Use of Branding in Managing Reputation in Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement

AYEOWUEKE, Soye Opuiyo
Department of English and Communication Arts.
Faculty of Humanities
Rivers State University
Port Harcourt, Nigeria
soyeopuiyo@gmail.com
08023197197

Abstract

This study examined the use of branding in managing the reputation of the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Three research objectives and three research questions guided the study. The population of the study consisted of 49 management personnel and public relations or communication officers. A structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Use of Branding in Managing Reputation" was used as instrument for data collection. Three experts validated the instrument while test-retest method was used to obtain the reliability coefficient index of 0.79. 49 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and used for the study. Data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that branding strategies positively influenced the reputation of the Bureau, while communication and public relations practices contributed significantly to enhancing the institution's image and stakeholder trust. Descriptive findings further showed general agreement among respondents on the effectiveness of branding and communication activities within the Bureau. The study concluded that strong relationships exist among branding, communication, institutional reputation, and stakeholder trust, and that effective branding supported by consistent communication improves public confidence in the institution. Based on these findings, the study recommended that the Bureau should strengthen its branding strategies, improve communication channels, and maintain transparency in its operations in order to sustain public trust and enhance its institutional image.

Keywords: Branding, Reputation Management, Public Procurement, Stakeholder Trust.

Introduction

Branding is no longer viewed as an exclusive activity in the private sector; it is becoming a crucial instrument in perception and trust formation in the institutions of the population, particularly in agencies that need to maintain transparency and accountability in their governance (Awah, 2022). Branding in the context of public procurement, where credibility and openness is always questioned, has a subtle, but potent effect on stakeholder perceptions of institutional integrity and performance (Akujuru, 2024). The environment in which the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement functions is characterized by a weak level of public trust induced by historical issues with corruption and ineffective procurement regimes in Nigeria (Nkpee, 2020). In this regard, the necessity of creating the image that will be consistent and trustworthy becomes not only desirable but a prerequisite of the effective institutional functioning (Ukaegbu, 2024). Research has revealed that the organizations that actively control their brand image are more likely to have increased stakeholder trust, higher rates of compliance and enhanced cooperation of vendors and the overall population (Maina, 2024). Although Maina stresses that branding improves the performance of the organisational in the procurement authority in Kenya, in Nigeria, such initiatives might encounter specific difficulties, including political interference, poor communication networks (Maina et al., 2024).

Moreover, branding in governmental organizations tends to be more or less similar to the practice of PR, such as transparency campaigns, stakeholder involvement, and media communication approaches (Ukaegbu, 2024). These factors help to create the general image of the organisation, which has a direct impact on its legitimacy and performance (Awah, 2022). The empirical evidence provided by the Bureau of Public Procurement in Nigeria suggests that previously procurement malpractices and anomalies have lowered citizens' trust in the governmental organization, which also emphasizes the necessity of restoring trust by means of strategic communication and identity management (Akujuru, 2024).

Equally, international statistics indicate the existence of a positive relationship between transparent and well branded procurement systems and investor confidence and lower corruption risks in countries, as indicated by global data of the World Bank (World Bank, 2023). Thus, branding is becoming a more pertinent component of reputation management to be incorporated into the work of the public procurement agencies, such as Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement (Nkpee, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Although the public procurement systems in Nigeria have been reformed, the lack of trust and low public perception continue to affect the effectiveness of many government agencies in Nigeria (Akujuru, 2024). These challenges do not spare Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement, and problems like the perceived absence of transparency, poor communication strategies, and the lack of involvement of people still remain in its reputation (Nkpee, 2020). Although improvements have been made in the procurement processes and accountability structures, not much focus has been put on branding as a strategic instrument to run institutional image (Awah, 2022). The experience of other comparable institutions suggests that ineffective branding may lead to misinformation, lack of trust, and vendor and contractor opposition (Maina, 2024). Nevertheless, the current literature in Rivers State is more oriented towards the efficiency of procurement and the relations with suppliers than on the effects of branding on reputation (Nkpee et al., 2020). This difference opens a necessity to discuss the methods of branding that can be properly applied to enhance the reputation of the Bureau and increase trust in people (Ukaegbu, 2024).

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the use of branding in managing reputation in the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of branding strategies on the reputation of the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement.
2. Assess how public relations and communication practices influence institutional image.
3. Determine the relationship between branding and stakeholder trust in the Bureau.

