al., 2007).

6.2   Crisis Management Concept

According to Wikipedia.org (2010), crisis management can be defined as, "a holistic management process that identifies potential impacts that threaten an organization and provides a framework for building resilience, with the capability for an effective response that safeguards the interests of its key stakeholders, reputation, brand, and value-creating activities- as well as effectively restoring operational capabilities." Essentially, it is the process by which an organization deals with a major event that threatens to harm the organization, its stakeholders, or the general public. James (2007) defines organizational crisis as "any emotionally charged situation that, once it becomes public, invites negative stakeholder reaction and thereby has the potential to threaten the financial well-being, reputation, or survival of the firm or some portion thereof.

When crisis hits, organizations must be able to carry on with their business in the midst of the crisis while simultaneously planning for how they will recover from the damage the crisis caused. Crisis handlers not only engage in continuity planning (determining the people, financial, and technological resources needed to keep the organization running), but will also actively pursue organizational resilience to the crisis (Shrivastava *et al*., 1988). Crisis management consists of:

- Methods used to respond to both the reality and perception of crises.
- Establishing metrics to define what scenarios constitute a crisis and should consequently trigger the necessary response mechanisms.
- Communication that occurs within the response phase of emergency management scenarios.

The crisis management methods of a business or an organization are called crisis management plan. A crisis mindset requires the ability to think of the worst-case scenario while simultaneously suggesting numerous solutions. It is necessary to maintain a list of contingency plans and to be always on alert. Organizations and individuals should always be prepared with a rapid response

plan to emergencies which would require analysis, drills and exercises (Venette, 2003). During a crisis period that challenges a businesses or organization, there must be open and consistent communication throughout the hierarchy to contribute to a successful crisis communication, process (Coombs, 2007).

6.3   Types of Crises

6.3.1   Natural Disasters

Typically natural disasters considered as 'acts of God,' are such environmental phenomena as earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes, floods, landslides, tsunamis, storms, volcanic eruptions and droughts that threaten life, property, and the environment itself. Example: 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake (Tsunami) and the 2012 flood disaster that ravaged many states in Nigeria, destroying lives, buildings, food crops and other facilities.

6.3.2   Technological Crises:

Technological crises are caused by human application of science and technology. This is rampant in the oil industry in form of oil spills, explosions, fire outbreaks, etc. Technological accidents inevitably occur when technology becomes complex and or when something goes wrong in the system as a whole (Technological breakdowns). Some technological crises occur when human error causes disruptions (Human breakdowns). People tend to assign blame for a technological disaster because technology is subject to human manipulation whereas they do not hold anyone responsible for natural disaster. Examples include software failures, industrial accidents, and oil spills.

6.3.3   Confrontation Crisis

Confrontation crisis occur when discontented individuals and/or groups fight organizations, government, and various interest groups to win acceptance of their demands and expectations as frequently happens in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, disrupting oil explorations and drillings. Other common type of confrontation crisis is boycotts and picketing by workers or the labour union, sit-ins, ultimatums to those in authority, blockade or occupation of buildings, and resisting or disobeying police. Examples in Nigeria include ultimatums by militant groups in the Niger Delta to oil companies to down tools (James & James 2008).

6.3.4   Crisis of Malevolence

An organization faces a crisis of malevolence when opponents or miscreant individuals use criminal means or other extreme tactics for the purpose of expressing hostility or anger toward, or seeking gain from a company, country or economic system, perhaps with the aim of destabilizing or destroying it. Examples of crisis malevolence include product tampering, kidnapping, malicious rumors, terrorism, and espionage.

6.3.5   Crises of Skewed Management Values

Crises of skewed management values are caused when managers favor short-term economic gain and neglect broader social values and stakeholders other than investors. This state of lopsided

values is rooted in the classical business creed that focuses on the interests of stockholders and tends to disregard the interests of its other stakeholders such as customers, employees, and the community.

