

## **POLITICAL IMAGE MAKING IN NIGERIA AND THE DEFIANCE OF JOHARI WINDOW MODEL**

**Onuchukwu, Uju Cecilia  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University,  
Awka Anambra State  
07039728773**

### **Abstract**

Image making is an important aspect of the public relations job. While image makers are recruited by organizations to improve the image of their organizations and brands, politicians have made use of image makers as well to improve their reputation in the eyes of the public. The herculean task of transform an unacceptable politicians and their conducts into an acceptable one have brought the image makers under heavy criticism that the public now sees the political image maker as an accomplice. Using documentary sources, this paper addressed political image making in Nigeria in the light of the Johari Window Model. The paper argues that political image making in Nigeria has deviated markedly from the ideal provisions to the detriment of the public relations practice. Based on this suggestions on the way forward are provided.

**Key Words: Image making, Politician, Johari Window Model, Reputation**

## Introduction

Organizations entrust in the public relations practitioners the task of protecting and projecting the organizations' image. Public relations involves the various activities that an organization undertakes to promote and protect its image, products, and policies with stakeholders. Stakeholders are the interested parties with the organization, such as customers, suppliers, shareholders, patrons and employees. In that context, it is the responsibility of the public relations manager or practitioner to advise the management or leadership of the organization to adopt rules that improve the organization's image publically.

The role of the public relations managers however, is not confined to the organizations. The role extends to individuals including politicians occupying vital positions in the polity. Although, these individuals have no business with suppliers, shareholders and employees that constitute their stakeholders, they need to maintain favourable image in the eyes of the public. The term "image" is used to convey what a person or an organization appears to be, and which is sometimes very different from who or what they actually are in private. According to Boorstin (2021), image making implies that something can be done to it; the image can always be more or less successfully synthesized, doctored, repaired, refurbished, and improved, quite apart from [though not entirely independent of] the spontaneous original of which the image is the public portrait." An image is synthetic. It is planned: created especially to serve a purpose, to make a certain kind of impression."

A politician's image is a visible public personality as distinguished from his inward private character. In other words, a politician's character may be different from what his image portrays. In political image making, the practitioner tries to polish the image of the politician to appear beautiful in the eyes of the people even if the politician is morally bankrupt. Unfortunately, little or nothing is done to make the politician strive to become what he wants the public to believe about him (Olisa, 2020). It is as a result of this that, the image maker often has become an accomplice in the eyes of the public for attempting to 'turn black into white'.

Political image making need to conform to the Johari Window model. American psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham developed this model in 1955 (Bourne & Barbour, 2021). The name 'Johari' came from joining their first two names. The Johari window model is used to enhance the individual's perception on others. This model is based on two ideas- trust can be acquired by revealing information about an individual to others and individuals learning themselves from others' feedbacks. Each person is represented by the Johari model through four quadrants or window pane. Each four window panes signifies personal information, feelings, motivation and whether that information is known or unknown to oneself or others in four viewpoints. This paper takes a critical view of the political image

making in Nigeria in the context of Johari window model. Misapplications are noted while appropriate suggestions are made.

### **Role of Political Image Maker**

An organization's reputation is critical. Every organization has many relationships, and they must be positive for the benefit of the organization. Hence, there is a great need to protect this reputation by providing the correct information to the public. Like the organization, a politician thrives on public goodwill and needs to sustain and consolidate his position. He therefore needs to guard his reputation with jealousy. While good work speaks for itself, this work needs to be projected so that the public will always be assured that the public figure is on the right track. Even, where there is no work to project, the politician needs to put up a semblance of an image of a public officer who mean well for his people. This is where the role of the image maker comes in. It is important to note that the public relations which is a broader concept than image making has basic objectives. The media Centre (2021) highlights some of these objectives to include:

- a. Awareness-building: Image maker helps to create awareness about the organization or individual, its objectives, products, and services through the media and events, to remind the public of it, maintain interest, trust in existing products, to attract the attention of customers, to raise awareness when introducing new products, or to make adjustments to current products. As stated in the introductory part of this paper, the politician, like the organization need this kind of awareness creation.
- b. Building interest: Image maker aims to manage people's opinion of an individual or organization to make it acceptable to the public and employees in particular. It also aims to draw customers' attention to the organization's offerings and build attention to try the organization's products. The politicians on the other hand, need to win people's votes and confidence. His eyes is always on the next election, and he needs public acceptability.
- c. Providing information: Image maker provides correct information about several things related to the organization, such as new legislation and the way a particular product is used at a time when there is a concealment of information. This strengthens the credibility of the organization and builds trust. The politician equally needs to build trust and eliminate misconceptions, prejudices that they may have.
- d. Activate the order: Studies have shown that customers usually make a decision of purchasing based on the organization's reputation. Reputation may be seen as a component of identity as defined by others (McElreath, 2013). Sometimes, talking positively about products in an article, on TV, or online will increase the sales, and help the organization to sell their products quickly, so this reputation is a part of advertising to promote current and new products. It is as a result of this that politicians like to be on the news, to be talked about in order to build reputation.