Research Questions

1. How do branding strategies affect the reputation of the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement?
2. What role do communication and public relations practices play in shaping the Bureau's image?
3. What is the relationship between branding and stakeholder trust in the Bureau?

Concept of Branding

Branding can be defined as a conscious attempt on the part of an organisation to establish a distinctive identity that defines how the organisation will be viewed by its stakeholders and the general populace (Farrington, 2020). It transcends logos or slogans and encompasses values, communication patterns, and consistent behaviour that create recognition and trust in the long-term (Blind, 2020). Branding is not as evident in public institutions, though it remains highly significant due to its impact on the ways the citizens perceive the actions of the government and the policies (Ojo, 2024). Although there are scholars who view branding as a marketing instrument, there are scholars who believe that in governance contexts it can be regarded as a trust building tool that alleviates uncertainty and enhances transparency (Yahaya, 2020). As an example, an organisation with a clear and consistent identity is less likely to have misunderstandings with stakeholders (Ogunsanya, 2022). Branding in the Nigerian context might have obstacles as a result of poor institutional frameworks, but it is one of the main stimulants of confidence among people when used appropriately (Farrington et al., 2020).

Concept of Reputation Management

Reputation management is the act of taking deliberate steps to shape the perception of an organisation by its stakeholders in relation to its actions, communication and performance (Casady, 2020). Not only is it related to responding to crises but also to creating a positive image in the long run through a stable behaviour and accountability (Liu, 2021). Reputation in the context of the state procurement is closely interconnected with the transparency and equity in contract awarding, which directly influences the public trust (Ojo, 2024). Although there are researchers that suggest that reputation is influenced primarily by previous behavior, others emphasize that the impact of communication on the formation of the public image is also important despite the fact that the performance is improving (Chersan, 2020).

To illustrate, agencies that do not report their success usually have problems with the negative perception even when they have achieved something internally (Yahaya, 2020). The international data presented by the OECD indicates that the higher the procurement transparency system of a country, the higher it will be in the index of public trust, which confirms the significance of reputation management (OECD, 2022). Therefore, good performance and effective communication strategies are necessary in managing reputation (Casady et al., 2020).

Public Sector Branding

Public sector branding can be described as the manner in which state institutions represent themselves to the people to achieve trust, legitimacy, and acceptance (Blind, 2020). As opposed to the private organizations , which strive to make a profit, the branding of the public institutions helps to enhance credibility and serve as a way to show accountability in the service provision (Lăzăroiu, 2020). This complicates branding in the public sector because it needs to strike a balance between transparency and political and social demands (Chersan, 2020). Some scholars think that branding in the public sector remains underdeveloped, but others opine that it is slowly becoming relevant with the growing need to account and actively involve citizens (Ogunsanya, 2022). The problem of poor communication channels in Nigeria is common in the public agencies, which influences the way their activities are viewed by the people (Ojo, 2024). Nevertheless, international cases demonstrate that the governments that invest in branding activities are more likely to have better citizen trust and engagement (World Bank, 2023). According to this insight, branding of the public sector is crucial in creating the perception of institutions, such as procurement agencies (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020).

Branding Strategies in Government Institutions

In government institutions, branding strategies are organized attempts to convey values, develop trust, and have a stable image in all interactions with the stakeholders (Farrington, 2020). These measures commonly encompass awareness campaigns in society, stakeholder engagement programmes, and transparency initiatives that showcase institutional performance (Liu, 2021). Whereas certain agencies depend on formal communication methods greatly, others have more interactive strategies like community engagement and electronic platforms (Yahaya, 2020). Bureaucracy and innovation deficiency in the Nigerian context limits branding strategies and make them less effective (Ogunsanya, 2022). Nonetheless, research has demonstrated that the more transparent and straightforward communication practices are followed in institutions, the more people will trust and cooperate with them (Blind, 2020). As an illustration, the procurement agencies that publicly publish contract-related information are less likely to evoke suspicion and enhance stakeholder trust (Ojo, 2024). Thus, good branding plans must be based on good communication as well as institutional consistency in behaviour (Farrington et al., 2020).

