

Public Relations and Motorists' Perception of Federal Road Safety Corps' Operations in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

This study examines the role of public relations (PR) strategies in shaping motorists' perception of the Federal Road Safety Corps' (FRSC) operations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Using a qualitative case study design, the research explores how PR efforts such as road safety campaigns, media engagement, and officer conduct influence public trust and compliance with traffic regulations. Data were collected through structured interviews with 30 purposively selected motorists, including private vehicle owners, commercial drivers, motorcyclists, and tricycle operators across major urban centers. Thematic analysis revealed four major findings: moderate awareness of FRSC campaigns, mixed experiences with FRSC officials, fragile public trust, and the need for more inclusive and technology-driven engagement strategies. The study concludes that while FRSC's public relations activities are visible, their effectiveness is limited by inconsistent communication, selective outreach, and officer misconduct. Recommendations include broadening PR coverage, improving officer training, adopting participatory communication models, and leveraging digital platforms for more effective public engagement. Strengthening these areas is critical for enhancing motorists' trust and promoting road safety compliance in Akwa Ibom State.

Keywords: Public relations, motorists' perception, federal road safety corps, road safety operations, Akwa Ibom State.

Introduction

Public relations plays a critical role in governance and service delivery, especially in enhancing citizen engagement and institutional credibility Odugbemi and Norris (2010). Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) emphasise that the way a law enforcement agency communicates and relates with the public affects its legitimacy and the willingness of citizens to comply with regulations. Public Relations (PR) plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of government agencies by fostering effective communication and public engagement (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In road safety management, PR is particularly vital as agencies like the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) must communicate road safety regulations, enforce compliance, and manage public trust (Coombs, 2007; Wilcox *et al.*, 2013).

The FRSC is responsible for ensuring road safety in Nigeria, enforcing traffic laws, and reducing road accidents. However, motorists in Akwa Ibom have raised concerns about FRSC operations, including enforcement tactics, alleged extortion, and ineffective public

awareness campaigns (Edegoh & Anunike, 2016). This study evaluates FRSC's PR strategies in shaping the perception of motorists in Akwa Ibom.

Motorists' perception of FRSC in Akwa Ibom has been shaped by a mix of positive and negative experiences, including road safety campaigns, enforcement actions, and public engagement efforts. While the FRSC aims to improve road safety, motorists often complain about the agency's approach to enforcement, inadequate communication on traffic policies, and instances of alleged harassment (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019). This study examines the effectiveness of FRSC's PR strategies in engaging Akwa Ibom motorists and improving public trust.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

- (i) Assess the public relations strategies employed by Federal Road Safety Corps in engaging with motorists in Akwa Ibom State.
- (ii) Evaluate motorists' perception of Federal Road Safety Corps public relations efforts in Akwa Ibom State.
- (iii) Determine the influence public relations on motorists' perception of Federal Road Safety Corps' operations in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- (i) What public relations strategies does the Federal Road Safety Corps employ to engage with motorists in Akwa Ibom State?
- (ii) How do motorists in Akwa Ibom state perceive Federal Road Safety Corps' public relations efforts?
- (iii) How does public relations influence motorists' perception of Federal Road Safety Corps' operations in Akwa Ibom State.

Conceptual Review

Some concepts in this study are reviewed in this section to help in the understanding of this study.

Public Relations

Public Relations (PR) is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It involves managing an organisation's reputation, engaging stakeholders, and shaping public perception through media relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and crisis communication (Wilcox *et al.*, 2013).

In Nigeria, PR has played a critical role in corporate and government communication. Edegoh and Anunike (2016) argue that PR is essential for maintaining public trust and engagement, particularly for government agencies such as the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). Ojebuyi and Salawu (2019) emphasise that PR effectiveness in Nigeria is often limited by inadequate

transparency, poor crisis communication, and the public's scepticism towards government agencies.

