The Crisis of Illegal Migration among Nigerian Youth: Probing NOA's Adoption of Strategic Public Relations as a Tool of Mitigation

Samuel Chukwuemeka Nwamini  
Department of Mass Communication,  
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.  
samnwamini@ebsu.edu.ng, 08060904655

Simon Ugochukwu Nwankwo, Ph.D  
Department of Mass Communication,  
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.  
Simonnwankwo4good@gmail.com

Agatha Obiageri Orji-Egwu, Ph.D  
Department of Mass Communication,  
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.  
orjiegwuagatha@gmail.com,08037908932

Abstract  
Media reports has repeatedly shown how promising young Nigerians have lost their lives attempting to seek for greener pasture across the Mediterranean Sea. This desperate journey fuelled by a mind-set that they can only break even abroad has caused many of them an untold hardship. Majority of those who embarked on such journey had paid the ultimate price. This study probes the extent which National Orientation Agency (NOA) empowered by law to sensitize Nigerians on the consequences of such social ills knows and applies strategic public relations techniques in the quest to find solution to the problem. Survey research method was adopted. Structured questionnaire was the instruments for data collection. The study was anchored on Neoclassical Theory of Migration (NTM). The study found that strategic public relations strategies have been rarely adopted by NOA in mitigating the crisis in question, and thus, recommends, training and re-training of NOA staff on the application of strategic public relations in mitigating the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youths.

Keywords: Human Migration, Youth Migration, NOA, Public Relations Strategies.

Introduction  
Youth illegal migration did not start today in Nigeria; right from the colonial era, Nigeria has experienced the illegal migration of her youths to
countries like United Kingdom, United States of America, Spain, Italy and many other countries even in Africa, (Lanre, 2012). Scholars like Atsenuwa and Adepoju (2010), Lanre (2012), Adepoju, Aderanti and Van (2010) and Amalu (2008), have all adduced various reasons and enumerated circumstances that could compel Nigeria youth to illegally migrate to another country in search of greener pasture. These scholars also agreed that harsh economic condition, natural disaster, political conflict, and environmental degradation, quest for higher social status, human right violations, communal conflicts and push and pull factors are the major reasons why Nigeria youths travel in their drove to Europe and America with the premeditated assumption that they can only break even in overseas countries. The analysis and submissions of the above authors show that unemployment, poverty and lack of sustainable jobs formed the highest frame of opinions among their research participants. There are instances of these illegal migrations that results in hardships and migrants eventually end up becoming victims of violence and exploitation (IOM, 2003).

Nigeria boasts of diverse migration configurations of which irregular migration — especially human trafficking and smuggling — is represented prominently (Atsenuwa & Adepoju, 2010:9). Ajabike (2018) writes that political unrest, economic instability, frustration and general deprivation have driven sub Saharan migrants who arrive in Libya through meandering desert routes before facing an even more dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean in fragile overcrowded vessels to Europe. Articulating some of the push factors that entice the youth to illegal migration without recourse to its implication, UNIDO, (2018:12) submits as follow:

The quest for a better life and the attempt to escape poverty has influenced a major segment of Nigeria's population to seek alternatives for better livelihood prospects for themselves and their families. Migration, be it regular or irregular, to Europe and other parts of the world is usually a sought after option considered by those seeking greener pastures. The restrictions and expenses involved in regular migration make individuals opt for irregular migration as an appealing and viable option and this desire for a better life has led many young Nigerians to be smuggled or to fall prey to the deceptions of criminal gangs.

The consequences of illegal migration of Nigeria youths to Europe is alarming, this is why Victoria (2018) reports that a group under the auspices of Migration Enlightenment Project Nigeria (MEPN) has raised the alarm that over 700 Nigerians died in the Mediterranean Sea while migrating illegally in the last six month. Nigerian women, totalling 26, between the ages of 14 to 18 were reportedly found dead recently in a Spanish warship as they
tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Independent Newspaper of 14th April, 2017, suggested that the female illegal migrants might have been sexually abused and murdered. Attributing Nigeria youth illegal migration to Europe as failure of leadership, Newton (2018:23) writes that:

The plague of human trafficking and illegal migration is a national disgrace. It should keep us up at night wondering at the horrors many of our fellow human beings are facing at the exact moment we lie down comfortably in bed. Though; different by definition, as while illegal migrants pay smugglers to assist them cross the borders, victims of trafficking are forced, coerced or deceived for the purpose of exploiting them, both are illegal, and oftentimes, have disastrous consequences for both the trafficked and the illegal migrant.