Reputation Management in Public Procurement Agencies

Management of reputation in the public procurement agencies focuses on transparency, fairness, and responsibility in all the procurement processes to uphold a trusting relationship with the people (Casady, 2020). The environments that these agencies work in are one that face a lot of scrutiny, and thus, their reputation is very sensitive to any perceived misconduct (Ojo, 2024). Although certain scholars believe that observing the procurement laws strictly is sufficient to preserve the reputation, some also believe that communication and stakeholder interaction is also crucial (Yahaya, 2020). Practically, the lack of clarity in communication of the processes by agencies leads to distrust even after adherence to the regulations (Chersan, 2020). According to the information provided by Transparency International, the incidences of corruption and institutional credibility are lower in those countries with a transparent procurement system (Transparency International, 2022). Political interference and poor public awareness remain some of the challenges to the procurement reputation in Nigeria (Ogunsanya, 2022). This means that reputation management in such agencies must be through a combination of transparency, good communication, and regular ethical conduct (Casady et al., 2020).

Empirical Review

George et al. (2024) conducted a study that investigated the collaboration of the public and the private sectors in solving complex institutional challenges with consideration of how organizational design, alignment of stakeholders, and coordinated communication would influence public confidence in the joint governance endeavors. The purpose of the study was to conduct a review of the impact of collaborative structures on institutional effectiveness and legitimacy.

It was conducted as an international survey of previous researches as opposed to in a single nation, with documented findings on research on the collaboration of the public and the privates. The sample consisted of published literature of collaborative governance whereas the population consisted of selected peer reviewed articles pertinent to organizational partnerships. The data were gathered by reviewing the documents and analyzed with the help of thematic and content analysis. The researchers determined that agencies that identified themselves well, messaged effectively, and identified the stakeholders had higher chances to be legitimate and trusted, but poor communication harmed the perception of the citizens. The authors determined that institutional image is enhanced when organizations display congruency in purpose and behavior. On this insight, they suggested more explicit engagement techniques and more robust reputation-oriented communication within the public institutions. The reviewed study is similar to this current study regarding that both studies focused on the effectiveness of government establishments but differs in certain areas such as the design of the study, the instrument used and the methodology applied.

Okolie and Edo (2023) examined problems and failure of infrastructure project implementation in Nigeria, where the aim was to determine the governance and management factors that undermine the project performance and trust of the people in the state institutions. The research was conducted in Nigeria and was on the public sector system of infrastructure delivery. The population was encompassed of public project stakeholders, policy records, and implementation experiences that are discussed within the chosen materials whereas the sample was selected based on the available documentary and academic evidence on failed projects. The secondary sources were used to collect data and the descriptive content analysis was used to analyze the data. The study indicated that poor transparency, communication, and inconsistent management practices were factors that significantly contributed to project failure and undermined institutional credibility. It also revealed that when the citizenry feels that there is a difference between what the authorities say and what they do, reputation is lost irrespective of what is on paper. Thus, the research came to the conclusion that the element of institutional trust is not merely a matter of performance, but also of the manner in which the performance is conveyed. The authors suggested more robust accountability mechanisms and more effective communication to the public in order to enhance the perception of the public. Though both studies focused on government establishments and government projects, they differ in terms of scope. While the present study focused on a single government establishment and their activities to Rivers State, the previous study had a wider cover across the country Nigeria. They also differ in terms of instrument used for data collection and methodology used for analysis.

In his work, Whiteside (2020) conducted research on the topic of public private partnerships and management reform and how market-based governance strategies transformed the public institutions and impacted their public status. The aim was to explore the impacts of reform-based management systems on service delivery, legitimacy and institutional authority. The research was framed within the wider analysis of the reform processes in the public sector and relied on the policy and governance literature in a variety of contexts. The sample included the selected texts on the restructuring of public institutions, and the population included documents of public sector reforms and academic literature on the governance of a partnership. The qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze data collected by document analysis. The results indicated that managerial image, efficiency claims, and stakeholder persuasion reforms tended to affect the judging of institutions by citizens. It also discovered that in areas in which the reform messages were not accompanied by observable accountability, the skepticism of the people heightened. In this way, the research found out that unbelievable image management undermines trust. It suggested that government agencies should align their communication, service delivery, and accountability in case they want to attain sustained reputational power. The both studies relate in terms of focus on public or government projects and activities but differs in terms of instrument used for data collection and methodology in terms of analysis and reporting.

Methodology

This research study took a descriptive survey research design in order to investigate the effect of branding on reputation in Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement. The design was appropriate since it facilitated collection of data on perceptions, experience and attitudes without manipulating any of the variables. It also allowed the use of quantitative techniques to analyze relationships between branding practices and reputation outcomes. The research was conducted in the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement, which was chosen due to its purpose of controlling the procurement operations and ensuring transparency in the government operations.

