A Review of Stakeholder Theory and its Application in Public Relations Practices

Eric Gbeneka Godam[1], Christie Omego[2], Chris Ochonogor[3]

Research Fellow[1] & Senior Lecturers [2&3], Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies
University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract
This paper reviews the stakeholder theory and its application in the study of the public relations practices of Electricity Distribution Companies in Nigeria. The stakeholder theory is a theory of organizational management and business ethics that accounts for various publics impacted by corporate units like customers, vendors, suppliers, employees, local communities, creditors, government agencies, environmentalists operating near the business entity, financial institutions and a host of other entities linked to the organisation or impacted by its activities. It instructs that there are many stakeholders in a company and their needs and appeal vary. It informs that the company's success lies in satisfying all its stakeholders, and looking beyond those who might profit from the company's stock. This analysis posits that the corporate environment as an ecosystem of interconnected assemblage, and they all need to be considered and contented to keep the organisation healthy and successful in the long run.

Keywords — *Public Relations, Stakeholder Theory, Publics, Power Distribution Companies, Nigeria*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to explain the basic assumptions of the stakeholder theory.The point that the stakeholder theory has achieved pervasive popularity in the academia, media and managers we think that it is an important task to bring some system into all those confusing approaches around to the stakeholder concept. At the beginning we will comment on the basic idea of the stakeholder theory. We will also try to give a clear definition of what the concept is all about.

Public relations strategies are usually plans, ideas, blueprints, or concepts designed to combat certain challenges encountered or foreseen by organisations in the course of dealing with their publics or to promote a course of action in line with corporate policy aimed at achieving set goals on a long or short term basis. Here in Nigeria, public relations practice have come of age nonetheless, some observers have expressed doubts over the integrity and relevance of some practitioners in organisations especially in the electricity distribution sector which began in Marina-Lagos in the year 1898 (Awosope, 2014). A retrospective glance at the sector's 121 years in Nigeria is enough to prompt customers to demand for transparent, efficient, affordable, and dependable services premised on the fact that any business which has lasted for over a century ordinarily, ought to have been very experienced, transparent and reliable. This review looks at the impact of the Stakeholder Theory in public relations and insights into how other concepts play a role in engendering public relations practices.

II. PUBLICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

The word "public" in public relations, is slightly different in meaning comparatively to the normal usage of the word, public, used to represent a large number of citizens of a community, state or nation. The publics of an organisation to a large extent can be identified by taking into cognizance, the line of business, products and services or activities undertaken by the organisation or company. Ohiagu (2015) states that:

> Every PR objective defines its own publics. If the defined objective is to lobby for a favourable bill, then the publics to "manipulate" to achieve this goal would be the legislators and the government. If it is to remedy an unfavourable opinion by a hostile host community, then the neighbour community becomes the target publics, it is to improve on media publicity and coverage; the publics would immediately shift to the media practitioners.

For these procedures stated above to be clearly understood, the objectives of the organisation must be clearly stated too so that the process can be easily followed. Black (1990) agrees that there is no government or organisation of any sort that can operate in isolation of its publics. This means that every organisation must have publics. Again, Black (1990) posits that the publics' place of residence is immaterial as they can either be at home or overseas. What is important to note is that the status of publics of organisations can overlap as some employees of organisations may also double as shareholders in the same organisation. What this means is that some employees of some organisations also acquire shares in the organisations making them shareholders in the organisation where they are employed.

For this reason, public relations practitioners must possess a good knowledge of the various publics of their organisations as that will help them in the planning process of public relations activities or programmes of the organisations. It suffices to note at this point that there are no linear publics in organisation. Publics of organisations have divergent needs and demands meaning that each stratum of publics of an organisation may likely be different in their demands and needs and so, may require different ways of communication to attend to their issues. For example, the demand of the employees may be focused on increment in remuneration and their welfare in general while the demand from the host community may be related to issues of environmental pollution, scholarships awards, provision of public utilities and sponsorship of events. No one single communication method can be sufficient in addressing all strata of publics in an organisation.