Newton (2018) identifies appeals to greener pastures, inability to secure legal and safe passage out of the country, domestic syndicate centres in Lagos, Edo, Delta, Anambra (Onitsha) and Abia (Aba), so-called success stories, Nigeria's porous borders as some of the factors orchestrating the crisis. Proffering solution to this ugly development, Newton (2018) says that youth economic empowerment, safe camps for returnees, firm border security, re-orientation of the masses would surely provide part of the dependable solutions to youth illegal migration in Nigeria.

Apart from the solution proffered above by Newton, Ashiekpe, (2017) asserts that public relations strategies can provide way for the individual, group, organization or members of a society to monitor and interact effectively with the other key groups in this subsystem. Explaining the influence of public relations strategy in crisis management, Sandra (2010) avers that whatever is the structure of communication campaign, public relations strategies plays a significant role in making the process more coherent, consistent and result oriented. Ojomo (2006) identifies counselling, research, media relations, publicity, multicultural relations, and workplace diversity as some of the major component of public relations practices. Ashiekpe (2017) is of the view that public relations practice today is without doubt an expanding and diversifying discipline Thompson (1995) maintains that public relations is usually strategic in its approach to crisis management, hence, he concludes that its application in any crisis situation is certainly a means to an end. Meanwhile, Mintzberg (1998) offers five uses of the word strategy; a plan as a consciously intended course of action, a ploy as a specific manoeuvre intended to outwit an opponent or competitors, a pattern representing a stream of actions, a position as means of locating an organization in an environment, a perspective as an integrated way of perceiving the organization's set objective.

Newton (2018) writes that the approach employed by the cartels and
syndicates that perpetrate the crisis seem to be more effective than the one employed by government agencies such as National Orientation Agency, to sensitize the people against the crisis. From the foregoing, the crisis of illegal migration among Nigeria youths requires strategic public relations input. According to him, strategic public relations involves the application of such tools as town hall meeting, workshops, seminars, training in skill acquisition, financial grant to start or enhance existing business and lobbying for job creation and massive employment as strategies in crisis management. This new approach must be considered since the crisis has lingered on in spite of the effort of the National Orientation Agency in mobilizing Nigerians to shun illegal migration. This even more imperative as evidence still shows that promise of fake jobs, modelling contracts in Europe, schooling, booming businesses still lure these youths to undertake the journey. Meanwhile, available literature like Ashiekpe (2017) shows that scholars are exploratory and extrapolative in their probe on Nigeria youth illegal migration, not many have beamed their research lens on the role of National Orientation Agency in forestalling this ugly trend through the application of strategic public relations. This is the gab, part of which, this study tends to fill.

**Statement of the Problem**

National Orientation Agency (NOA) in line with the law establishing it is involved in sensitizing and mobilizing Nigerians, particularly, the youths against social vices, crime and unpatriotic actions. Among the numerous crises engaging the attention of NOA in the contemporary Nigeria is the catastrophic issue of illegal migration among Nigeria youths. Many Nigeria youths through the Mediterranean Sea irregularly migrate to Europe on alarming dimension. It was a CNN journalist, Nima Elbagir who through her undercover documentary had revealed the inhuman treatment mated on African illegal migrants in Libya. This ugly development sparked off global condemnations and criticism.