Globally, PR is recognised as a vital tool for public sector communication. Coombs (2007) discusses the importance of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) in managing public perception during crises, a strategy that FRSC could employ when addressing road safety issues or allegations of misconduct. Shields and Peruta (2019) highlight that digital PR, particularly social media engagement, has transformed public sector communication by enhancing accessibility and responsiveness.

Motorists

Motorists in Akwa Ibom State represent a diverse group of road users, including private car owners, commercial drivers, motorcyclists, and tricycle (keke) operators. Given the state's growing urbanization, particularly in Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene, road transport has become essential for daily movement and commerce (Effiong & Nwosu, 2021).

However, Akwa Ibom motorists face several challenges, including poor road infrastructure, frequent road safety enforcement by the FRSC, and concerns over alleged extortion by traffic officials (Ekong & Udoh, 2020). Research by Nwachukwu (2018) indicates that motorists in Nigeria generally perceive traffic enforcement agencies as being more punitive than preventive, often questioning the fairness of road safety fines and penalties.

In contrast, international studies, such as those by Walters and Brooks (2021), show that effective road safety enforcement can significantly reduce accidents if motorists perceive it as transparent and fair. This underscores the need for FRSC to strengthen its PR strategies to improve motorists' trust and voluntary compliance.

Perception

Perception refers to how individuals interpret, understand, and react to stimuli based on their experiences, cultural background, and external influences (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2015). In the context of PR and road safety, perception is shaped by personal experiences, media representation, word-of-mouth, and direct interactions with officials (Kotler & Keller, 2019).

In Nigeria, public perception of government agencies, including the FRSC, is often influenced by issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and inconsistent enforcement of policies (Akinwale, 2017). Nwulu (2021) found that motorists' perception of FRSC in South-South Nigeria varies significantly, with commercial drivers generally having a more negative view than private car owners due to frequent fines and roadblocks.

Globally, perception studies in public sector public relations have shown that positive perception is linked to consistent and transparent engagement strategies (Fombrun, 1996). For example, research in South Africa by Molefe and Dlamini (2020) indicates that drivers respond better to road safety campaigns when they feel engaged rather than targeted for enforcement penalties. This highlights the importance of effective PR in shaping motorists' perception of FRSC operations in Akwa Ibom.

Road Safety Operations

Road safety operations refer to organised activities, policies, and enforcement mechanisms aimed at preventing road accidents, ensuring compliance with traffic regulations, and enhancing overall transportation safety (World Health Organisation, WHO, 2020). These operations encompass law enforcement, public education, infrastructure improvements, emergency response, and data-driven interventions to minimize road fatalities and injuries (OECD, 2019).

In Nigeria, road safety operations are primarily managed by the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), which was established in 1988 with the mandate to prevent road traffic crashes, enforce traffic regulations, and provide post-crash emergency response (FRSC, 2022). According to Adekoya *et al.* (2021), FRSC employs a combination of road patrols, mobile courts, public education campaigns, and speed limit enforcement to promote safer driving behaviours. However, road safety operations in Nigeria face challenges such as poor road infrastructure, inadequate funding, and public resistance to enforcement measures (Eke, 2019). Empirical studies by Okonkwo and Nwokedi (2020) suggest that motorists' compliance with FRSC regulations is influenced by the perceived fairness and transparency of enforcement strategies.

Internationally, road safety operations are guided by frameworks such as the Safe System Approach, which emphasises safe roads, safe vehicles, safe speeds, and safe road users (OECD, 2019). Countries like Sweden and the Netherlands have successfully implemented Vision Zero policies, which aim to reduce road fatalities to near zero through strict enforcement, public awareness, and infrastructure enhancements (Johansson, 2009).

In the United States, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) oversees road safety operations by setting vehicle safety standards, conducting crash research, and supporting state-level enforcement programmes (NHTSA, 2021). Research by Walters and Brooks (2021) highlights that data-driven road safety interventions, such as predictive policing and automated speed enforcement, have significantly reduced traffic fatalities in high-risk areas.