Wragg (1992) in his explanation outlines the publics of organisations under four taxonomies thus: Functional publics. These are the category that enables the organisation to carry out their day to day functions. They include the employees, consumers or customers (including other related businesses) trade unions which represent them, suppliers of raw materials or contractors, components, or in the case of retailer, of the goods being sold. Enabling publics. This group is made up of regulatory bodies, community leaders, politicians and shareholders. These, permit the organisations to function within the framework of the society to which they belong. Diffused publics. This parlance is used to describe the media, pressure groups and local residents. This term is used largely because they are varied audiences and often, in the case of pressure groups and the media, avenues to other major audiences. Normative publics. These are the trade associations, and professional bodies. They may also include political parties in some settings. (p.6)

Gregory (2000), in her taxonomy of publics of organisations, explains the diversities of publics of organisations in relation to these inherent factors: Range, this is in connection to the breadth of the publics. For instance, an organisation that specialises in the manufacture of military arsenal may have the Ministry of Defense only to contend with while the organisation that manufactures drugs may definitely have a whole lot of publics across the board. Numbers and location, these are connected to organisations that have publics cut across a wide range of uniformed blocks for, example, the multiple retailers with large groups of customers, suppliers and local authorities as publics. Other examples such as project engineers will have a whole range of publics, often small in number, attached to each project. Publics of some organisations are spread across a large geographic or socio-economic environment while others are centered on focused groups to contend with. Influence and power, these are the class of active publics that galvanizes power by catching the public mood for example, pressure groups. They may not be large in number or have direct link with the organisation but can very influential over the way an organisation conducts its business. For example, Greenpeace and Amnesty International and other non-profit oriented pressure groups can be very influential to the running of some organisations more so; in situations where there are seemingly disagreement on matters of human rights abuse or environmental pollution.

A good example is the long standing Ogoni environmental agitations against Shell Petroleum Development Company and the stance taken by Amnesty International as mediator. It is the place of the public relations practitioner to carefully assess the relationships of these stakeholders and plan its public relations programmes accordingly. This does not in any way infer that the "big publics" will be allocated with the bigger budgets.

Connection with organisation,these are the publics that are intimately connected to the organisation, for example, the employees. There are those who are remotely connected with the organisation for example, those publics who occasionally visit the organisations' websites. The public relations practitioner's task is to have a good knowledge of these various publics so that he can incorporate them or advice management during the formulation of public relations policies. Hasan (2013) posits that:

> Public relations however, deals with more than one group. It, in fact, deals with a number of groups. These special groups, whether large or small, have different characteristics, needs, wants, etc. Most importantly, they play different roles and differ in the type of relationships they share with the organisations. These different groups of people with different expectations and interests are called the publics of an organisation (p. 524).