NOA in her effort to tackle these rising cases of illegal migration and human trafficking among Nigerian youths has adopted several approaches such as the use of radio and television jingles and commercials, organizing seminars, newspaper and magazine publication, formulation of slogan like “do the right thing, transform Nigeria” among others to persuade Nigerian youths against illegal migration and other social vices. All these efforts seem not to be producing the desired result as
literature evidence clearly shows that the problem of illegal migration is rather growing unabated. The scaring videos seen on various social media and television stations regarding the ugly condition and humiliating treatment of these irregular migrant in Libya and many other countries of the world are undisputable evidence that NOA is losing on their constitutional mandate. Meanwhile, research evidence also indicates that not much is known about NOA's application of strategic public relations approach in her efforts to sensitize and mobilize Nigeria youth against illegal migration. This therefore makes it imperative for a probe into NOA's level of knowledge and application of this evolving aspect of public relations practice in tackling the problem of Nigeria youths illegal migration.

**Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to evaluate NOA's level of knowledge and application of strategic public relations in mitigating the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youth. Based on the broad objective the study specifically seeks to:

1. Determine the NOA's level of awareness that strategic public relations can help in mitigating the problem of illegal migration among Nigerian youths.
2. Evaluate NOA's knowledge level in adoption of strategic public relations in tackling illegal migration in Nigeria.
3. Determine NOA's level of application of strategic public relations in handling the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youth.
4. Identify the major inhibitors to NOA's adoption of strategic public relations in managing the crisis of illegal migration among the Nigerian youth.

**Research Questions**

In consideration of the research objectives set out by the study, the following research questions were posed to guide the researcher in data collection and analysis.

RQ1. What is the NOA's level of awareness that strategic public relations can help in mitigating the problem of illegal migration among Nigerian youths?

RQ2. What is the NOA's knowledge level in the adoption of strategic public relations in tackling illegal migration among Nigerian youths?
RQ3. What are the specific strategic public relations tools adopted by NOA in handling the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youths?

RQ4. What is the major inhibitor to NOA’s adoption of public relations strategy in managing the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youths?

Review of Related Literature

The Crisis of Illegal Migration among Nigerian Youths, an Appraisal of NOA's Interventions

National Orientation Agency is a Federal Government agency under the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture established by law to address the social-economic and political ills of the society through unrelenting campaign and communication advocacy to re-orientate Nigerians on the trajectory of social justice and constitutional provisions that guarantees egalitarian society. This mandate given to National Orientation Agency is backed by enabling laws to ensure effectiveness in its operational modalities. Etannibi in Ibikunle (2016) avers that the military regime led by General Ibrahim Babangida recognized the necessity of re-orientating the citizens of the country and laid a foundation that established the Directorate of Social Mobilization, Self-Reliance and Economic Recovery widely known as MAMSER in 1987. This gesture of the then military regime metamorphosed into what is known today as National Orientation Agency. The directorate according to Ibikunle (2016) was effective in public enlightenment and mass mobilization of Nigerians to exhibit positive attitude towards nation building.

According to Wikipedia.com, MAMSER was charged with many responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities include; to cultivate support for the transitional programmes of the military regime, to educate Nigerians about the political process, to mobilize Nigerians to take part in elections and political debates, to propagate the need to eschew all vices in public life; corruption, dishonesty, electoral and census malpractices, ethnic and religious bigotry, fight against consumption, patronage and use of locally made goods in Nigeria among others. Agbo (2016), reports that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) was established by Decree 100 of August 23, 1993. The responsibilities of these organizations was to enlighten Nigeria and Nigerians on social, economic and political consequences of social vices such corruption, dishonesty, electoral malpractice and child trafficking among Nigerian youths (Agbo, 2016).
According to Olusegun (2018), the recurrence of anti-social vices such as drug abuse, political thuggery and kidnapping in our society and their ripple effects on individuals and the society at large is better imagined than experienced.