7. Empirical Review

Ulmer (2001) in his study on impact of crisis management on organizations effectiveness using the quantitative research approach found that most research on crisis management illustrates that organizations often emphasize their own concerns over those of stakeholders and that "their communication is largely focused on legal concerns and typically results in denials of responsibility and lack of useful information to stakeholders" (p. 608). The organization should, in Ulmer's recommendation, attempt to see how crisis events affect their stakeholders and not focus only on stockholders. An organization's first priority should be protecting its stakeholders from any types of negative effects, including physical, financial, and psychological harm; reputational and financial concerns should only have second priority (Coombs, 2007a; 2010a; Holladay, 2010).

Research reveals that organizations frequently make obvious mistakes in their crisis communication such as denying the crisis, evading responsibility, trying to shift blame, or lying about evidence (Nathan, 2000; Ulmer et al., 2010). Mitroff (2004) observed that one of the most significant barriers to effective crisis handling is denial. Kim, Avery and Lariscy (2009) analyzed public relations research from 1991 to 2009, using the framework of Benoit's (1997b) Image Restoration Theory and Coombs' (2007a) Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Their study shows that the most frequently used crisis response strategies by organizations were bolstering (58.8%), denial (56.9%), mortification (45.1%), attack-the-accuser (36.7%), and shifting-the-blame (34.7%). They observed that the most effective crisis strategies were full apology (71.4%), mortification (52.4%), corrective action (52.2%), and bolstering (50%). The least effective strategy, in regard of the outcome of the crisis situation, was denial although it was the most often used strategy. The majority of crises were preventable crisis (53%), accident (31%), and victim (20%). Their research apparently demonstrates that practitioners do not seem to consider advice directives developed by academic research (Galloway, 2004; Sterne, 2008). The findings suggest that there may be a gap between crisis communication practice and academic research. For instance, the denial strategy, which ignores the victims of a crisis, is only useful if the organization has really no responsibility for a crisis (Coombs, 1999).

8. Methodology

Opinion survey design was adopted in this study. The main instrument for data collection was an interview schedule. The population of the study was the host community members from Bonny in Rivers State, Warri in Delta State and Eket in Akwa-Ibom State, being three major oil producing States in the country. The 3 selected IOCs were Shell in Rivers State, Mobil in Eket, Akwa-Ibom State and Agip oil in Warri, Delta State. A non-probability sampling method of purposive or judgmental sampling technique was used to arrive at a sample size of 12 for the host communities and 3 for the oil companies, bringing it to 15. Hence, a total of 15 respondents were interviewed in the study. The distribution of the sample frame is as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents for the Interviews

Respondents	Number of Respondents	Type of Respondents	Percentage
Bonny	4	2 opinion leaders, 2 youth leaders	26.67%
Warri	4	2 opinion leaders, 2 youth leaders	26.67%
Eket	4	2 opinion leaders, 2 youth leaders	26.67%
Shell	1	A management staff	6.67%
Mobil	1	A management staff	6.67%
Agip	1	A management staff	6.67%
Total	**15**		**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

9. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data procured were analyzed qualitatively. Each of the respondents was interviewed in exactly one hour, thirty minutes. Telephone interview was used on the oil companies' managers and some of community opinion leaders, while face to face interview was used for the youth leaders. The respondents were all literate enough to understand the questions posed and within the ages of 20 to 60 years. Due to the nature of the questions, research questions 1 and 3 were posed on the three oil companies' managers, while research question 2 was posed on the communities' opinion and youth leaders.

Research Question 1: What are the types of public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs in Nigeria in managing their host community publics?

Table 2: Respondents' answers on the types of public relations crisis management tools employed by their companies.

