

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF “BAIL IS FREE” MEDIA CAMPAIGN OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE IN ABUJA

Chidi Iloamaeke & Professor Anthony Iorver Igyuve

Department of Mass Communication, Nasarawa State University, Keffi
Faculty of Social Sciences
iloamaeke@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines public perception of “Bail Is Free” media campaign initiated by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in Abuja. The specific objectives of the study are to find out the level of awareness of Abuja residents to the campaign; to identify the channels through which the campaign messages are communicated and to determine the level of public acceptance of the “Bail Is Free” campaign by the Nigeria Police Force. The study adopted Mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews, with a sample size of 384 drawn using a Multi-stage technique from a population of 3,464,123 respondents in the six (6) Area Councils of Abuja. The findings of the study reveal that despite the high level of awareness of the “Bail Is Free” campaign among residents of the FCT-Abuja, they (residents) still do not believe that bail is indeed free. The study identified the major media channels through residents of Abuja receive the “Bail Is Free” campaign messages have been identified to be posters, billboards, inscriptions in Police stations and flyers. The study recommends among other things the need for strict enforcement of the “Bail Is Free” campaign within the ranks of the NPF. There is need for the NPF to increase the regularity and consistency of the campaign across all media platforms that are accessible, available affordable to residents of Abuja.

Keywords: Bail, Nigeria Police Force, Communication Channels, Media Campaign, Public perception

Introduction

Media campaigns are essential in today's culture for influencing public opinion, raising awareness, and rallying support for a range of issues (Heide, 2007). Understanding the role that communication plays in the formation of society, Santos and Asemah (2013) stress the intentional structuring of media messages to accomplish particular goals. In the contemporary context, the pervasiveness of media campaigns—which span both new and old media channels—has gained significant prominence (Heide, 2007; Enke & Borchers, 2019). Conversely, Sandman (2000) posits that:

The message's substance, intent, and design will heavily influence audience perception and the communication channel that is used in a campaign. The following media outlets significantly influence our attitudes, values, and beliefs: films, television shows, newspapers, books, the internet, and entertainment programmes. Their impact is unique and their

reach is unparalleled. For this reason, in order to have the intended effect on the target population, mass media campaigns are diverse, complex, meticulously planned, and carefully put together (p. 2).

It makes sense that people, companies, and institutions in Nigeria, as in other areas of the world, are concerned with maintaining their corporate image. "No organisation can satisfy its numerous publics without being perceived, first by the publics, as trustworthy and dependable," state Inobemhe et al. (2023). The level of comfort provided to the public together with her goodwill determines how reliable the organisation is (P. 129). An instance that illustrates the strong positive correlation that exists between individuals' opinions of an organisation and supporting pro-corporate actions is the observation that organisational image management has a major impact on most organisations' overall performance (Campbell, 2020).

According to Campbell (2020), stakeholders' impressions of specific firm activities, along with related industry and national challenges, shape an organization's image. Simultaneously, the perception of an organisation greatly affects how stakeholders feel about certain business decisions and offerings. One of an institution's or organization's most precious or significant physical assets is its reputation (Edi & Erna, 2022). In most cases, it might be challenging to manage harm to public opinion, claim Edi and Erna (2022). Corporate organisations and institutions always work to preserve a favourable image and, consequently, a positive impression among the general public, since a damaged reputation tends to attract negative perception.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is not immune from the use of media campaigns to rectify bad public impression and generate good reputation on their actions. Undoubtedly, a number of issues have put the Nigeria Police's effectiveness and efficiency under strain and negatively impacted it, including the police's inappropriate focus on reactive rather than proactive or preventive measures, extrajudicial killings and other forms of brutality against citizens, corruption, extortion, and subpar performance in the areas of intelligence analysis and utilisation, investigation, and perversion of the course of justice (Alemika, 2010).

It is clear that there is a bad public opinion of police in Nigeria due to their terrible behaviour with the Nigerian populace, despite the duty and holy obligations of the NPF as established in the Police Act, 2020 (Idowu & Nwosu, 2021). This depends in great part on the experiences that the people who make up the society's total membership have had as well as their interactions with the police.