**Figure 1: A Pictorial Advert against Illegal Migration on Edo State NOA's Website**

![Image](http://www.noa.gov.ng/category/edo/)


**Figure 2: Nigerians inside a motorized boat in a high sea attempting to illegally cross over to Libya**

![Image](Royalty-free photos and images)
Obi (2015) reports that migration has been part of human life and will remain a constant factor in the history of mankind. He further argued that the advent of civilization and globalization and the intensity of the desire of people to travel from one country to another have been on the increase as the world experiences advancement in different areas. Faced with increasingly strict immigration control measures, Nigeria Migration Policy paper believes that a growing number of young Nigerians have adopted more sophisticated, high-risk daring and evasive methods to enter Europe clandestinely (NMP, 2015). According to Emeka (2018), about 171 stranded Nigerians youths from Zintan District of Libya where flown back to the country through the assistance of International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Migration has been differentiated into managed, unmanaged, voluntary and forced migration. It is forced migration that leads to illegal migration crisis that Nigeria state is battling with presently. Children, youth and women remain particularly vulnerable, since they might not enjoy legal protection or access to support networks that would mitigate the risks of exploitation, Global Crisis Centre, (2015). Considering the major motivating factors for youth illegal migration in Nigeria, GCC, (2015:9), notes and explained thus:
Push factors include the numerous reasons why migrants might be incentivized to leave their homes, such as humanitarian concerns (including conflicts), overpopulation and destruction of the local environment, wage stagnation, or job scarcity. Pull factors are incentives for migrants to journey to a certain place and include working opportunities, benefits, ease of travel, the possibility of permanent settlement and the opportunity to reconnect with family members and community networks.

International Organization for Migration and United Nation Migration Agency organized a workshop in Lagos to create awareness on the implications of irregular/illegal migration by Nigeria youth. The organizers of the workshop deployed communication advocacy by creating computer application called “Migrants as Messengers” to help dissuade Nigeria youth from illegal migration. One of the confessional statements made by the returnee as reported by Ikechukwu and Jorge (2018) is as follows:

“I believe the App (Migrant as Messengers) will help a lot of people, particularly the youth, to shift their focus away from dangerous journey,” she added. I travelled to Libya on 23 August 2016 and was among those helped by IOM to return home on 20 June 2017. “I was working with Diamond Bank PLC at Victoria Island Lagos when a friend introduced the idea of travelling abroad to me,” I wanted to travel to London and I paid Six Hundred Thousand (N600,000) Naira to fly to London, but was tricked into going by road; I ended up in Libya where I was sold into slavery. To regain my freedom, my mother had to sell all of her properties, including a piece of land I bought when I was working with Diamond Band in Lagos. I am going to do my best using this platform to ensure that more youth are persuaded against this risky and regrettable journey.

The crisis of illegal migration of Nigerian youth require the application of these two components of strategic public relations approach to control the influx of Nigeria youth into the western world illegally, and as such, save the nation of the impending danger.

**Strategic Public Relations Practices as Panacea to Crisis of Illegal Migration in Nigeria**

Strategic public relations approach has been used by many scholars to describe an approach of using communication apparatus to achieve the objective of an organization. Explaining the loose nature of defining strategic public relations by scholars, James and Larissa, (2005) reports that strategic public relations has been a loosely defined concept that recently become
popular among public relations practitioners. Most of the discussion of strategic public relations however, consists of loose reference to the idea that public relations should be planned, managed by objective, evaluated and connected to organizational objectives (James and Larissa, 2005). When a process becomes strategic, it navigates through a consolidated pattern of response that permeates the process into a factual result oriented effort. In essence, strategic public relations refer to managed public relations as opposed by public relations as a set of communication tactics supplied by communication technicians.

Developing effective public relations strategies especially in the management of youth migration crisis required a good cognitive approach that entails consistency in planning and implementation of decisions. In the words of Wendy (2016), to develop effective public relations strategies two basic procedures are fundamental;

1) **Defining your communication campaign goals.** This is extremely important, but also often overlooked by many conflict management experts. Effectiveness of any communication campaign strategy depends on the ability of the conveners to measure the results against objectives and creating your goals according to the SMART model of public relations. This means that your goals are: **specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and time-based.**

2) **Determine Your Target Audience.** The knowledge of the audience of any public relations strategy campaign is very important, Wendy (2016). To ensure that your audience is known, question such as; who are the individuals, groups, what are their demographics, which communities are there from, what communication approach is most suitable, are there decision-makers in their community, what are their psychographic components. Available literature shows that no amount of sensitization or communication advocacy by any organization or government established agencies without articulated communication campaign goals and a defined audience can be effective and result oriented (Wendy, 2016).