Taking a look at the above citation, Hasan (2013) agrees that publics of organisations are nonlinear and that every sector of publics have peculiar interest in the organisation and therefore needed to be considered intrinsically as a stakeholder according to the peculiarity of their interest. In further explanation of publics of organisations, Hasan (2013) proposes nine basic types of publics that are common to most organisations: Employees: people who work for the organisation, from top management to the workers. Potential Employees: those who are studying or working somewhere else, but wish to work for the organisation. Consumers, users and clients: past, present and potential. Shareholders, investors and other financial associates: all those people and organisation, who have financial stakes in the organisation including banks, brokers, insurance companies, etc. The trade chain; the distributors, dealers and retailers. Suppliers; who supply goods, raw materials and services. Opinion leaders, people, organisations and institutions who can influence the functioning, of the organisation in any way. Opinion leaders include the industry, the government, business and industrial bodies FICCI, CIL, etc in India) and other opinion forming groups like consumer forum, environment groups, etc. Media; who reach the people with and opinions and work as a link (press, radio, TV etc) The community; people who live near the organisation's premises.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) define publics of public relations in four categories: Non-publics, these are the category of publics whose activities do not affect the organisation nor are they affected by the activities of the organisation. For instance, the activities of the publics in Port Harcourt may not in any way affect the activities of a fast-food company located in Benin and vice-versa. This category of publics are usually ignored and not taken into cognizance. Latent publics, these are the category of publics that are affected by the activities of an organisation without them knowing that they are affected. For instance, the establishment of a local beverage production company may inadvertently increase the local traffic without the locales taking challenge into cognizance. Aware publics, these are the category of publics that recognize the existence of a problem. This class of publics only gets awareness of their challenge through their exposure to the media or pressure groups and environmentalists. Active publics, these are the class of publics that do not only recognize their problems or challenges but go ahead to confront their challenges head on.
Looking at the various classifications of publics of organisations above, it is clear that there are overlaps between these publics. An analytical look reveals the possibility of having a particular class of public cutting across political parties and pressure groups. It is also obvious that some publics may be consumers and employees concurrently. One of the serious obstacles of communication in public relations campaigns is making sure that the right message is sent to the appropriate receiver via the appropriate medium. For instance, an organisation wishing to communicate issues bordering on job security and advancement can only be meaningfully understood by employees and not customers while matters concerning product variations, introduction of new products and renewed packaging will be of utmost relevance to the customers, consumers and shareholders. This is not ruling out the possibility of other overlaps of interest for example, issues relating to redundancy or unemployment is not only relevant to employees but also the politicians who need the information for planning of annual budgets and political campaign strategies.

III. PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION

The synergy between public relations and communication is significant and inseparable in the process of building goodwill and maintaining mutual relationship between an organisation and its publics. Wu (2004) state "information is the foundation of public relations activities and is the premise and condition under which public relations can function effectively for social organisation's managing and operating activities" (p.30). Public relations therefore, is a managerial function geared towards establishing goodwill through the formulation and implementation of policies capable of sustaining strong bonds of mutual relationship between an organisation and its publics. According to Cutlip, Center & Broom (1999) "Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its publics on whom its success or failure depends" (p.6). The convergence between communication and public relations is vital as it enhances the process of planning and implementation of public relations programmes or activities.

Fang (2004) argues that while other departments in an organisation restrict their information gathering to their departmental requirements, for instance, finance department is only concerned with issues of financial transactions; the public relations department gathers information across all departments, processes and makes them available for both internal and external publics' consumption. For an organisation to properly communicate policies to its publics, the management must be well acquainted with correct information on the economics, social environment, rivals, policy and customer's tendency on the appropriate assessment of the organisation's image by its publics. This is where the inputs of the public relations professionals become inevitable. A proposed public relations policy may be expertly formulated but may not be effectively implemented without an appropriate communication process or channel.

Gregory (2000) states that efficient communication skills are basic requirements for professionals of public relations to effectively transmit public relations policy of management to the publics of organisations. No matter how sophisticated the public relations policy may seem, without appropriate communication skills involved in its formulation and drafting, there is the tendency that meaning erosion may occur. For instance, the use of high sounding words which may not convey the intended meaning to the publics, will not serve the conceived purpose. It is pertinent that public relations practitioners be properly grounded in the environment they operate to enable them understand the problems and challenges of their publics and in-turn, proficiently use good communication channels to communicate management decisions and policies to the publics or audience. Communication is a process in which the participants create and share information with one and another in order to reach a mutual understanding. Hasan (2013) quoting Mc Quail (2005):

> …sees human communication in linear terms, as the sending of meaningful messages from one person to another. These messages could be oral or written, visual or olfactory. He also takes such things as laws, customs, practices, and ways of dressing, gestures, buildings, gardens, military parades, and flags to be communication (p.3).

Communication can occur within an individual (intra communication) from one person to another (interpersonal communication), within members of a group (group communication) or through mediated communication (mass communication). McQuails (2005) again, sees communication as a process, which increases, commonality but also requires elements of commonality for it to occur. Hasan (2013) describes communication as the sum of all the things one person does when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another. It is a bridge of meaning between the sender and receiver.