The Bureau offered working environment where the questions of branding, communication and perception of people are extremely topical. This was a sample of the management personnel and the public relations or communication officers since they were directly engaged in decision making and communication within the institution. The sample size was purposively chosen and was 49 respondents, and this sample size was sufficient to guarantee that only those people with the relevant knowledge took part in the study.

Table 1: Population Distribution

S/N	Respondent Category	Sample Size
1.	Management Staff	10
2.	Public Relations/Communication Officers	39
	Total	49

The structured questionnaire was used in data collection that was based on a four-point Likert scale of strongly agree (SA) – 4 points, agree (A) – 3 points, disagree (D) – 2 points, and strongly disagree (SD) – 1 point. This structure made the responses simple to analyse and understand. The instrument was also checked by the experts in order to ensure that the instrument was able to measure the intended variables and reliability was determined by the test-retest method which ensured that the instrument was consistent over time. The questionnaires were given to respondents personally, to guarantee a high response rate and precision in data gathering. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyse the data collected and provide answers to the research questions.

Results

Demographic Information of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	26	53.2%
	Female	23	46.8%
Age	20–30 years	13	24.4%
	31–40 years	17	35.6%
	41–50 years	11	22.8%
	51 years and above	8	17.2%
Position	Management Staff	23	47.6%
	Public Relations/Communication Officers	26	52.4%
Years of Experience	1–5 years	13	26.8%
	6–10 years	15	31.6%
	11–15 years	11	22.0%
	16 years and above	10	19.6%
	Total	**49**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The demographic findings revealed a relatively balanced gender distribution among the respondents, with males accounting for 26 respondents (53.2%) and females constituting 23 respondents (46.8%). This indicates that the study captured perspectives from both genders in a reasonably representative manner. In terms of age distribution, respondents within the 31–40 years' category formed the largest group, comprising 17 respondents (35.6%). This suggests that a substantial proportion of the participants were within their active professional years and were likely to possess considerable knowledge of institutional communication and branding practices. Regarding position, Public Relations and Communication Officers constituted the majority with 26 respondents (52.4%), while Management Staff accounted for 23 respondents (47.6%). This balance ensured that the study benefited from both operational and strategic viewpoints concerning communication and branding activities within the organizations. The representation of both groups strengthened the reliability of the responses obtained.

With respect to years of experience, the largest category consisted of respondents with 6–10 years of professional experience, numbering 15 (31.6%). This was followed by those with 1–5 years of experience (13 respondents, 26.8%), 11–15 years of experience (11 respondents, 22.0%), and 16 years and above (10 respondents, 19.6%). The distribution indicates that the respondents possessed adequate professional exposure to provide informed opinions on the issues investigated, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study findings.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 2: Responses on Branding Strategies and Reputation of the Bureau

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The Bureau had a clearly defined brand identity.	19 (38.8%)	16 (32.7%)	9 (18.4%)	5 (10.2%)	49	2.99	1.01	Accepted
2	Branding strategies improved public perception of the Bureau.	20 (40.8%)	15 (30.6%)	7 (14.3%)	7 (14.3%)	49	3.02	1.02	Accepted
3	Consistent branding enhanced the credibility of the Bureau.	18 (36.7%)	18 (36.7%)	8 (16.3%)	5 (10.2%)	49	2.98	1.01	Accepted
4	The Bureau's visual identity reflected professionalism and trust.	17 (34.7%)	19 (38.8%)	6 (12.2%)	7 (14.3%)	49	2.97	0.98	Accepted
5	Branding helped distinguish the Bureau from other government agencies.	19 (38.8%)	15 (30.6%)	10 (20.4%)	5 (10.2%)	49	2.98	0.99	Accepted
	Total	**93 (38.0%)**	**83 (33.9%)**	**40 (16.3%)**	**29 (11.8%)**	**245**	**2.99**	**1.00**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 shows that respondents generally agreed that branding strategies positively influenced the reputation of the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement. Across the five items, the majority of respondents selected either Strongly Agree or Agree, indicating a favorable perception of the Bureau's branding efforts. Specifically, 19 respondents (38.8%) strongly agreed and 16 (32.7%) agreed that the Bureau had a clearly defined brand identity, while 20 respondents (40.8%) strongly agreed that branding strategies improved public perception of the Bureau, making it the most strongly supported statement. Similarly, respondents acknowledged that consistent branding enhanced the Bureau's credibility, that its visual identity reflected professionalism and trust, and that branding helped distinguish it from other government agencies. The grand mean score of 2.99 exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating acceptance of all the items. This finding suggests that branding strategies have played a significant role in strengthening the Bureau's image, credibility, and public reputation.