Fahad (2016) writes that the actual work of public relations became clear only when there is a crisis in the government or institution to analyze and to achieve the ability to work and compete. Grunig (2001) says that public relations has become a complex profession practiced by hundreds of thousands of people around the world. Coombs (2006) writes that challenges facing the science of crisis management are to try to deal with crises before they occur and the adoption of strategic planning process; which represents the essential foundation for any effective crisis management. Achammara (2008) believes that the role of public relations in crisis management is not to understand only through the process of contact, which represents the basis of
the work of public relations, rather it means influencing people's attitude positively.

Strategic planning for public relations is about making such decisions not by hunches, but by solid and informed reasoning that draws on the science of communication as well as its various art and forms (Roland, 2002). Strategic public relations involve public affairs, issue management, crisis communication, public information management, consumer and customer relations, lobbying and investors relations. It also includes litigation public relations, risk communication and reputation management (Roland, 2002).

The key components of strategic public relations are crisis communication, risk communication and reputation management. In the words of Muhammad (2014), crisis communication is a communication plan/strategies organizations adopt during emergency or crisis communication. There are different crisis communication strategies including apology, full-length apology, attacking accuser, providing justifications, ingratiation etc in context of organizational communication. Management Study Guide (2019) conceptualizes crisis communication to mean a special wing of communication which deals with enhancing the reputation of individual, organization/institutions and nations, through a well managed and articulated communication apparatus to ensure mutual understanding. MSG (2019) further asserts that crisis communication is an initiative which aims at protecting the reputation of the organization and maintaining its public image. Crisis communication and public relations strategy are two components of communication apparatus use by communication managers and public relations practitioners to reduce the intensity of crisis in any organization. Illegal migration in Nigeria has reach a crisis situation level and required these two approaches to ensure that effective public relations practice is develop to curtail illegal migration of Nigeria youths.

National Orientation Agency and the Adoption of strategic Public Relations Tools for Mitigating Illegal Migration in Nigeria

A study titled the efficacy of public relations strategies in public health advocacy: a case study of Obi Local Government of Benue State by Comfort, (2016), revealed that public relations strategies are sustainable communication means of driving health care campaigns. The main objective of the study is to assess the relevance, efficacy and cost-effectiveness of adopting public relations strategy to advance public health advocacy. The study adopted Gruning and Hunt two way symmetric model of public relations. The result of the study showed that through a carefully executed public relations strategies, positive health behaviour can be achieved. One of
the recommendations of this study is that government at all levels should take public relations practice more seriously in tackling the hydra-headed health problems, socio-economic and political problems bedeviling the country. Orji-Egwu, Nwanchor and Nwamini (2008) studied appraisal of public relations strategies as tool for resolving petroleum products crisis in Nigeria. The study adopted historical and analytical research method and explored possible public relations strategies that could be used to reduce drastically the hydra-headed monster called “fuel crisis” in Nigeria. The study found that Federal Government who regulates the activities of this sector has not been applying public relations strategy in resolving crisis that emanates from the petroleum sector. The study recommends that Federal Government should employ basic and effective public relations strategies that will facilitate effective negotiations between NUPENG as one of the operators in the petroleum sector and PPPRA as an agency of government that regulates the pricing of petroleum products.

Egwuonwu and Kabuoh (2015) reviewed the imperative of public relations strategies and Nigeria vision 20:20:20 development goals and found that public relations strategies are potent factors for national development. The study adopted descriptive and conceptual review research design. The study reviewed the concept of strategic public relations as they apply to Nigeria's prevailing issues of sustainable development, and argues that the implementation of public relations strategies like stakeholder forums, sponsorships, celebrity endorsement and buzz marketing will result in improved level of awareness, buy-in and commitment to the goals achievement. This study recommends that government agencies should be more proactive and intentional in executing public relations strategies for the propagation of the Vision 20:20:20. Asemah (2011) studied public relations strategies and the implementation of the millennium development goals in Nigeria and found that public relations strategy can be used to achieve the millennium development goals in Nigeria. The paper examines the different public relations strategies like corporate social responsibilities, sponsorship, community relations, information management, research, etc, and how they can stimulate national development in Nigeria. The paper recommends that the government should explore public relations possibilities, which will in turn lead to all round national development in the country.