Gregory (2000) reiterates the significance of communication as a means in public relations thus:

> …strategic information and plans are so important, management are often tempted to communicate them in pompous language and in an inappropriate form, for example a highly glossy brochure that permits no discussion or questioning! The communication professional must resist such actions and provide skilled advice on how to undertake the communication task. (p.10)

Public relations practitioners in this regard, require proficient communication skills and the ability to resist unprofessional interference from management to perform their duties efficiently. With good communication abilities, public relations practitioners are able to build effective mutual relationships with their publics by properly implementing public relations goodwill policies to better the lives of its publics and subsequently improve the image of the organisation.

Again, Wilcox et al (2003) state that the fundamental goals of the communication process in public relations is to inform, persuade, motivate or achieve mutual understanding with the receiver of the message. Therefore, it is important for the professional practitioner to have basic understanding of: What constitutes communication and how people receive messages; how people process information and change their perceptions; what kind of media and communication tools are most appropriate for a particular message.

Wilcox et al (2003) reiterates that professional communicators armed with the above stated skills; should be in the proper position to prepare messages that adequately conveys intended meaning across to the publics of their organisations. More importantly, public relations practitioners must be abreast of the right communication channels as that remains an integral part of the implementation of public relations programmes.

Wragg (1992) in concurrence with Wilcox et al (2003) above, outlines 16 basic techniques available to public relations practitioners to effectively reach their target publics, such as press release, case histories or studies, feature article, advertorials, editorial interviews, event press support, analysis briefings, financial reports, political lobbying, newsletters and publications, video and film, conferences and seminars, product launches, special events, promotional items, and corporate image. Wilcox et al (2003) stated the imperatives of proper channeling of communication in public relations state that:

> PR programme planners need to reexamine their traditional approaches to the practice and think about media broadly and strategically. PR media planners must now address some of the key questions that confront advisers. What media best meet a programme's objective? How can media be combined to enhance programme effectiveness? What media are most efficient to reach key audiences? (p.164).

The place of communication in public relations is irreplaceable because all public relations programmes and activities must be communicated to the various publics be it internal or external. In fact it is impossible not to communicate. It is said that even the yelling of an infant at varying frequencies is actually sending messages to the mother asking for food and other needs. The important factor is for communication to flow from the sender to the receiver unhindered. For this reason, it is imperative for communicators or practitioners of public relations to be in-charge of the drafting of messages meant for the publics of organisations and carefully choose the media that can appropriately meet the target publics.

In cases where management interference is inevitable, practitioners or communicators should endeavour to advise management on the techniques of drafting messages to the target publics of an organisation.

IV. STAKEHOLDER THEORY

The stakeholder theory was initially quoted in an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute in the United States of America in the year 1963. It became an authentic theory in the 1984 through the efforts of Edward Freeman, who beefed it up with more relevant information. The theory states that organisations have stakeholders who naturally, are classified as individuals and groups that benefit from it or are adversely affected by the organisation's operations (Hartman, 2005).

According to Freeman and Reeds (1983), the stakeholder theory recognizes the diverse groups and individuals that are affected in one way or another, by the activities of an organisation. The theory stipulates and recommends the ways by which the collective interests of stakeholders would be catered for by the management of an organisation. Basically, the theory is widely seen as one of the classical theories in public relations. The controversy arising from who is a stakeholder and who is not has been pervasively discoursed among scholars for a very long time now.

Amodu (2012) asks:

> Should stakeholder status be a reserved right for constituencies having close relationship with the organisation? Should the status be seen to apply broadly to all groups that can affect or be affected by the organisation? Should activists, competitors, natural environmentalists or even the media be classified as stakeholders? (p.132)

Freeman and Reed (1983) in an attempt to answer these questions provide two explanations. The narrow definition only includes the groups that are vital to the survival and the success of the organisation, while the wide or broad definition accommodates all groups that can affect or be affected by the actions of a corporation. In addition to Freeman and Reeds explanation of who stakeholders are, Dougherty (1992) provides classification of stakeholders into four groups: enabling publics, functional publics, normative publics and diffused publics.