Table 3: Responses on Communication, Public Relations Practices, and the Bureau's Image

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	SD	Decision
6	The Bureau communicated effectively with stakeholders.	17 (34.7%)	18 (36.7%)	8 (16.3%)	6 (12.3%)	49	2.93	1.00	Accepted
7	Public relations activities enhanced the image of the Bureau.	19 (38.8%)	16 (32.7%)	9 (18.4%)	5 (10.1%)	49	3.01	1.00	Accepted
8	Timely information dissemination improved public trust.	20 (40.8%)	15 (30.6%)	8 (16.3%)	6 (12.3%)	49	3.01	1.01	Accepted
9	Media engagement positively influenced the Bureau's reputation.	17 (34.7%)	19 (38.8%)	7 (14.3%)	6 (12.2%)	49	2.96	0.99	Accepted
10	Feedback from stakeholders was properly managed by the Bureau.	16 (32.7%)	18 (36.7%)	10 (20.4%)	5 (10.2%)	49	2.90	1.00	Accepted
	Total	**89 (36.3%)**	**86 (35.1%)**	**42 (17.1%)**	**28 (11.4%)**	**245**	**2.96**	**1.00**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 indicates that communication and public relations practices contributed significantly to the image of the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement. The responses show a strong positive disposition among respondents, with Strongly Agree and Agree categories accounting for a combined 175 responses (71.4%) out of the 245 total responses recorded across the five items. The statement that timely information dissemination improved public trust received one of the highest levels of support, with 20 respondents (40.8%) strongly agreeing and 15 (30.6%) agreeing, resulting in a mean score of 3.01. Similarly, public relations activities were perceived to enhance the image of the Bureau, also recording a mean of 3.01. Respondents further agreed that the Bureau communicated effectively with stakeholders, that media engagement positively influenced its reputation, and that stakeholder feedback was adequately managed. Although feedback management recorded the lowest mean score of 2.90, it remained above the acceptance benchmark of 2.50. The grand mean of 2.96 confirms the acceptance of all the items and suggests that effective communication, stakeholder engagement, timely information dissemination, and public relations activities played important roles in shaping and sustaining the Bureau's positive public image.

Table 4: Responses on Branding and Stakeholder Trust in the Bureau

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	SD	Decision
11	Strong branding increased stakeholder trust in the Bureau.	19 (38.8%)	17 (34.7%)	8 (16.3%)	5 (10.2%)	49	3.01	0.99	Accepted
12	Transparent branding practices improved stakeholder confidence.	21 (42.9%)	14 (28.6%)	8 (16.3%)	6 (12.2%)	49	3.02	1.03	Accepted
13	Stakeholders were more likely to engage with a well-branded Bureau.	18 (36.7%)	18 (36.7%)	7 (14.3%)	6 (12.3%)	49	2.97	1.00	Accepted
14	Branding influenced stakeholders' perception of accountability.	18 (36.7%)	17 (34.7%)	9 (18.4%)	5 (10.2%)	49	2.97	1.01	Accepted
15	A positive brand image led to long-term stakeholder trust.	20 (40.8%)	15 (30.6%)	8 (16.3%)	6 (12.3%)	49	2.99	1.02	Accepted
	Total	**96 (39.2%)**	**81 (33.1%)**	**40 (16.3%)**	**28 (11.4%)**	**245**	**2.99**	**1.01**	**Accepted**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 reveals a positive relationship between branding and stakeholder trust in the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement. The findings indicate that respondents generally agreed that branding contributes significantly to building and sustaining stakeholder trust. Overall, the Strongly Agree category accounted for 96 responses (39.2%), while the Agree category recorded 81 responses (33.1%), giving a combined positive response rate of 72.3%. The statement that transparent branding practices improved stakeholder confidence recorded the highest mean score of 3.02, with 21 respondents (42.9%) strongly agreeing and 14 (28.6%) agreeing, suggesting that transparency is a key factor in strengthening stakeholder confidence and trust. Respondents also agreed that strong branding increased stakeholder trust, encouraged stakeholder engagement, enhanced perceptions of accountability, and fostered long-term trust in the Bureau. The grand mean of 2.99 exceeded the benchmark mean of 2.50, leading to the acceptance of all the statements. Furthermore, the standard deviation values, ranging from 0.99 to 1.03, indicate a reasonable level of consistency in respondents' views. The findings therefore suggest that effective branding plays an important role in enhancing stakeholder trust and confidence in the Bureau.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study demonstrated that branding strategies were highly significant in influencing the reputation of the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement, suggesting that the manner in which the organisation presents and communicates its identity plays a critical role in shaping public perception. Respondents particularly agreed that branding strategies improved public perception of the Bureau, while also enhancing its credibility, professionalism, and distinctiveness among government institutions. This finding supports the argument of Blind (2020) that institutional reputation extends beyond operational performance to include how organisational values and activities are communicated to stakeholders. Similarly, Blind et al. (2020) maintained that public institutions derive legitimacy not only from efficiency but also from their ability to communicate their identity and achievements effectively. However, while these scholars emphasized standardisation and innovation as drivers of institutional reputation, the Nigerian public sector context presents challenges such as bureaucratic constraints and weak institutional structures that may affect the effective implementation of branding initiatives (Ogunsanya, 2022).