- e. Strengthening the brand: Image making aims to build and maintain its reputation among stakeholders, strengthen relationships with them, and provide a good image by focusing on corporate social responsibility. It aims to achieve media fame and provides a positive impression of its products that it is reliable. It promotes the brand and improves its reputation through charitable acts, newspapers, and speeches at various events. In Nigeria, every politician (including legislators) would like to execute one project or another even when it is the responsibility of the executive arm of government to execute projects. This has been officially entrenched through the so-called 'Constituency Fund'.
- f. Public relations parties: Public relations develops relationships with many parties appropriately in normal and hard times, including: relationships with the community, relationships with employees, customer relations, financial relations and government relations. Since the politician relates with the public, he also needs to maintain mutual relationship with different parties and groups in the society.
- g. Communication during crisis: Responsibility during a crisis such as bankruptcy, natural accidents, financial fraud, and the emergence of product defects lies on public relations in delivering accurate, correct information to the public interested in the organization during the crisis period to reduce risk, and to take the proper measures to control the crisis. Likewise, the politicians is always in the eyes of the storm, and during period of crisis of one form or the other, he relies on the public relations to mitigate the unpalatable consequences.

### **Political Image Making in Nigeria and Conformity to Johari Window**

Today, the term "image" is used to convey what a person or an organization appears to be, and that is sometimes very different from who or what they actually are in private. Image is the reputation or perception of a person, group or corporate body, held by others, often as a result of what they do or have done (Oparaugo, 2021). Image is the picture, reflection or appearance of someone or something and the impression, perception, feeling or opinion these create in people's mind.

Image is of two types (Boorstin, 2021). An image which closely conformed to reality is a "good image," and more meaningful, more honest, and more moral than an image that did not. An image which does not conform to reality, whether this occurred by design or by accident, is a "bad image." And, the more it differed from reality, the worse it is. Some personal images seem to be "more real," or "more natural," or more honest reflections of the subject's "actual personality." Sometimes it is because that is how those people actually are; they are largely without artifice and feel comfortable being themselves in public. In other cases, it is an accident of timing; they somehow unexpectedly came into the public spotlight and accidentally became public figures without having time to prepare and project a more carefully thought-out image of themselves.

Admittedly, political images in Nigeria appear to be obvious artificial constructions of public personas that have been developed to fool the public. Thus, political image making in Nigeria has begun to receive public condemnation in the recent time. In fact image making for politicians has become an arduous task for the practitioner as the public now see the political image maker as an accomplice to all sorts of unbecoming behaviours for which many Nigerian politicians are generally known. A few incidences of bad image making may suffice here: Femi Adesina and Garba Shehu (image makers for Muhammadu Buhari), Bayo Onanuga (for Ahmed Tinubu), Lai Mohammed (for Nigeria's APC-controlled Federal Government), etc. These image makers have come at one time or another under the eyes of the storm for defending what the public consider indefensible. For instance, Odunsi (2023) quoted Onanuga as saying "God has plans for Nigeria and chose a man who has the leadership pedigree and espouses the best vision to pilot the affairs from May 29". Continuing, Mr. Onanuga noted that "2023 election was the best, most free (sic) and fair, most transparent". This is a statement from an image maker laboring to right a process considered by right thinking members of the public including the international community to be the worst.

In a similar tirade, Onyedika-Ugoeze (2023) reported Lai Mohammed, Minister of Information as saying "President deserves accolades for delivering the best election in Nigeria's history". Mr. Mohammed further stated that "President Buhari lived up to his billing by delivering a free, fair and credible election, and his legacy is assured". The media is awash with thousands of similar image making labour aimed to make the 'lame' not only to walk, but to run as well. It therefore brings to the front-burner the question as to whether the role of the political image maker extends to the blatant and reckless propagation of lies; and deodorizing a stench. Chari (2017) maintained that, to maintain a positive image, it is crucial that the image maker's position remains clear and truthful at all times. The image maker always should ensure that his statements address the situation at hand in the best and most elaborate way, without covering up or sugarcoating anything. Chari stated further that great image makers are never afraid to speak the truth. Where the image maker cannot provide the answers required in all honesty, he should consider waiting until he can. This will solidify the image maker's reputation as a reliable and steadfast professional.