According to Odekunle (2004), it is depressing and concerning that, despite the constitutional authority granted to the police to uphold public safety, security, and peace in Nigeria, the agency is steadily losing the public's trust and confidence as a result of their evil deeds both on and off duty especially in the area of bail. Little wonder why the NPF introduced the "Bail Is Free" media campaign to address negative public perception towards the police as residence of Abuja (Nigeria's federal capital) lament the incessant financial exploitation arising from

officers and men of the NPF before granting a suspect bail for bailable offences.

The "Bail Is Free" media campaign which recognizes the inherent right to bail as safeguarded by Section 62(2) of the Police Act, 2020, aims to address public doubt stemming from allegations of bribery in exchange for bail. Through the utilization of different channels of mass communication, the NPF strives to rebuild public confidence, rectify misconceptions, and emphasize the constitutional principle of unrestricted free bail for offenses that are eligible for it.

Within a broader framework, this research delve into assessing residents of Abuja's public sentiments towards the "Bail Is Free" media campaign and identify the media channels used in promoting the "Bail Is Free" initiative. impacts of media campaigns in shaping public sentiment towards the NPF. It underscores the distinctive and influential impact of various media platforms, both traditional and modern, in shaping attitudes, values, and beliefs within contemporary society. The NPF's case serves as a poignant illustration of an organization grappling with the consequences of negative public perception and actively employing media campaigns to reshape its image and regain trust from the Nigerian public (Alemika, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Tom and Philip (2010) contend that reputation is not something that just happens. It has to do with relationships with stakeholders, quality of goods and services, leadership, management, and organisational processes. Public relations is therefore necessary in an organisation as it shapes people's perceptions of a person, an organisation, or an institution.

Some people have the impression that the NPF is cruel, dishonest, and unwelcoming (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005). This explains the declining public perception of the Police since its founding in 1985 (Amnesty International, 2016). Because of their criminal acts, the Nigerian populace is becoming less trusting of the Police (Ajibade, 2011). The October 20, 2020, ENDSARS rally in Lagos serves as an example. The demonstration called for police reform, the

dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police squad that is now defunct, and against police violence (Jones, 2021; ACLED, 2021). It is crucial to note that in order for the police to win over the public's trust, it is imperative that the negative public opinion that Nigerians allegedly have of the NPF be addressed immediately.

The police have initiated awareness initiatives like the "Police Is Your Friend" media campaign, "Crime Fighter," and "The Police and You," a television program broadcasted on DSTV (Channel 418), TVC (Channel 45 on GOTV), and Startimes (Channel 270), airing every Sunday from 7:30 pm to 8:00 pm. Additionally, the "Bail is Free" media campaign is broadcasted on Nigeria Police Radio 99.1FM in Abuja. Nevertheless, the NPF is not relenting in its responsibility to secure the public as well as repairing the unfavourable image Nigerians have of the NPF. It is against this backdrop of this contending public issues that bother on the image of the Police that this research intend to find out how the public perceive the "Bail Is Free" media campaign of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF).

Research Questions

The following are the research questions that will be addressed in the study:

- 1 What is the level of awareness of Abuja residents to the "Bail Is Free" media campaign of the Nigeria Police Force?
- 2 What are the channels through which the media campaign messages are communicated?
- 3 What is the level of public acceptance of the "Bail Is Free" media campaign by the Nigeria Police Force?

Theoretical Framework

Martin Fishbein initially proposed the notion of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) in 1967 in an attempt to comprehend the connection between conduct and attitude. It originated from the dissatisfaction of consistently being unable to anticipate conduct based on conventional measurements of attitude (Fishbein, 1993). The theory of Reasoned Action, defined by Ajzen and Fishbein, is predicated on the idea that people are logical and utilise the knowledge that is accessible to them in a thoughtful and rational manner.

According to Asemah et al. (2022), the more someone anticipates a certain activity to benefit them personally, the more favourable their mindset towards that behaviour will be.

Before committing to a particular action, people consider the possible results and implications of their decisions. It suggests that an individual's intention or willingness to carry out an activity determines their overt action, which is often measured by him or herself.

This theory implies that residents of Abuja who personally believe through experience that the "Bail Is Free" media campaign of the NPF does not align with his/her experienced reality, will not be encouraged to trust the campaign, hence such individual will be motivated to pay money for bail since the reality is the opposite of the campaign message.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

There is a significant body of literature available on the subject of Bail, the Nigeria Police, and Public relations in Nigeria. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this research, numerous prior studies will be examined, along with the viewpoints of scholars regarding the variables, which will be incorporated into the literature review. Afe (2019) defines bail as thus:

Bail is the release or placement of an arrested or imprisoned person at large after other people provide surety for his presence at a specified time and location and he also agrees to self-recognition. Sureties receive the accused or convicted person and are legally considered to be in charge of them; nevertheless, they have the option to release the person from further obligation if they turn them over to the court prior to the scheduled date (p. 6).