**Imperatives of Public Relations Strategies and Nigeria’s Vision 20:20:20 Development Goals**

Anatusi and Nnabuko (2013) of Department of Mass Communication, Babcock University Ogun state researched on corruption and tourism: restructuring Nigeria’s image for development using public
relations strategies. The focus of the study is to find out how public relations strategies can be employed in curbing corruption and aid the true image reformation and tourism development of Nigeria state. The researchers found that instituting probe panels or laws by government authorities cannot achieve the said objective, except effective public relations strategies and proactive approaches are imbed and practice by those stakeholders. The study adopted survey research method through structured interview. The study recommends that since there are enough rules to prevent corruption, the application of such rules should be applied in a blanket form and not randomly.

Theoretical Framework

Youth migration in African has been a recurrent quandary. Over the years, countries of Africa are making effort to ensure that illegal migrations are curtailed. Nigeria has continued to serve as reference point when issue of illegal migration is brought to the fore. Consequently, anchoring the study on Neoclassical Theory of Migration is considered proper. The emergence of the theory dates back to the 1932 works of Hicks. It states that economic dependency, differences in real wage are some of the push and pull factors that compel youths to illegally migrate to other countries of the world. Explaining the critical concept of Neoclassical Theory of Migration (NTM), Giovanni & Boike, (2014) explain that the unbalanced distribution of capital and labour at macroeconomic level causes inequality in wages and living condition and thus lead to migration. They affirm that migrants move towards the places where employment, wages and other economic conditions are favourable to them.

Amelie & Douglas (2002) had reported that neoclassical economics theory of migration and the new economics of labour migration contribute significantly in motivating international migrants to travel to other countries. Neoclassical Theory of Migration (NTM) had a dominant influence on majority of the literatures consulted in this study. Todaro and Smith (2015) bear testimony to this when they submitted that at the present, the dominant theory in explaining causes of migration is the neoclassical theory of Migration. The underlying assumption of NTM is that migration is stimulated primarily by rational of economic considerations of relative benefits and costs. Masood & Peter (2015) is of the opinion that in the history of economic thinking on why people migrate from places of their origin is not unconnected with a wide variety of approaches such as neoclassical macroeconomics and microeconomic theories which explain inter alia the mechanism of labour migration.

The neoclassic economical theory is focused majorly on the wage
differences between states/countries reported on the costs of migration, and explains, most of the times, migration as an individual decision to maximize the incomes (Alexandra, 2015). In the case of Nigerian youth who illegally travel to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea to salvage their economic woes exemplified the dominant paradigm on the utilization of this theory as key component of the research objectives, this theory therefore is apt and considered relevant to the study. Since economic empowerment, closing wage discrepancy and general wellbeing of the migrants beclouds their mindset despite consistent communication advocacy by government and her agencies on the inherent danger on such mission. In his analogy on the primacy of public relations; Ashiekpe, (2017), avers that the primacy of public relations practices is to try to persuade audiences to learn new information, to change emotions, and to act in certain ways. He concludes that Public relations is thus the use of communication in an attempt to shape, change and/or reinforce perception, affect (feelings), cognition (thinking) and/or behaviour. It is then clear that public relations can be applied as one of the communication advocacy mechanisms by the federal government agency such as National Orientation Agency to influence feelings, thinking and behaviour of Nigerians to curtail youth illegal migration in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive research design. According to Daily Trust of Nov. 5, 2018, NOA has a total staff Strength of 5000. With the use of online Australian sample size calculator, a total of 386 respondents were drawn and used for the study. Purposive sampling technique was adopted, as such; copies of the questionnaire were mailed to key staff members in NOA offices in Abuja and Lagos, besides, all the 36 state directors of the agency. Those at the management cadre were purposively sampled on the belief that they are involved in the day to day decision making process of the agency. The questionnaire probed mainly their level of knowledge and application of strategic public relations in the mitigation of illegal migration among the Nigerian youths. Twenty copies of the questionnaire were pretested in a test-retest pilot study carried out in the NOA office in Benin city, Edo state. Pearson's $r$ correlation coefficient of 0.95 confirmed the reliability of the instrument. The Questionnaire contains structured five-point Likert scale questions. The data generated were analysed through the computation of the mean values. A mean value of equal or above 3.0 ($x \geq 3.0$) confirmed acceptance of a questionnaire item and a
mean value of less than 3.0 ($x \leq 3.0$) indicated rejection of the same.