Chari's position is consistent with the Johari Window model. Johari Window is represented as a common window with four panes, namely, open/safe area or arena, blind self or blind spot, hidden area or façade and unknown area. Two of these panes represent self and the other two represent the part unknown to self but to others. The information transfers from one pane to the other as the result of mutual trust which can be achieved through socializing and the feedback got from other members of the group (). Nigeria's political image makers seem to defy this model.

a. Open/self-area or arena

Based on the model, the information about the person his attitudes, behaviour, emotions, feelings, skills and views will be known by the person as well as by others. This is mainly the area where all the communications occur and the larger the arena becomes the more effectual and dynamic the relationship will be. 'Feedback solicitation' is a process which occurs by understanding and listening to the feedback from another person. Through this way the open area can be increased horizontally decreasing the blind spot. The size of the arena can also be increased downwards and thus by reducing the hidden and unknown areas through revealing one's feelings to other person.

b. Blind self or blind spot

This are includes information about the politician that others know but the politician will be unaware of it. Others may interpret the politician differently than he expects. The blind spot is reduced for an efficient communication through seeking feedback from others. The image maker therefore needs to obtain feedback on what people feel about the image he is making.

c. Hidden area or façade

This area constitutes the information that is known to the politician but will be kept unknown from others. This can be any personal information which the politician feels reluctant to reveal. This includes feelings, past experiences, fears, secrets etc. People understandably keep some of their feelings and information as private as it affects the relationships and thus the hidden area must be reduced by moving the information to the open areas. Rather than reduce this area, the politician closes the open area, while the image maker labours to keep the façade as it is.

d. Unknown area

The Information which are not known to neither the politician nor to others. This includes the information, feelings, capabilities, talents etc. This can be due to traumatic past experiences or events which can be unknown for a lifetime. The politician will be unaware till he discovers his hidden qualities and capabilities or through observation of others. Open communication is also an effective way to decrease the unknown area and thus to communicate effectively.

An individual's reputation is an interplay of three factors: What he does, what he says and what people say about him. If people have wrong perceptions about image makers, then they are doing a disservice to themselves as reputation managers. Olisa (2020) admitted that "we're significantly responsible for the incorrect impressions people have about our profession. Thus, it behooves us to change this narrative by recalibrating our practices".

It is the failure of the image maker to adhere to the provisions of this model that the job of the image maker has come under attack in the recent time. According to Olisa (2020), a profession

designed to manage perception is itself experiencing some misperception, what a ludicrous irony. To the public, image makers are mere publicists, spin-doctors, reactive machines, corporate megaphones or just press officers. The image making profession therefore should start making its image in order to rebuild its reputation and public image.

### **Suggestions/Conclusion**

Image making has met public opprobrium in the recent time against the backdrop of laundering the image of inept political leadership. Today, the image maker is considered an accomplice with politicians in their sharp practices. The image maker himself has not helped matters especially in jettisoning the provisions of the Johari Window model and throws caution to the wind in his image making practice.

The image maker should not be a casualty but that depends on his willingness to change his modus operandi. Image makers need some 'image-making', even as image-makers. This will be achieved through strategic actions in their various organisations and highly publicized intellectually appealing forums.

### **References**

- Chari, V. (2017). The 10 characteristics of a successful PR professional. *Public Relations Analysis*, Aug 22. Agility PR Solutions LLC.
- Bourne, P. E. & Barbour, V. (2021). Ten simple rules for building and maintaining a scientific reputation. *PLoS Computational Biology* 7(6), e1002108. doi:10.1371/journal.pcbi.1002108. PMC 3127799. PMID 21738465.
- McElreath, R. (2013). Reputation and the evolution of conflict. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 22(3), 345-357.
- Media Centre (2021). Public relations roles in improving company's image among stakeholders, August 20. [lpcentre.com](http://lpcentre.com)
- Odunsi, W. (2023). God chose Tinubu for Nigeria, LP, PDP blackmailing judiciary-Onanuga. *Daily Post*, May 8.
- Olisa, S. (2020). PR, beyond publicity stunts. *Businessday NG*, November 6.
- Onyedika-Ugoeze, N. (2023). Stop complaining over election, you lost hands down, FG tells opposition. *The Guardian*, May 1.
- Oparaugo, B. (2021). Role of public relations in corporate image building and sustenance. *IJARBM – International Journal of Applied Research in Business and Management*, 02(01), 26-37.