Stevens, Malone and Bailey (2005) also state that enabling publics are those who provide leadership for the organisation and also control the resources that allow it to exist and among them are shareholders, regulatory bodies and boards of directors. The functional publics are those who exchange inputs in an organisation for output, such as the employees, unions, suppliers and customers who provide labour or make use of the organisation's products and services. Normative publics are those with shared values or similar problems such as trade unions and professional societies. The last group is referred to as the diffused publics, which emerge when external consequences result from an organisation's activities; these include the media, environmentalists, residents and the community.

To this effect, the stakeholder theory, posits that every legitimate person or group involved in or affected by the activities of an organisation is a stakeholder for the sake of benefits and that the priority interest of every legitimate stakeholder is not self-evident (Furneaux, 2006). The stakeholder theory could be identified by the following characteristics: It is descriptive: it offers a model of the organisation, it is instrumental: it offers a framework for investigating the links between conventional firm performance and the practice of stakeholder management. Although stakeholder theory possesses the above characteristics, it is more fundamentally normative. Stakeholders are identified by their interests and all stakeholders are considered to be intrinsically valuable (Amodu, 2012).

The stakeholder theory is therefore chosen as a guide to this study because the study is comparatively analyzing the public relations strategies of Port Harcourt Electricity Company Limited (PHEDC) and Benin Electricity Distribution Company Limited (BEDC). The theory states that stakeholders of an organisation are identified through their affiliation with the organisation or in other words, stakeholders are the publics whose operations affect an organisation and or are affected by the operations of an organisation. Though the stakeholder theory identifies organisations' publics but it does not emphasize the need for symmetrical flow of communication between an organisation and its stakeholders hence, the need for a second theory that inculcates the flow of communications.

V. CORPORATE IMAGE

An image is an impression of a symbol or an icon that exists in the head of the beholder alone. The image of an organisation in like manner can be deciphered by surface observance of the corporate conduct or corporate behaviour of the organisation. According to Marken (1990) corporate image, is perceived as the sum of the entire organisation, its objectives and plans. Therefore, any organisation that is observed by its publics and seen to "behave properly" is believed to have a good image while an organisation that do not "behave properly" in the eyes of its publics is believed to have a bad image.

Olins (1989) also sees corporate image as the entirety of all the impressions that an organisation makes on all its publics. In simple terms it can be described as the totality of how an organisation is viewed by its publics. The public relations practitioner in any organisation has a responsibility to advise the organisation on matters capable of affecting the image of an organisation positively or negatively. Controlling an organisation's image is best done proactively rather than reactively. This is because it is easier to consolidate on the gains of positive perceptions in the minds of the publics of an organisation rather than attempting to repair or rebuild a battered image.

The image of an organisation is ostensibly vital to its survival because an organisation with a battered image will not have a favourable market disposition and sooner than expected may become moribund. A good and responsible corporate image is inversely responsible for high patronage and collaboration by publics of an organisation. Bernstein (1991) sees image as a vaporous concept of imprecise language, superficial thinking and self-styled image makers who contribute to the insubstantiality.

Ohiagu (2015) sees corporate image as "… picture of an organisation which any individual or group of stakeholder have about an organisation at any point in time. It is a mental representation of what the stakeholders believe is true about the organisation" (p.190). This implies that the impression of the corporate image of an organisation in the minds of the publics of an organisation is not "cast in stone" but varies, depending on the prevailing level of mutual understanding and circumstance between the publics and the organisation. Ohiagu (2015) reiterates that corporate image of an organisation varies from public to public, for instance how the employees of an organisation perceive the corporate image of an organisation may be totally different from how the community, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders perceive the same organisation.