The Key Components of Road Safety Operations Include:

- (i) Traffic Law Enforcement: Monitoring and penalising violations such as speeding, drunk driving, and seatbelt non-compliance (Adebayo & Osagie, 2020).
- (ii) Public Education Campaigns: Creating awareness about road safety through media, schools, and driver training programmes (Edegoh & Anunike, 2016).
- (iii) Infrastructure Improvements: Developing safer roads, pedestrian walkways, and traffic control systems (World Bank, 2021).
- (iv) Emergency Response and Accident Management: Ensuring quick medical assistance for crash victims (WHO, 2020).
- (v) Technology Integration: Utilising surveillance cameras, speed detection devices, and automated enforcement systems (Shields & Peruta, 2019).

Review of Studies

Uzundu, C. A., Jamson, S. L., & Marsden, G. (2022). Road Safety in Nigeria: Unravelling the Challenges, Measures, and Strategies for Improvement

The study by Uzundu, Jamson, and Marsden (2022) provides a comprehensive analysis of road safety challenges, measures, and improvement strategies in Nigeria. Using focus group discussions with stakeholders from transport ministries and agencies, the study explored perceptions of road safety policies, road user behaviours, and systemic issues affecting enforcement. The findings reveal significant shortcomings in road design, weak traffic control mechanisms, and poor policy implementation, all of which contribute to Nigeria's high road traffic accident rates. Notably, the study highlights public education and information campaigns as perceived effective measures, despite contradicting existing literature that suggests such campaigns alone do not significantly alter driver behaviour. Additionally, the study emphasises the need for system-based reforms, improved inter-agency collaboration, and stricter enforcement of road safety laws to achieve meaningful reductions in road traffic crashes.

A key strength of this study is its qualitative approach, which provides rich insights into stakeholders' perspectives. However, a notable limitation is the exclusion of non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society groups, road users, and the private sector, who could offer alternative viewpoints on road safety measures. The study's findings align with global research indicating that holistic, multi-sectoral approaches—incorporating infrastructure upgrades, enforcement, and behavioural interventions—are essential for sustainable road safety improvements (WHO, 2018). To enhance policy effectiveness, the study recommends strengthening Nigeria's National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS), adopting a Safe System Approach, and prioritizing long-term investments in road infrastructure and driver education. Overall, the study provides a valuable evidence base for improving Nigeria's road safety landscape, though further research incorporating broader stakeholder perspectives would strengthen its conclusions.

Ibrahim Ibrahim, A. A. (2016). Evaluating Effectiveness of Federal Road Safety Commission Training and Education Programmes for Commercial Vehicle Drivers in Jigawa State, Nigeria

The study by Ibrahim (2016) evaluates the effectiveness of the Federal Road Safety Commission's (FRSC) training and education programmes for commercial vehicle drivers in Jigawa State, Nigeria. The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining a descriptive survey and focus group discussions to assess how commercial drivers perceive FRSC's road safety education efforts. The study sampled 2,000 commercial drivers from seven major inter-city parks, utilizing a 52-item self-developed questionnaire alongside focus group discussions. The findings indicate that drivers' educational background, duration of learning road safety, behaviour, and knowledge significantly influenced their attitude toward road safety education programmes. However, the study also reveals a lack of significant impact of FRSC's education programmes on drivers' compliance with road safety regulations, particularly concerning road signs and speed limits. This suggests that while education programmes increase awareness, they do not necessarily translate into behavioural change.

The study aligns with Onuka and Akinyemi (2012), who found that commercial drivers' compliance with traffic regulations is strongly linked to formal education and structured training. However, Okafor *et al.* (2014) argue that road safety campaigns must be complemented by strict law enforcement to ensure compliance. Ibrahim (2016) highlights a major challenge: many Nigerian commercial drivers acquire driving skills informally, without structured training, making it difficult for FRSC programmes to have a lasting impact. The study recommends continuous road safety enlightenment campaigns through radio, television, and motor parks and suggests that mandatory structured driving education should be introduced for commercial drivers before licensing. While the study provides valuable insights, its focus on only Jigawa State limits generalizability, and future research should explore the effectiveness of FRSC education programmes across multiple regions in Nigeria.