Therefore, bail is an essential human right that aims to safeguard people's freedom of movement and their ability to defend themselves in court when necessary in civil or criminal cases. These rights are enshrined and guaranteed in Chapter IV, Section 41 (1) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) as amended 1999 constitution: No Nigerian citizen shall be subjected to expulsion from Nigeria or be refused entry into or departure from

Nigeria (Ajayi & Longe, 2015). Every Nigerian citizen has the right to live anywhere in Nigeria and to travel around without restriction.

Udemezue and Ojeih (2021) contend that bail was developed as a legal tool to protect an accused person's freedom, particularly in light of Nigeria's legal presumption that an individual is innocent until and until a court of competent jurisdiction finds him guilty. In every legal system, the idea of bail plays a crucial role in the administration of justice as it is a well-established legal principle that an accused person is presumed innocent until and until they are proven guilty in a court of law.

According to several reports, bail is not free in Nigeria (The Guardian Editorial, 2022). The Guardian claims that "bail racketeering is thriving, which not only eliminates the 'free' tag from bail but also drives up the cost of granting bail." In order to extract funds from bail seekers and their attorneys, the organised crime's perpetrators have put up a concerted, coercive, phoney, extortionist, or other unlawful plan.

In order to extract money from bail petitioners and their solicitors, dishonest police officers frequently impose onerous or complex requirements before granting bail (Akinlabi, 2017).

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) relaunched the "Bail Is Free" campaign on September 13, 2017, throughout the thirty-six (36) states of the federation, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, in an effort to stop this undesirable trend and repair the harm done to the Nigeria Police's reputation (Sun Newspaper Editorial, 2017).

Review of Empirical Studies

Numerous investigations have examined the complex dynamics that exist between Nigerian citizens and law enforcement, providing insight into attitudes, obstacles, and elements impacting public confidence. Sonia and Sabrina (2015) investigated the matter of citizens in Sierra Leone being required to bribe for bail, uncovering a troubling custom that undermines the credibility of the judicial system.

In 2015, Sonia and Sabrina carried out research on the topic of "Pay No Bribe for Bail in Sierra Leone." A survey technique of data collection was employed to get responses from 264 respondents, who included automobile drivers, motorcycle riders, petty traders, lawyers, and journalists. The respondents were surveyed using a

questionnaire. The media's Agenda Setting Theory was used in the study. The researchers found out that individuals in Sierra Leone (citizens) were requested to pay money for bail.

Oluwasola (2016) carried out a study with the title "Assessment of Public Relations as a Tool for Repositioning the Image of the Nigerian Police Force: A Study of Lagos Command." The investigation's goal was to evaluate how public relations may be used to change the way the public views the Nigerian Police Force, with a particular focus on the Lagos State Police Command. The study's conclusions made clear that the main causes of the general population's bad opinion of the police in Nigeria are unethical actions by officers, harassment by the public, a lack of resources, a lack of dedication, and other institutional flaws.

Onwuama et al. carried out a study in 2019 with the title "Public Perception of Police Performance in Crimes Control in Anambra State of Nigeria." Examining the public's perception of the Anambra State police's efficacy in preventing crime was the main goal of this study. The investigation revealed a tense and negative rapport between the people and the police. This difficult relationship was ascribed to a number of things, such as police extortion, distribution of false information or charges, working with criminal elements, coercion, bribery, and corruption. These problems were found to be serious harms to the Nigeria Police Force's reputation, which in turn caused the public to lose faith in the police's ability to protect people and their property.

The combined results of these investigations point to a widespread crisis in the public's opinion of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), which is being driven by worries about unethical behaviour, harassment, a lack of money, and institutional shortcomings. Public trust has been severely damaged by negative attitudes, which have been made worse by problems including police extortion, false allegations, coercion, bribery, and corruption. Due to these obstacles, the NPF is less efficient at preventing crime. As a result, thorough reforms that put a priority on procedurally fair policing, citizen-centric policing, and real anti-corruption initiatives are required. One important factor that becomes apparent is trust, which is closely related to people's sense of safety and the police's capacity to carry out a variety of duties. Customised tactics are necessary to improve responsibility and restore

public trust in law enforcement among various social groups.