The study further revealed that communication and public relations practices contributed significantly to the image of the Bureau. Respondents strongly agreed that public relations activities enhanced the image of the Bureau and that timely information dissemination improved public trust. These findings reinforce the position of George (2024), who argued that strategic communication and stakeholder engagement are essential components of institutional image building. The findings suggest that effective communication creates opportunities for transparency, fosters public confidence, and strengthens organisational legitimacy. George et al. (2024) further noted that coordinated communication efforts enhance institutional visibility and stakeholder acceptance. The present study extends this argument by demonstrating that even within a public procurement agency, regular information dissemination, media engagement, and stakeholder interactions positively influence public perceptions. Nevertheless, challenges such as inadequate information-sharing mechanisms and limited stakeholder engagement, which have been identified in Nigerian public institutions, may still undermine communication effectiveness (Okolie, 2023).

Moreover, the findings confirmed a significant relationship between branding and stakeholder trust, indicating that trust is influenced not only by institutional performance but also by how that performance is communicated and perceived. Respondents particularly agreed that transparent branding practices improved stakeholder confidence and that strong branding increased stakeholder trust in the Bureau. This finding aligns with Whiteside (2020), who argued that public trust is strengthened when institutions consistently communicate their values, responsibilities, and achievements in a transparent manner. Although Whiteside focused primarily on governance reforms and market-oriented approaches, the present study demonstrates that trust within public procurement institutions is also strongly linked to branding, transparency, and effective reputation management. Furthermore, Klein (2020) emphasized that responsible and consistent institutional behaviour contributes to the development of a positive organisational image. The findings of this study support this assertion by showing that a positive and transparent brand image encourages stakeholder engagement, strengthens perceptions of accountability, and promotes long-term trust in public institutions.

Conclusion

The study examined the role of branding in reputation management at the Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement and established that branding is a significant factor in shaping institutional reputation. The findings revealed that effective branding strategies enhanced public perception, strengthened organizational credibility, and projected the Bureau as a professional and trustworthy institution. The study also showed that branding enabled the Bureau to distinguish itself from other government agencies, thereby contributing to a more favorable public image. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that communication and public relations practices played a vital role in shaping the Bureau's image. Public relations activities, media engagement, stakeholder communication, and timely dissemination of information were found to contribute positively to public trust and institutional legitimacy. The results suggest that communication is not merely a supporting function but a strategic mechanism through which the Bureau reinforces its reputation and sustains positive stakeholder relationships. The analysis further established a strong relationship between branding and stakeholder trust. Stakeholders were more likely to trust, engage with, and maintain confidence in the Bureau when its branding practices reflected transparency, accountability, and consistency. The findings therefore indicate that institutional reputation in the public sector is determined not only by organizational performance but also by the effectiveness with which that performance is communicated and interpreted by stakeholders.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made;

1. The Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement should ensure effective branding strategies as this will help to strengthen the Bureau's image, credibility, and public reputation.
2. The Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement should ensure strategic communication and public relations practices for building and sustaining a positive institutional reputation.
3. The Rivers State Bureau on Public Procurement should continue to strengthen its branding initiatives by promoting transparency, maintaining consistent communication, encouraging stakeholder engagement, and reinforcing accountability in all its activities as such efforts will contribute to sustaining stakeholder trust and enhancing the long-term reputation of the Bureau.

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