Macauley, C. I. (2021). Public Perception of the Public Enlightenment Programmes of Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC): A Survey of Motorists in Imo State

The study by Macauley (2021) examines the public perception of FRSC's public enlightenment programmes among motorists in Imo State. Anchored on Social Cognitive Theory, the study employed a survey research design, drawing a sample size of 399 respondents from a population of 857,298, using the Australian sample size calculator. The multi-stage sampling technique was used, and data were collected through questionnaires. The findings indicate that 45.5% of motorists in Imo State were highly exposed to FRSC's public enlightenment programmes, with seminars in motor parks (32.8%) being the most influential engagement method. The study also reveals that motorists generally perceive FRSC's public enlightenment programmes as effective, with an average mean score of 2.9 on a 4-point Likert scale, suggesting a positive influence on driver behaviour. Furthermore, the study found that motorists do not hold a negative image of FRSC, implying that the enlightenment programmes have improved the agency's public perception.

Despite these findings, the study highlights key areas for improvement. While exposure to FRSC campaigns is relatively high, motorists still engage in unsafe practices such as speeding, ignoring seatbelt use, and using phones while driving. This aligns with Ucheobi (2020), who argues that FRSC's campaigns must be reinforced with strict enforcement strategies to drive compliance. Additionally, Olusegun (2018) found that Information Communication Technology (ICT)-driven awareness programmes had a stronger impact than traditional seminars, suggesting that FRSC should diversify its media approach by integrating digital platforms and social media into its campaigns. The study recommends that FRSC expand its public enlightenment programmes to reach a wider audience, particularly through new media, and that the agency sustain its positive public relations efforts to maintain its good image among motorists in Imo State. While the study provides valuable insights, its geographic limitation to Imo State suggests that further research across multiple states could provide a more generalized understanding of public perception of FRSC's enlightenment efforts.

Gana, M. A., & Emmanuel, J. M. (2014). Road Transportation and Traffic Law Enforcement in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC)

The study by Gana and Emmanuel (2014) examines the role of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in enforcing road traffic laws in Nigeria, with a focus on the challenges faced by the agency. The study adopts a descriptive approach and utilises data collection and analysis to evaluate FRSC's effectiveness. The findings reveal that while road traffic laws in Nigeria are strong and adequate, their enforcement remains weak, leading to high rates of non-compliance among motorists. The study identifies key challenges hampering FRSC's effectiveness, including a lack of operational equipment, inadequate funding, and poorly maintained road infrastructure. Additionally, it highlights human factors such as over-speeding, reckless driving, and driving under the influence as the primary causes of road traffic accidents. Despite these challenges, the study acknowledges that FRSC has played a significant role in educating motorists through public enlightenment campaigns, which have contributed to some level of awareness and compliance.

The study aligns with previous research by Oyeyemi (2003), who emphasises that human error accounts for over 80% of road traffic accidents in Nigeria, underscoring the need for behavioural change campaigns alongside enforcement strategies. Similarly, Rom Kalilu (2008) supports the notion that FRSC's establishment led to a significant reduction in road crashes, but notes that gaps in emergency response services and road maintenance hinder further progress. Gana and Emmanuel (2014) recommend that FRSC be provided with adequate funding, modern enforcement tools, and improved training for personnel to enhance their ability to enforce traffic laws effectively. They also advocate for better road infrastructure and inter-agency collaboration to address enforcement limitations. While the study offers valuable insights into FRSC's operational challenges, its focus on enforcement without a deeper exploration of policy implementation and technological interventions limits its scope. Future studies should investigate how innovative traffic management systems and digital enforcement strategies can complement FRSC's efforts in improving road safety in Nigeria.