Yakubu and Ugwuoke (2019) study on "Public Perception Study of Community Policing in Jema'a and Jaba Local Government Areas of Kaduna State", provides insight into the doubts held by the general public regarding the effectiveness of the police in crime prevention, despite acknowledging the positive rapport between the police and the community. Moreover, a considerable majority acknowledged the advantages of community policing in mitigating crime. The research emphasizes the significance of tackling concerns like manpower training and resource allocation to improve the efficiency of community policing in the areas under examination.

To affirm the above, the study conducted by Onwuama et al. (2019) on "Public Perception of Police Performance in Crimes Control in Anambra State of Nigeria" underscores the existence of a complex and challenging landscape for the Nigeria Police Force in Anambra State. The study reveal that despite "sincere" efforts to combat crime, barriers such as a lack of equipment, negative public perception, inadequate welfare, a lack of public cooperation, integrity issues, and corruption collectively hinder the NPF from fulfilling its constitutional mandate to uphold law and order in the community.

John (2017) also observed in his research on "Public Perception of Police Activities in Okada, Edo State, Nigeria" that negative perceptions had detrimental effects on community policing, as the public's lack of confidence hindered their willingness to collaborate with law enforcement efforts. The findings underscore the urgent need for reforms within the Nigerian police force to address these issues (extortion, unlawful roadblocks under the guise of crime checks, harassment without cause, extrajudicial killings, and indiscriminate arrests) and restore public trust for effective community policing in the Okada region and beyond.

In his study of "Public Perception of Trust in the Police in Abuja, Nigeria", David (2019) posits that individual's trust in the police is strongly influenced by their perception of safety in their neighbourhoods. Concerns about rising crime, particularly kidnappings, coupled with the belief that police corruption contributes to such issues, lead to a shift in attitudes towards law enforcement. David (2019) observes that corruption within the police force manifests as unfairness, injustice, and inefficiency, creating a system where justice becomes a commodity available to those who can afford it, thereby hindering the resolution of crimes. Overall, the study underscores the multifaceted role that the public expects from the police beyond institutional equity, emphasizing the need for law enforcements to actively combat corruption to regain public trust.

A study by Sonia and Sabrina (2015) on: "Pay No Bribe for Bail in Sierra Leone" revealed that Sierra Leoneans requested to pay for bail even when bail is supposed to be free in that country. The study also show that the police in that country is corrupt, having been requested for bribe in many instances as the average bribe requested by the police is reportedly equal to four times the typical weekly salary of the inmates. This is happening even when there are poster stating that bail is free.

Research Methodology

The Survey Research design was used in this investigation. The population of this study comprised of all residents in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria: The population of the FCT as of 2021 is 3,464,123 as obtained from World Population Review (2021). The population according to the NPC is spread across the six (6) area councils of the FCT: Abuja Municipal Area Council, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali and Abaji respectively. As a result, the researcher sampled 384 respondents as a representation of the entire population for the study, using the Sample Size determination table by Cozby and Bates (2015, p.149) at

Data Presentation

Demographic Data

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	220	58.5
Female	156	41.5
Total	376	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The Table 1 above reveals that the male gender in Abuja constitutes majority of the respondents who were surveyed in this study.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
18-28	70	18.6
29-39	120	31.9
40-50	97	25.7
51 and above	89	23.6
Total	376	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 above shows that majority of the respondents who are residents of Abuja that were surveyed in this study are young adults.

Table 3: Academic Qualification of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC)	37	9.8
WAEC/SSCE	40	10.6
OND/NCE	52	13.8
BSC/BA/LLB (First Degree)	126	33.5
Master’s Degree/MBA	60	15.9
Doctorate (PhD.)	36	9.5
Professor	15	3.9
None	10	2.6
Total	376	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents that participated more in the study are first degree (BSc/BA/LLB) certificate holders.

Table 4: Area Council of the Respondents

Variables			Frequency	Percentage %
	Abaji		16	4.2
16	Kwali	4.2	28	7.4
	Gwagwalada		39	10.3
	Bwari		62	16.4
Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC)			201	53.4
	Kuje		30	7.9
Total			376	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4 above shows that residents from Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), form the highest number of sampled respondents for this study.