S/N	Respondent	Public Relations Crisis Management Tools
1	Shell Manager	Periodic meetings with community groups, execution of some corporate social responsibility projects in various host communities, award of scholarships to youths in the area, employment quota and reservation of certain jobs to people from the host communities. Others include sponsorship of festivals and special events of the people, press briefings, press releases, issues-monitoring and research, prompt cleaning of oil spills pro-active crisis management practice.
2	Mobil Manager	Periodic press conferences, conducting facility visits and guided tours for traditional rulers, opinion and youth leaders from the host communities, production of documentary films, radio jingles and TV commercials on the good works of Mobil in the area. Others include: building corporate social responsibility projects like roads, schools, hospitals, markets for the host communities, award of scholarships to the indigenes, employment quota to the people, sponsorship and participation in their annual festivals and special events. The use of dialogue and meetings to resolve conflicts with the people.
3	Agip Manager	Issues-monitoring in order to nip them in the buds before they balloon into crisis. Periodic welfare packages, season's greeting cards, hampers, corporate gifts and souvenirs to the people. Solidarity and condolence visits to diseased members of the communities officially reported to Agip. Others include: organizing workshops/seminars for public relations staff of Agip on latest conflict-management styles, periodic meetings with the people to resolve all conflicts via dialogue rather than confrontation, routine/courtesy visits to traditional rulers and opinion leaders in the areas.

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Analysis of data displayed on Table 2 shows that the international oil corporations operating in Nigeria, have a wide array of public relations tools and strategies for checkmating and managing conflicts and crises with their host communities' publics. However, this researcher asked the managers a yawning question on why despite all these, they are still experiencing youths' restiveness, militancy, vandalization of their facilities, kidnap and hostage-taking of their workers sometimes. The three replied that it is because human beings are insatiable. This then called for hearing from the host community members themselves on their own point of view.

Research Question 2: Do the public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and their host community publics?

Table 3: Respondents' answers on whether the public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and their host community publics

S/N	Respondent	Viewpoints and Reasons Adduced
1	1st Bonny opinion leader	I will say yes, because if you check the periods we have peace and the periods we have problems with the IOCs, you can see that the periods of peace with them is more
2	2nd Bonny opinion leader	The answer to your question is yes and no, because some people here are happy with them, while others are aggrieved.
3	1st Bonny youth leader	We are not happy because they recognize only the traditional rulers, big men and politicians from here. So, we will continue to fight them
4	2nd Bonny youth leader	They give money to traditional rulers and scholarship to their sons and daughters only. It is only when we strike that they remember us.
5	1st Warri opinion leader	We are happy with them when they are doing good, like now, but when they neglect us, we also try to show them that we matter. However, I think they're doing well with us.
6	2nd Warri opinion leader	As long as I am concerned, the public relations crisis management of IOCs with us is working, because you can see we have enjoyed relative peace and mutual understanding with them here for quite a while now. However, they need to sustain the peace and good relationship they have with our people now.
7	1st Warri youth leader	Those people, they will come here settle some people, leave others. Is that what you call public relations? If they're the ones that sent you, tell them to be ready for us, finishes!
8	2nd Warri youth leader	I don't have anything to tell you. Go back and tell them that you did not see me, he answered, showing total disappointment
9	1st Eket opinion leader	Well, we have been enjoying cordial relationship with Mobil, here.
10	2nd Eket opinion leader	So far, we don't have much problems with them. But, they have to help us fix some of the bad roads here.
11	1st Eket youth leader	Their scholarship awards and jobs are given only to well-connected people. My brother, if you're not well-connected, forgets it.
12	2nd Eket youth leader	I don't have anything to say, they give contracts only to people they know, that's why I'm not happy with them.

Source: Field Survey, 2018.
Analysis of data displayed

on table 3 above, shows that majority of the opinion leaders interviewed, which include traditional rulers, prominent men and political leaders within the area of study were happy with the IOCs, while the youths in the area are largely dissatisfied. This shows that the public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs do not have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and their host community publics, since the youth are more in population than the opinion leaders, and are also more restive, more militant and more destructive.

Research Question 3: Do the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs contribute significantly to their corporate performance?

Table 4: Respondents' answers on whether the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs contribute significantly to their corporate performance.