Amah, E. A., Popoola, M., & Asemah, E. S. (2022). Influence of Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) Ember Months' Campaign on Motorists in Benin City, Nigeria

The study by Amah, Popoola, and Asemah (2022) investigates the impact of FRSC's ember months' campaign on motorists in Benin City, Nigeria. Using a survey research design, the researchers examined the level of exposure to the campaign, the media channels through which motorists accessed the messages, and the perceived effectiveness of the campaign in influencing driving behaviour. The study sampled 300 commercial motorists, out of which 276 valid responses were analysed. The findings reveal that 45% of respondents reported low exposure to FRSC's ember months' campaign, with television being the primary channel through which they received campaign messages. Furthermore, the majority of motorists rated the campaign as less effective (45%) or not effective (28%), indicating concerns about the reach and impact of the FRSC's public awareness strategy. However, despite this skepticism, 65% of respondents acknowledged that the campaign positively influenced their driving behaviour, suggesting that while effectiveness may be limited, it still holds some behavioural influence.

The study aligns with previous research on fear appeal communication strategies in road safety campaigns. Asemah and Omosotomhe (2016) argue that fear-based messages can influence behaviour if combined with strict law enforcement and real-life accident statistics. Similarly, Delaney et al. (2004) found that fear appeals work best when complemented with persuasive educational materials and continuous public engagement. However, the study highlights that FRSC's over-reliance on traditional media, such as television and radio, limits its campaign effectiveness, echoing Okafor (2014), who recommends the integration of digital media, social media engagement, and targeted community sensitization programmes. The study recommends that FRSC expand its communication channels beyond television and radio to include social media, outdoor advertising, and print media to enhance message reach and effectiveness. Additionally, sustained monitoring and evaluation of campaign effectiveness should be prioritised to ensure improved compliance with road safety measures during the ember months.

FRSC (n.d.). Image Building and Public Relations in FRSC

The presentation "Image Building and Public Relations in FRSC" discusses the role of public relations (PR) in shaping the corporate image of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). The paper highlights that public perception is essential to the effectiveness of FRSC operations, as a positive image enhances compliance with road safety regulations. The study defines public relations as a planned and sustained effort to maintain understanding between an organisation and the public, emphasizing that PR is crucial in mass education, stakeholder engagement, and internal communication within the FRSC. Additionally, it explores the factors influencing FRSC's corporate image, including officer conduct, service delivery, and public trust, while identifying key challenges such as lack of confidence, inadequate funding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The paper suggests solutions like leadership commitment, improved PR strategies, and learning from best practices in other safety organisations.

The study aligns with previous research by Grunig and Hunt (1984), who argue that two-way symmetrical communication is critical for successful PR in public service organisations. Similarly, Olusegun (2018) found that law enforcement agencies in Nigeria struggle with public perception due to poor engagement strategies and inconsistent enforcement. The presentation's strength lies in its practical recommendations, such as training FRSC personnel as PR ambassadors and enhancing community relations to improve road safety compliance. However, it lacks empirical data or case studies to measure the impact of FRSC's PR efforts. Future research should explore how digital PR, such as social media campaigns and real-time road safety alerts, can enhance FRSC's engagement with the public. Overall, the study provides a valuable framework for understanding the intersection of PR and road safety management in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the stakeholder theory, as developed by Freeman (1984). The theory emphasises that organisations must consider the interests of all individuals or groups who are affected by or can influence their activities. Rather than focusing solely on profit-making or satisfying regulatory bodies, organisations should pay attention to a broader set of stakeholders, including customers, employees, government agencies, suppliers, local

communities, and the general public. The theory suggests that an organisation's success and legitimacy largely depend on how well it manages its relationships with these diverse groups.

According to this theory, effective organisational management involves ongoing communication, collaboration, and balancing of competing interests among stakeholders. It is not enough for organisations to act unilaterally; they must create mechanisms for dialogue, feedback, and participation to maintain trust and cooperation. When stakeholders feel valued and included in decision-making processes, they are more likely to support the organisation's objectives and initiatives, thus creating a more stable and supportive environment for operations.

Stakeholder Theory also stresses that ignoring or marginalizing key stakeholder groups can lead to significant consequences such as public distrust, reputation damage, protests, legal challenges, and operational difficulties. Organisations that fail to address the concerns of their stakeholders' risk losing credibility, facing constant conflict, and struggling to implement their policies effectively. Thus, the theory promotes a relational and ethical approach to organisational management, where success is measured not only by financial outcomes but also by social approval and stakeholder satisfaction.