Table 5: The Level of Awareness of Abuja Residents to the “Bail Is Free” media Campaign by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF)

Variables	Frequency				Total	Percentage				Total
	SA	A	D	SD		SA	A	D	SD	
1. You are aware that there exist a public enlightenment media campaign of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) called “Bail Is Free”	177	98	67	34	376	47	26	17.8	9	100
2. You have heard or seen the “Bail Is Free” media campaign of the Nigeria Police Force in the last one month.	120	88	98	70	376	31.9	23.4	26	18.6	100
3. The “Bail Is Free” media campaign of the Nigeria Police Force has been effective in creating the desired public awareness among residents in Abuja that bail is indeed free.	61	72	100	143	376	16.2	19.1	26.5	38	100
4. You can confirm through your experience with the NPF that bail is truly free.	59	70	91	156	376	15.6	18.6	24.2	41.4	100
5. The “Bail Is Free” media campaign of the NPF enlightens the public about the processes to be followed to be granted bail.	64	82	95	135	376	17	21.8	25.2	35.9	100
Total					376					100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

From Table 5 above, the level of awareness of Abuja residents to the “Bail Is Free” media Campaign by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is high.

Table 6: The Channels through which the “Bail Is Free” media Campaign by the NPF are communicated

Variables	Frequency				Total	Percentage				Total
	SA	A	D	SD		SA	A	D	SD	
1. The "Bail Is Free" media campaign of the NPF have been seen or heard through the following channels: Traditional (Television commercials, Radio advertisements and Newspaper), Social (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and Below -the-line media (Billboards, Flyers, Posters in public spaces and Police Stations)	174	99	81	22	376	46.2	26.3	21.5	5.8	100
2. The messages of the “Bail Is Free” media campaign of NPF have been tailored to be easy to understand in the various channels of communication: Traditional and Social media	161	68	97	50	376	42.8	18	25.7	13.2	100
3. The channels through which the media campaign message are sent out to the public are available, accessible and affordable to residents of Abuja	123	85	66	102	376	32.7	22.6	17.5	27.1	100
4. “Bail Is Free” media campaign of the NPF have been viewed frequently on Posters and Inscriptions in Police Stations, Billboard displays in public places and distributed flyers more than traditional media: Radio, Television, Newspapers and Magazines.	142	105	70	59	376	37.7	27.9	18.6	15.6	100
5. The NPF need to increase the frequency of the “Bail Is Free” media campaign in both Traditional and Social Media channels of communication	167	98	39	72	376	44.4	26	10.3	44.4	100
Total					376					100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 6 above reveals that the channels through which the “Bail Is Free” media Campaign of the NPF are communicated are Posters and Inscriptions in Police Stations, Billboard displays

in public places and distributed flyers more than traditional media: Radio, Television, Newspapers and Magazines.

Table 7: The Level of Public Acceptance of “Bail Is Free” media Campaign by the Nigeria Police Force

Variables	Frequency				Total	Percentage				Total
	SA	A	D	SD		SA	A	D	SD	
1. Do you believe in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) campaign message that Bail Is truly Free?	36	65	70	205	376	9.5	17.2	18.6	54.5	100
2. You are willing and ready to convince others to believe in the campaign message that bail is free indeed.	48	39	93	196	376	12.7	10.3	24.7	52.1	100
3. You believe that the "Bail Is Free" campaign is effective in deterring police men and officers from collecting money for bail.	99	86	75	116	376	26.3	22.8	19.9	44.1	100
4. You will seek legal redress to enforce the campaign or report erring Police officers to the appropriate authority if you were asked to pay money for Bail	101	59	94	122	376	26.8	15.6	25	32.4	100
5. Your willingness to cooperate with the Nigeria Police Force during any investigation (Criminal or Civil) is as a result of your conviction that bail is free	89	57	99	131	376	23.6	15.1	26.3	34.8	100
Total					376					100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As indicated in Table 7 above, the Level of Public Acceptance of “Bail Is Free” media campaign by the Nigeria Police Force is low.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the demographic data relating to the Gender of Respondents presented in Table 1 shows that more men participated in the survey as represented by 220 (58%). The import is that there are more men who are particular about the implementation of the “Bail Is Free” campaign of the NPF in Nigeria. Accordingly Table 2 data reveal that respondents between ages 29-39 are the highest age bracket that participated in this study. The consequence of the above is that younger population are more committed to issues relating to the “Bail Is Free” campaign of the NPF in Abuja. As presented in Table 3, the date relating to