**Data Presentation and Analysis/findings**

A total of 378 copies of the mailed questionnaire were retrieved and used for analysis and findings. The arithmetic mean and simple percentage computation were employed to analyze the data. 5-point Likert scale was used to weigh the extent of agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items. The response options and weights assigned were:

1) Strongly agree (SA) - 5 points, (2) Agree (A) - 4 points, (3) Neutral (N) - 3 points (4) Disagree (D) - 2 points, and (5) Strongly disagree (SD) - 1 point

The formula was used to compute the mean score of each of the scaled statement:

$$x = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

Where:

- $x =$ mean
- $\sum x =$ sum of the point, and
- $N =$ number of the items
- $x = 15/5 = 3.0$

Therefore, a mean response of 3.0 and above was considered as “Agree” while mean response of less than 3.0 was regarded as “disagree”.

**Table 1: NOA Staff's Level of Awareness of Strategic Public Relations Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Total Mean Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| NOA staff's level of awareness about strategic public relations practice (eg, organization of seminar, youth rallies, capacity building etc) for mitigating the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youths | Code: SA=5, A=4, N=3, D=2, SD=1 | 1624/378 = 4.3%
| Freq: 150 190 38 0 0                                                              | % Value: 39.7% 50.3% 10% 0 0       |
| Code: 750 760 114 0 0                                                              | % Value: 39.7% 50.3% 10% 0 0       |
| Code: 1624 100%                                                                   | % Value: 100%                      |

Source: Field work 2019
The mean value of 4.3 as seen above shows strong acceptance among NOA staff that they are aware of the concept of strategic public relations practice for crisis management.

Table 2: NOA Staff’s Level of Knowledge about Strategic Public Relations Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Total Mean Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOA staff’s admittance of knowledge about the practice of strategic public relations like speaking to youths during rallies, workshop and seminar, production of video clips, radio drama, motivational tv/radio lectures/talks, job hunting/entrepreneurial expos, skill building and establishing chains of interpersonal communication; all for the purpose of mitigating illegal migration among the Nigerian youths.</td>
<td>Code  SA=5, A=4, N=3, D=2, SD=1</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey, 2019

The mean value of 3.7 as calculated above is higher than the decision point of 3.0. This shows acceptance among the respondents that they have knowledge about the practice of strategic public relations.

Table 3: Application of strategic public relations in mitigating illegal migration among the youths in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Total Mean Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOA staff’s involvement in practical use of strategic public relations practice in sensitizing, mobilizing and educating Nigerian youths on the dangers of illegal migration.</td>
<td>Code  SA=5, A=4, N=3, D=2, SD=1</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey, 2019

The mean value of 2.9 as calculated above is lower than the decision point value of 3.0. This shows rejection that NOA as a body has made significant application of strategic public relations in mitigating the crisis of illegal migration among the youths in Nigeria.