In relation to public relations this study, Stakeholder Theory suggests that agencies like the FRSC must recognise motorists as essential partners, not just subjects of enforcement. Building strong, trust-based relationships with motorists requires more than issuing commands or occasional campaigns; it demands continuous engagement, responsiveness to complaints, and adaptation to feedback. Applying this theory helps explain why public perception matters in ensuring road safety compliance and why institutions must treat public relations as a core operational strategy rather than a peripheral activity.

Methodology

The case study design was used for this study. The design is appropriate when a researcher aims to explore a bounded system (a case) in-depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). In this context, the FRSC's operations in Akwa Ibom State can be treated as a unique case, and the study can examine how its public relations strategies shape motorists' perceptions. This design allows the researcher to use multiple data sources, such as interviews, documents, and observations, which enriches the depth and context of findings.

The population of this study comprises motorists in Akwa Ibom State, including private car owners, commercial drivers (taxis and buses), motorcyclists (okada riders), and tricycle operators (keke riders) who regularly interact with the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in the state.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2022), Akwa Ibom has a rapidly growing urban transport sector, with over 250,000 registered vehicles and an estimated 120,000 commercial transport operators. The FRSC (2023) also reports that road users in Akwa Ibom are key stakeholders in road safety operations, making them suitable for this study.

This study specifically focused on motorists operating within major urban centers such as Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene.

Qualitative data were obtained from 30 respondents using structured interviews. The participants were purposively selected to ensure representation across key categories of motorists in Akwa Ibom State, distributed as follows:

- (i) 10 commercial drivers (taxi and bus operators),
- (ii) 10 private vehicle owners,
- (iii) 5 motorcyclists (okada riders), and
- (iv) 5 tricycle operators (keke riders).

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 30 respondents participated in interviews and their perspectives were analysed using thematic analysis. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Four major themes emerged from the analysis:

Theme 1: Awareness and Reach of FRSC Public Relations Campaigns

Most respondents were aware of FRSC's public campaigns, particularly during festive periods and special events like "Ember Months." The campaigns were mostly accessed via radio, community rallies, and posters at checkpoints.

"They usually come out strong during December with jingles and patrols. That's when you hear their safety messages clearly." – Commercial Driver, Uyo

"I've seen their posters and billboards. They are visible, but not always consistent." – Private Driver, Eket

Motorcyclists and tricycle riders, however, reported less frequent exposure, especially those operating in interior parts of the state.

"They don't reach us with the messages. Maybe the big drivers hear them, but we small riders only see them when they stop us on the road." – Okada Rider, Ikot Ekpene.

Theme 2: Motorists' Experience with FRSC Officials

Experiences with FRSC officials varied widely across respondents.

Private and commercial drivers reported more formal interactions, particularly during checks for documentation and speed compliance.

Keke and okada riders described their encounters as often "confrontational," sometimes involving allegations of extortion or harassment.

"Some of them are respectful and just want to check your papers, but others are rude and threaten you if you don't 'settle.'" – Commercial Driver, Ikot Ekpene

"Most times, the officers don't even explain anything to us. They just stop you and start shouting." – Keke Rider, Uyo

Theme 3: Trust in FRSC and Perception of Agency Image

Trust in the FRSC's intentions was mixed. Several respondents believed the organisation was trying to maintain order, but inconsistency in officer behaviour and enforcement damaged their public image.

“Their rules are okay, but it’s the way they carry it out that causes problems. Some officers abuse the power they have.” – Private Vehicle Owner, Ikot Ekpene.

“If they can be more honest and treat people equally, we’ll respect them more.” – Okada Rider, Eket.

Many motorists also noted that positive behaviour from some officers helped reduce tension and promote compliance.