S/N	Respondent	Viewpoints
1	Shell Manager	Even though there has been vandalization of some of our oil pipelines, but the percentage is insignificant compared with the ones that are working. Based on that, I would say that our public relations crisis

		management tools have contributed positively to our corporate performance over the years
2	Mobil Manager	Apart from some isolated kidnap of our workers by some aggrieved youths in the past, we have not really witnessed disruptions in operations. So. I can confidently say that our public relations crisis management tools have contributed positively in significant ways to our corporate performance
3	Agip Manager	To be best of my knowledge, our public relations crisis management tools is what have kept the restive youths at bay, hence, the have contributed positively to our corporate performance

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Analysis of data on table 4 reveal that all the three managers of the three oil companies were unanimous that the public relations crisis management tools of their companies have contributed significantly to their corporate performance over the years.

10. **Summary of Results**

A summary of the results of this study shows that;

The international oil corporations operating in Nigeria have a wide array of public relations tools and strategies for checkmating and managing conflicts and crises with their host communities' publics.

 i.   The public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs do not have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and majority of their host community publics.
 ii. The public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs have contributed significantly to their corporate performance over the years.

11. **Discussion**

The result number one of this study which shows that the international oil corporations operating in Nigeria, have a wide array of public relations tools and strategies for checkmating and managing conflicts and crises with their host communities' publics, is a demonstration of the fact that the IOCs in Nigeria are not resting on their oars regarding having a peaceful working climate. This agrees with the fact that public relations efforts are never in vain, and the money invested into it is never in vain. This is buttressed by the observations of Onwunali *et al* (2006), that public relations always try to align the policies and programmes of an organization in such a way that it will favour both the organization and its internal and external publics, so that there will be a mutual outcome. However, this is diluted by the number two result which reveals that the public relations crisis management tools employed by the IOCs do not have significant effect in maintaining mutual understanding between them and majority of their host community publics. Probably, this has to do with the styles and approaches adopted by the IOCs in executing those public relations programmes and projects, and not with the public relations tools, media and strategies employed. For crisis management to work, it must target the right publics with the right tools, through the right media, otherwise, even the best PR plan and strategy could be rubbished (Nkwocha, 2016; Odigbo *et al.,* 2013). The IOCs in Nigeria need to recognize this and make it part of their public

relations master plan for long term organizational survival in the storm of crisis (Matai, 2010; Romano, 2012).

Even though the number three result shows that the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs have contributed significantly to their corporate performance over the years, but they could still do better than that, when youths' restiveness, vandalization of oil pipelines and hostage-taking of oil workers becomes a thing of the past. This could only be made possible through effective public relations crisis management plans and actions (Ndu and Agbonifoh, 2014).

12. **Conclusion**

Youths' restiveness, community agitations and environmental activism have at one time or the other beclouded the public relations efforts of the international oil companies (IOCs) operating in the Niger Delta area of the country, where over 90 percent of the country's oil revenue come from. At the height of the Niger Delta crisis, oil flow stations were shut down, thus, reducing the nation's petroleum production capacity. This was followed by vandalization of oil pipelines and other facilities, hostage taking of oil workers especially the expatriates, sometimes leading to loss of lives. All these brought economic losses of quantum proportions to the nation. This study, however, reveals that the public relations efforts of the major oil corporations were not in vain, as it has to some degree promoted a level of cordial relationship between the IOCs and their host communities. However, there is still room for improvement since some members of their host communities, especially majority of the youth groups are not yet happy with them.

13. **Recommendations**

Mindful of the outcome of this study, it is recommended as follows:

 i.   The IOCs in Nigeria must do everything possible to win over and carry along the aggrieved youths' publics within their host communities, through astute public relations crisis management strategies.
 ii. The IOCs in Nigeria should not allow the situation in the Niger Delta to relapse to the bad old days of kidnappings and hostage-taking of oil workers. They must try to improve upon the level of mutual understanding between them and their host communities, through effective public relations crisis management tools.
 iii. The IOCs should also try not to be selective in dispensing their public relations goodies to members of their host communities, but try to accommodate all the groups in all their public relations programmes and practices.
 iv. The Nigerian owned oil corporations and the regulatory agencies should also aid the IOCs by contributing their own quota to ensure that the Niger Delta region remains a crisis-free environment, safe for oil productions, for consequent optimal revenue to the nation.

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