Adekunle (2017) provides five types of images that can be used to describe an organisations'behaviour in the minds of its publics as thus: Mirror image- type of image people in an organisation believe outsiders have of them. It could be illusionary or wishful thinking. Current image- image held by people outside the organisation based on experience or on poor information and understanding. Wish image- desired image the management wishes to achieve. Corporate image- image of the organisation rather than the product or service. Multiple image- image created that does not conform to the image for the total organisation.

Mackiewicz (1993) argues that a strong corporate image is an essential asset in today's era of borderless competition and observes that notwithstanding how unclear the concept maybe, image is a reality because people are usually inclined to believing in what they see most of the time. Conversely, an organisation's image can be interpreted subjectively if its policies are in contrast with the beliefs, value systems and norms of the publics.

In order to enhance the image of an organisation, Ohiagu (2015) proposes effective horizontal and vertical communication between an organisation and its public as a means of restoring confidence in the minds of the public. Horizontal communication does not observe hierarchical rules and it strengthens bilateral and mutual relationship between contemporaries in an organisation as a colleague can easily communicate with another to effectively achieve set goals. Vertical downward communication facilitates directives from superior officers down to subordinates while vertical upward communication facilitates suggestions and complaints from subordinates to management of the organisation. The duty of the public relations practitioners in an organisation is to advise management to always consider the intrinsic place of every public in the planning of organizational policies.

VI. CORPORATE IDENTITY

Corporate identity and corporate image is sometimes misunderstood. While corporate identity is the totality of all an organisation communicates intentionally or unintentionally via various cues; corporate image on its part is the overall mental perception of a corporate organisation in the minds of its publics. Wragg (1992) sees corporate identity as "… the single image presented by a company or other organisations, giving an impression of unity through all the various manifestations of its activities" (p. 96). The word manifestation in this context refers to the sum of items or paraphernalia that are used to display the identity of an organisation using objects such as motor vehicles, premises, literature, stationery, advertising materials and products. Ohiagu (2015) states that, "… communication elements which help companies portray themselves to their stakeholders form the corporate identity". Corporate identity is therefore, the physical icons used to communicate with the publics of an organisation. It is also a source for recognition of the organisation by publics simply by identifying the graphics representing the organisation. These graphics come in diverse forms like, logos, badges, coveralls, stationery letterheads, brand of vehicles, publications, stickers, ads on billboards, lab coats, souvenirs etc. This does not in any way discredit the intangibles.

Wragg (1992) reiterates by classifying corporate identity in three categories thus: monolithic identity, endorsed identity and branded identity. The process of creating corporate identity for an organisation is usually a cumbersome, tasking, highly intellectual and painstaking process used by practitioners of public relations to create the paraphernalia that are used to identify a corporate organisation. Corporate identity therefore, is an integral part of an organisation as it serves as a medium of cognitive recognition of an organisation in the eyes of the publics. Without corporate identity, organisations will definitely be difficult to identify. Corporate identities are veritable tools that convey messages of different sorts to the publics of an organisation.

Ajalla (2001) identifies "good vision, creativity, sustained research and considerable funding" (p. 93), as basic qualities required in the development of a corporate identity. The development of corporate identity therefore requires a process powered by cognitive ingenuity coupled with cognate experience to formulate an acceptable and recognizable identity.

Olins (1989) asserts the imperativeness of an effective corporate identity using Coca-Cola as a classic example. He argues that Coca-Cola brand has become one of most universally ubiquitous, widely recognized and accepted brand today because of its ingenuity, fanatical dedication and enormous financial involvement by management; resulting to the overwhelming success recorded today in the organisation. It is observed that the success of an organisation is somewhat dependent on the attractiveness of the organisational identity. It is eminent that the identity of a corporate organisation is contributive to the projection of its marketing competence as it enhances the publics' perception of the products and services, premises and management style.