Table 4: Inhibitors to NOA’s application of strategic public relations practice in mitigating illegal migration among the Nigerian youths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Strategic public relations practice involves huge fund and the agency has insufficient fund</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The presidency denies approval for the use of strategic public relations in solving the problem</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lack of qualified staff who are experienced in strategic public relations practices.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It is not within the duties of NOA to use strategic public relations in curbing illegal migration among the youths in Nigeria.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Inadequate number of NOA staff to make impact across the country in terms of mitigating illegal migration among the youths.</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey, 2019
The table shows that there are a lot of inhibitors to NOA’s application of strategic public relations in mitigating the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youths. The most dominant of these inhibitors as can be seen from the table above are the paucity of fund and rejections of proposal to use strategic public relations by the presidency.

**Discussion of Findings**

The results deduced from the tables above suggest that NOA staff have significant awareness and knowledge of the concept and practice of strategic public relations, but the agency has not significantly applied strategic public relations in mitigating the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youths. The study also reveals that the most dominant inhibitors to the application of strategic public relations by NOA in managing the challenge of illegal migration among the youths in Nigeria are the paucity of fund and rejections of proposal to use strategic public relations by the presidency. Earlier studies, like Werder (2009) had found that many acclaimed practitioners of public organisations are not ready or do not have the knowledge of the practical application of strategic public relations in crisis management. Ugwuonah and Okonkwo (2018) also found that International Oil Companies (IOC) in Nigeria have wide array of public relations tools and strategies for checkmating and managing crisis and conflicts with their host communities, but these PR tools did not have significant effect in managing and abating the restiveness of their host community publics. According to them, these IOC should be strategic in their applications of PR techniques in crisis management. To them, strategic public relations refers to managed public relations as opposed to PR as a set of communication tactics supplied by communication tacticians. In their words, “strategic public relations defines and describes how public relations should be practiced if it is to contribute to the success of an organisation, (p.24).

Igben (2016) found that the PR practices of the Nigerian government and the oil companies have been underpinned by outmoded PR models that do not represent the collective interest of the strategic stakeholders in Niger-Delta oil wealth. According to him, these practices do not support effective peace building and conflict processes. The above situations confirmed the earlier submission by Grunig and Grunig (2000, p.308) that strategic public relations refer to” managed public relations as opposed to public relations as a set of communication tactics supplied by communication tacticians.”

By and large, the uniqueness of the finding of this study lies in the fact that though the respondents admitted significant knowledge of strategic PR practices, they confessed insignificant applications in their quest to finding solution to the crisis of illegal migration among the Nigerian youths. Hence,
one cannot talk about the effectiveness or otherwise of strategic PR in mitigating the crisis under review. However, research evidence abound showcasing the effectiveness of public relations practices in checkmating and managing different types of crises. Anatsui and Ojunita (2015) declare that their finding suggest that public relations is inevitable for effective grassroots mobilization on environmental issues in Nigeria. An earlier study by Ugwuanyi and Odigbo (2012) had also found that public relations strategies were effectively used in managing religious, ethnic and social conflicts for promotion of foreign conflicts in Nigeria. It therefore, suffices to opine that NOA should wake up to her responsibility of mobilizing the teeming Nigeria youths against illegal migration by conquering the major factors that limit her from full application of strategic PR in mitigating the crisis of illegal migration in Nigeria, especially, among the youths.

Conclusion

There are verifiable research evidence that strategic public relations have helped in the management of many hydra-headed social, economic and political crises and conflicts in different parts of the world, including Nigeria. We therefore, strongly believe that NOA can harness and utilise the powerful potentials of strategic PR in mitigating the crisis of illegal migration among Nigerian youths. It therefore behoves on NOA to conquer the obstacles and the factors inhibiting her from making exploits in the above direction.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following measures are recommended:

1. NOA should adopt the use of strategic public relations in her quest to mitigate the menace of illegal migration among the Nigerian youths,

2. NOA should conquer the challenge of refusal to approve the use of strategic public relations in handling the crisis of illegal migration by lobbying ministries, agencies and the presidency for them to see the need for doing that.

3. NOA should source fund from partner governmental and non governmental organisations, so as to reduce her reliance only on the presidency for fund to tackle the challenge of illegal migration among the youths in Nigeria.

References


Muhammad, B. B., (2014). What is the real definition of crisis communication. Available at.