Academic Qualification of respondents show that graduates who are first degree holders are the highest number of respondents in this study. This is represented by 126 (33.5%). What this translates into is that those who are largely exposed to the campaign (Bail Is Free) are literate members of the society (Abuja) and could be in a better position to comprehend the campaign message. Data distribution in respect of Area Council of Respondents reveals that Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) has the highest number of respondents 201 (53.4%). The import is that residents of AMAC have more close contact with the NPF campaign than those from other area councils in the FCT-Abuja.

As presented in Table 5, this study reveals that the level of awareness of Abuja residents to the “Bail Is Free” media campaign by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja is high. This is represented by 77 (47%) of the respondents. The above is in line with the views of Asemah et al. (2017) who posit that people's willingness to accept information from a source will depend on how honest they believe it to be. The close-ended questionnaire indicated that 120 (31.9%) of the respondents have heard or seen the “Bail Is Free” media campaign of the Nigeria Police Force in the FCT within the last one month of this study. Alluding to the above during the one-on-one interview with the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), FCT (Abuja) Command, SP Josephine Akeh stated thus;

From my perspective, I will say that the awareness is quite high because there is basically no Police Division or Station you enter in the FCT that you will not see a signpost or placard to indicate that Bail Is Free. So I feel that the awareness is really high (Josephine Akeh, personal communication, May 19, 2023).

The above is in line with the Agenda Setting Theory of the media. The theory states that the amount of information in a news item and its positioning tells readers about certain issue and how much priority to assign to the subject (Anwumabelem & Asemah, 2021). This high level of exposure experienced by the respondents was met with a very concerning feedback as the same respondents confirmed through their experience with the NPF that bail is not free. The implication of the above is that the campaign will lose its credibility and believability among residents of Abuja if the above trend is not address where the Nigeria Police still involves in financial extortion for bailable offences. As deduced from the study, the campaign has not been effective in creating the desired public awareness among residents in Abuja that bail is indeed free.

Traditional media; (Television commercials, Radio advertisements and Newspaper), Social media; (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and Below-the-line media; (Billboards, Flyers, Posters in public spaces and Police Stations) are the channels through which the “Bail Is Free” media campaign of the NPF are

transmitted to residents of the FCT-Abuja. 174 representing 46.2% of the respondents affirmed the above in Table 6. This indicates that traditional media, social media and Below-the-line media are the media channels that were widely utilized by the NPF to reach a significant portion of the respondents in Abuja. The above reveal that for any campaign message to reach a wider audience, it needs to be integrated in its approach especially when the target population is large. Little wonder why the NPF made use of various medium of mass communication in the dissemination of the “Bail Is Free” media campaign, taking into cognizance residence who live in remote area councils of the FCT. That is why Unegbu (2013) posits that there is the need to make use of integrated communication approach; combining various forms of communication (traditional and non-traditional) to achieve developmental gains in rural areas. The above is in line with the views expressed by the FCT Police PRO:

We (Public Relations department of the NPF) have several platforms we utilise to create awareness of the “Bail Is Free” (media) campaign; we use the television as a means of communication, we even have a thirty minutes (30mins) TV programme on NTA Channel 5, Abuja titled: “Call the Police”, every Wednesday 10:30am to 11:00am...We also make use of Social Media: We have our Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp platforms. We make use of the Print media, *The Dawn*, a monthly publication of the NPF. We also make use of This Day newspaper, Vanguard newspapers, Sahara Reporters and Punch newspapers respectively to publicize the “Bail Is Free” (media) campaign of the NPF. We also have Radio stations too such as the Police Radio 99.1 FM and Love FM 104.5 FM. We make use of flyers, posters and billboards too. We have a WhatsApp platform and the PCRC where the PPRO communicate with the members of the public and also the journalists who might have some questions whatsoever

related to the campaign (Josephine Adeh, personal communication, May 19, 2023).

It is noteworthy that 123 respondents, representing 32.7% attest that the channels through which the media campaign message are sent out to the public are available, accessible and affordable to residents of Abuja. The above indicates that respondents are familiar with the various channels of communication used in disseminating the campaign message to the general public. It is also worthy of note that respondents largely confirm that the channels adopted are available, accessible and affordable. The above is in dissonance with the study conducted by Visentin et al. (2019) who find out that source credibility and accessibility influence public acceptance of any information.