Theme 4: Suggestions for Improving FRSC Public Relations and Operations

Respondents emphasised the need for:

Consistent communication across all regions,

Use of local languages and mobile platforms for awareness,

Improved officer training,

Community-based outreach, and

Engagement with drivers’ unions and transport associations.

“They should hold meetings with drivers in our parks, not just give orders from their offices.”

– Commercial Driver, Ikot Ekpene.

“Let them use WhatsApp groups and Facebook more. Most drivers are online now, even the younger ones.” – Private Motorist, Uyo.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this qualitative study reveal nuanced perspectives on how motorists in Akwa Ibom State perceive the public relations (PR) strategies and operational conduct of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). The discussion reflects four dominant themes: awareness of PR campaigns, experiences with FRSC officials, public trust, and recommendations for improvement.

First, motorists’ awareness of FRSC’s PR efforts was relatively high, especially among commercial and private drivers. This aligns with previous studies by Amah, Popoola, and Asemah (2022), who found that FRSC’s “Ember Month” campaigns were widely known but not consistently maintained throughout the year. The present study also revealed that motorcyclists and keke riders—many of whom operate in rural or semi-urban areas—reported lower exposure to FRSC awareness messages, highlighting a communication gap that limits PR effectiveness. This reinforces Macauley (2021) who noted that limited media penetration and narrow messaging formats can exclude key segments of road users.

Secondly, the nature of motorists’ interactions with FRSC officials significantly shaped public perception. While some respondents described professional and informative interactions, others recounted experiences of hostility, extortion, or arbitrary enforcement. This inconsistency confirms the assertions of Gana and Emmanuel (2014) that while FRSC’s operational framework is well-intentioned, execution often suffers due to human factors, such as officer behaviour and lack of accountability. The duality of experience also mirrors findings by Ibrahim (2016), who emphasised that training and education alone do not guarantee compliance or goodwill if officer conduct is not regularly monitored and improved.

The issue of trust and public image emerged as a critical concern. Respondents expressed skepticism toward FRSC's sincerity in enforcement, citing perceived revenue motives and selective treatment of motorists. This finding supports Ucheobi, Omego, and Ihejirika (2021), who argue that enforcement without transparency erodes public trust, even in the presence of extensive awareness campaigns. Moreover, as Olusegun (2018) suggests, public institutions must balance enforcement with ethical conduct to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Finally, the participants offered practical recommendations for strengthening FRSC's public relations, including more consistent grassroots engagement, use of local languages, integration of digital platforms, and better training for officers. These suggestions echo the conclusions of Okafor (2014) and Shields and Peruta (2019), who advocate for PR strategies that are participatory, technology-driven, and responsive to public feedback. The call for FRSC to engage directly with drivers' unions and host sensitization programmes at motor parks indicates a demand for relational and community-based public relations rather than top-down messaging alone.

In summary, while the FRSC has made visible efforts in promoting road safety through public enlightenment and operational visibility, this study reveals that effectiveness is limited by inconsistency in communication, officer conduct, and lack of inclusive stakeholder engagement. To enhance its image and operational credibility, the FRSC must embrace a more holistic PR model that prioritises year-round messaging, behavioural training for personnel, and broader public participation in road safety initiatives.

Taking the discussion further, the themes derived from qualitative data analysis are aligned with the specific research questions guiding the study as follows:

Research Question 1:

What are the public relations strategies employed by the FRSC in engaging with motorists in Akwa Ibom State?

Findings showed that motorists—particularly commercial and private vehicle drivers—were aware of FRSC's campaigns, especially during festive periods such as the Ember Months. Channels mentioned included radio jingles, community rallies, posters, and occasional road shows. However, motorcyclists and keke riders expressed limited exposure, citing poor outreach in rural and semi-urban areas.

"They usually come out strong during December with jingles and patrols." – *Commercial Driver*

"We don't really hear anything unless they stop us on the road." – *Okada Rider*

These insights affirm the existence of seasonal, media-based PR strategies, but also point to a lack of inclusive and sustained communication efforts (Amah *et al.*, 2022; Macauley, 2021).