VII. PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CORPORATE BRAND STRATEGY

Brand strategy is a systematic process used by corporate organisations to plan, develop and manage their activities to maximize production and services. Murphy (1990) defines a brand as a product or service of a particular supplier which is differentiated by its name and presentation. Therefore, brand strategy in corporate organisations involve issues like branding of industrial products and pharmaceuticals; the success of 'own label'; international branding; the use of corporate brand and the development of corporate identities, trademarks and intellectual property and brand valuation analysis; development of new brand principles of sound management branding of new products and branding of services.

The most effective system of maximizing corporate branding in organisations is by engaging public relations practitioners or professionals in the planning, development and implementation processes. Public relations professionals are usually skillfully equipped to handle the required technicalities that produce desired results. Any corporate organisation that does not recognize the importance of public relations' professionals will be potentially unsuccessful in their operations because the planning process will definitely lack professionalism.

Yu (2001) assert that brand strategy is a choice strategically made by corporate organisations to establish a good brand image which in turn promotes the reputation of an organisation's product or services. This in turn develops its market, promotes product and services' image and attracts patronage from customers. Brand strategy is also important for the cultivation of larger profit returns and customer loyalty to the organisation as well as its product and services.

Zeng (2001) sees brand strategy as a careful process used by corporate organisations to plan, design and implementation of brand creation, development and improvement of marketing competition and economic profits. A good brand strategy is the recipe for economic progression and stability in corporate organisations. Most analysts see the concept of brand strategy as the pivot of economic development in organisations. It is seen as the beacon that provides direction into the day to day running of organisational objectives.

Lu and Lu (2004) observe that brand strategy is a general plan used by corporate organisations to develop competitive brand advantages so as to reap long-term profitability. Brand strategy therefore, is not just any plan but a carefully planned process used by corporate organisations to develop a systematic template that enables the smooth functioning of the organisation. A good brand strategy attracts customer loyalty and sustains followership. It also improves the performance of the enterprise and stabilizes brand image.

Keller (1998) in his definition of brand, states that "a brand is, therefore, a product, but one that adds other dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need" (p. 4). Murphy (1990) again, in his definition says "a brand is the product or service of a particular supplier which is differentiated by its name and presentation" (p. 1) the essence of branding is to create awareness of the minds of the publics of an organisation towards a particular product or services offered by the organisation. Beyond creating awareness in the minds of publics, branding of a product or service psychologically encourages consistent patronage of the product or service by the publics.

Keller (1998) reiterates some basic functions of brand thus: source identification of product or services, signal of quality, symbolic device, bond with maker of product, risk reducer and search cost reducer. The brand is used to identify the product or service of a particular organisation thereby establishing the zeal to continuously patronize products associated with the brand. This zeal to build continuity is developed from long term satisfaction derived from using the products from the brand. Customers' persistence in the use of such branded products usually develops brand loyalty on the part of the customers.

The crux of corporate brand strategy in organisations is basically to attract credibility to the organisation and to provoke customer's physical and psychological satisfaction. When a good brand strategy is adopted and implemented by an organisation, it enables customers to have access to enough product information and offers options that lead to customers' choice on product consumption and patronage. Through this, customers' confidence is built and consolidated by organisations as regards products and services. Public relations on its part help the organisation to build confidence in the minds of the publics of an organisation to attract customer loyalty and trust. Public relations is not only confined to enhancing organisational image but also strives to ensure that customers build in their trust in the product and services of the organisation on the long run.

Ambler (1992) posits a brand as the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and provides satisfaction. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional. Branding essentially is a function of building a formidable image for a product or service and the objective is to attract the patronage of customers or publics to a particular product or services. Aside from presenting product and service variations, branding also helps to

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the stakeholder theory has shown that in public relations practice, every legitimate person or group involved in or affected by the activities of an organisation should be considered as stakeholders when interests are being considered. On this account, they should be given priority in communication so long as they have been identified as stakeholders. This will foster benefits for both the organisation and its publics as they move forward with their relationship towards bringing goodwill to the organisation.

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