The above is in agreement with the observations made by the PPRO who said that:

Basically what determines our preferred channel is hinged on a number of factors such as; credibility, accessibility, availability, convenience and affordability of a medium to the target audience of the campaign (Bail Is Free) at each point in time (Josephine Adeh, personal communication, May 19, 2023).

The implication is that respondents are willing to comply with the ideals of the campaign if the NPF will do their part in enforcing the campaign against men and officers of the NPF that contravenes the principles of the "Bail Is Free" campaign by collecting money from residents of Abuja for bailable offence.

Further findings emanating from this study reveal (as indicated in Table 7) that the level of public acceptance of "Bail Is Free" media campaign by the Nigeria Police Force is low. This is based on the survey response from 205 of the respondents, representing 54.5% of the respondents. The respondents themselves additionally do not believe that the "Bail Is Free" media campaign is effective in deterring police men and officers from collecting money for bail (represented by 116, constituting 44.1% of the respondents).

In her response regarding the level of public acceptance of the "Bail Is Free" media campaign, the Abuja Police PRO maintained that:

The level of acceptance of the "Bail Is Free" (media) campaign of the NPF is not as high as it should be if I am being honest. It is not as high as the level of awareness of the campaign. Now the level of awareness is quite high but the level of acceptance might not be in consonance with the level of awareness because we have had several persons come into this office (public relations office) with series of complains against Police officers that ask for money before granting bail...So the reason for the constant interaction and sensitization of the public by the police of the campaign stem from the fact that there is low level of public acceptance towards the campaign. If the campaign was totally accepted by the public, will there be any need to still put the billboards, flyers and sensitize the people out there (Josephine Adeh, personal communication, May 19, 2023).

The above is also in line with the submissions expounded by Akinlabi (2017), that so long as financial extortions for bail is practiced and encouraged by men and officers of the NPF, the public will not believe in the media campaign message that "Bail Is Free". This is also in consonance with *The Guardian Newspapers Editorial* report of August 8, 2022 that; "Frequently, bail is given cash-and-carry, meaning that it is contingent upon the payment of an extortion fee, failure to which bail is rejected". Financial inducements impact negatively on the already battered image of the NPF (Nyam, 2020). The above contradicts the findings of John (2017) who discovered that members of Okada community in Edo State, Nigeria refuse to cooperate with men and officers of the NPF in the fight against crime and criminals after men and officers of the NPF in the state undermined public trust due to their illegal activities. The findings from the study is consonance with the Theory of

Reasoned Action (TRA), which holds that people's motivations and intentions are what ultimately determine their behavioural decisions.

The implication is that if men and officers of the NPF continue to request money for bailable offence, residents of Abuja will continue to lose faith in the campaign and this will further impact negatively on their perception of the NPF. This can be seen in the study on Table 7 where respondents 196 (52.1%) reported that they are not willing and are not ready to convince others to believe in the campaign message that bail is free.

An interesting finding in this study is that despite the negative perception residents of Abuja have towards the campaign, 131 of the respondents, representing 34.8% have reported that they are still willing to cooperate with the Nigeria Police Force during any criminal or civil investigation. The implication here is that residents of the FCT-Abuja are largely law-abiding and cooperate with the NPF in ensuring that the rate of crime is drastically reduced in the FCT-Abuja despite the unprofessional conducts of some men and officers of the NPF.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that even though inhabitants of Abuja are well aware of the media effort, they remain unconvinced that bail is indeed free. This disconnection has undermined the campaign's capacity to bring about significant change inside the NPF on free bail and negatively impacted residents of Abuja's public opinion and faith in the campaign's efficacy.

This study recommends that the Nigeria Police Force must implement strict disciplinary measures through the Nigeria Police Service Commission (NPSC) to make sure that officers and men of the NPF in the FCT-Abuja are dissuaded from demanding or collecting money for bailable offences. By doing this, the campaign's message that bail is truly free will gain credibility with the general public.

Since the findings indicate that the "Bail Is Free" campaign is more frequently displayed on posters and inscriptions in police stations, billboard displays in public spaces, and distributed flyers, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) FCT Command should also increase the frequency of the campaign exposure on radio, television, newspapers, and magazines for wider coverage.

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