Research Question 2:**How do motorists perceive the public relations efforts of the FRSC in Akwa Ibom State?**

The study revealed mixed perceptions. Some motorists described professional and courteous behaviour by FRSC officials, while others recounted aggressive enforcement tactics and perceived extortion. These varied experiences shape overall attitudes toward the agency's PR and public image.

"Some officers are polite, but others shout at you without reason." – *Keke Rider*
"I was once fined without explanation, it didn't feel like safety, just punishment." – *Private Motorist*

Such responses reflect that motorists' perceptions are heavily influenced by face-to-face interactions, which often override PR messaging. This aligns with findings from Gana & Emmanuel (2014) and Ucheobi *et al.* (2021), who noted that inconsistent conduct by law enforcement agents affects institutional trust.

Research Question 3:**What is the influence of public relations on motorists' perception of FRSC's operations in Akwa Ibom State?**

Respondents recognised that while FRSC's messaging raises awareness about safety, it does not always lead to positive perceptions or behavioural change. Many participants linked PR effectiveness to officer behaviour, transparency, and grassroots engagement.

"If they can treat everyone fairly, people will listen to their messages more." – *Bus Driver*
"Use our language, come to our parks, and talk to us directly—that's what builds trust." – *Taxi Driver*.

This finding supports existing literature that emphasises the importance of two-way communication and participatory PR in public service organisations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Shields & Peruta, 2019).

Summary of Findings

- (i) **Awareness:** Most motorists are familiar with FRSC campaigns, especially during festive seasons. However, rural and informal transport operators feel under-informed.
- (ii) **Experience:** Interactions with FRSC officers are often uneven—some professional, others aggressive or exploitative.
- (iii) **Trust:** Public trust is moderate, weakened by perceived selective enforcement and officer misconduct.
- (iv) **Improvement Areas:** Suggestions include more grassroots engagement, multilingual communication, digital media use, and internal accountability for personnel.

This thematic analysis reflects the lived experiences of diverse road users in Akwa Ibom State and provides evidence-based direction for improving FRSC's public relations strategies and public image.

Conclusion

The study concludes that FRSC's public relations strategies are visible but inadequately inclusive and inconsistently applied. While the agency's awareness campaigns have had

some positive influence on road user behaviour, they are undermined by the lack of transparency in enforcement and poor interpersonal relations between officers and motorists.

Public perception of FRSC is shaped not only by the content of its messages but also by the conduct of its officers and the extent to which the public is engaged as stakeholders rather than subjects of enforcement. Hence, trust in FRSC operations remains fragile, especially among informal transport operators, who often feel marginalized and mistreated.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) **Broaden PR Coverage and Channels:** FRSC should extend public awareness campaigns to informal road users, especially motorcyclists and tricycle operators, by leveraging local radio, town hall meetings, community outreaches, and social media platforms.
- (ii) **Ensure Year-Round Engagement:** Rather than limiting campaigns to festive seasons (e.g., Ember Months), the FRSC should adopt a continuous PR model, reinforcing road safety messages throughout the year for sustained impact.
- (iii) **Train and Monitor FRSC Officials:** The agency must train its officers in ethical conduct, communication, and public relations, and institute internal monitoring mechanisms to check unprofessional behaviour. Officer conduct should align with FRSC's public image goals.
- (iv) **Adopt Two-Way Symmetrical Communication:** In line with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) theory, the FRSC should create feedback channels that allow motorists to express concerns, report misconduct, and suggest improvements—ensuring public participation in safety governance.
- (v) **Use Technology for Outreach:** WhatsApp groups, SMS alerts, and mobile apps can be used to communicate directly with registered motorists, making road safety education more interactive and accessible.
- (vi) **Partner with Driver Unions and Community Leaders:** Collaborations with transport unions, traditional rulers, and faith-based leaders can increase campaign credibility and reach, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

By implementing these recommendations, FRSC can improve its public image, strengthen motorists' trust, and enhance compliance with road safety regulations, ultimately contributing to safer roads in Akwa Ibom State and beyond.

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