



## PROJECTING THE POSITIVE IMAGE OF NIGERIA THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF LANGUAGE

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### **Abstract:**

It may not be far from truth to argue that there is a proportional relationship between the human mind and his language. Hence, man often perceives societal issues from the perspective of the language he speaks. Understandably, Nigeria is a multilingual society where people from different ethno-nationalities are expected to view national issues from the perspective of their language backgrounds. It is a truism that Nigerian image has been dented by the negative use of language in the mass media, video films, music novels etc. However, government has also made various decisive efforts to change this ugly trend. This advocacy article therefore explored the various measures taken by the Nigeria government down to the latest effort known of the present government of war against fake news. The negative effects of wrong choice of words on Nigeria were highlighted and some useful suggestions at curbing the negative trend. Also, how to sustain the various programmes of the Federal Government of Nigeria in order to turn around the image of Nigeria and Nigerians for the better was also analyzed.

**Keywords:** language, Nigeria, positive image

### **1. Introduction**

The government effort to sanitize the country in order to create good image for Nigeria and Nigerians has come a long way. This effort was necessitated by some objectionable behaviours of some unscrupulous Nigerians which became apparent right from early 70s. In the late 70s, a few Nigerians who were infested by the desire to get rich quick through dubious activities engaged themselves in various vices. It started with an economic crime popularly called advanced fee fraud (419). A few Nigerians engaged themselves in duping businessmen and women, especially the foreigners of their hard-earned money. Though some of the foreigners were culpable because they chose to transact business in clandestine manner in an effort to escape government taxes. There was also the issue of drugs peddling where young Nigerians men and women turned themselves into drug barons. These men and women used all sorts of

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dehumanizing means to carry hard drugs abroad where the drug business was booming. The drug business was associated with high level prostitution which also led to the vexed issue of human trafficking to the western countries. The whites did not only use Nigerians girls as sex machine to satisfy their lust, they also hired the girls for their dogs.

The next phase was the unprecedented corruption of the government officers and the elites which eventually led to yet another monster called money laundry. In the 80s huge sums of money mostly in hard currencies were transferred through international banking transactions. This money further enhanced the illicit drug business. Corrupt government officers also diverted the taxpayer money meant for development and lodge them in foreign banks. Consequently, these atrocities set the nation on the pedestal of being regarded as a crime haven. So, Nigerians who travelled abroad were treated at arm length like lepers that must be kept at a distance.

In an attempt to stem the tide of the ugly development, the Obasanjo's military government of 1976-79 replaced the National Anthem of the colonial masters with "Arise O' compatriots" and introduced the National pledge. The aim of this is to inculcate patriotism into Nigerians. The Shagari government that took over from Obasanjo between 1979 and 1983 introduced Ethical Revolution in an attempt to give Nigerians a sense of moral and ethical re-orientation towards better national values. Buhari-Idiagbon government of 1983 to 1984 introduced the **War against indiscipline** (WAI). The main aim was to compel the Nigerian citizens (in military force) to change their negative attitudes that tend to soil the good image of Nigeria within and outside the country. When General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) and his group came on board (1985 to 1993), **National Orientation Agency (NOA)** was established. The agency was headed by Professor Jerry Gana and the main objective was to imbibe good attitude and values in Nigerians. In an effort to curtail drug abuse, The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (**NDLEA**) and National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (**NAFDAC**) were established.

However, all these genuinely conceived efforts to project the good image of the country were not able to completely eliminate the financial corruption by government officials so, President Obasanjo in his wisdom established the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (**ICPC**) and The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (**EFCC**) to serve as watch dogs on all crimes related to economic and financial matters. Finally, in a seemingly unpopular cabinet reshuffle of President Obasanjo where Late Prof. Dora Akunyili was redeployed from Director General of National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control NAFDAC to the ministry of Information as the Minister, it was expected that based on her pragmatic nature, she would bring the much needed innovation to the ministry. It was timely then that no sooner she assumed office than she came up with programme that time known as **Re-branding Nigeria**. This was a variant of the previous government efforts. Re-branding Nigeria then involved a radical change which was aimed at repositioning the country for better image. The initiator of Re-branding Nigeria project, Late Prof. Dora Akunyili had emphasized on several occasions that the objective of re-branding Nigeria project was all about attitudinal change and value re-orientation. Re-branding Nigeria was a unique programme because it was holistic in dimension and it was capable of turning around the image of Nigeria for the better by the then administration.

Finally, the present civilian government led by Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari through the Minister of Information has been waging war against fake news which incidentally is detrimental to the image of the country in his attempt to project the good image of the country.

## **2. Language and the Image of Nigeria**

In all human societies where communication is seen as the major means of achieving unity, language is not only the most effective means of communication but also the most flexible and most productive. Therefore, in our society today, language is the means for social relationship between individuals and among nations. Language in the Nigerian situation refers to the English language because it happens to be the official language of communication. Language is used in relating all aspects of human life. This makes Leech and Short (1981:16) to observe that the totality of man is expressed in his language. Therefore, language plays a major role in portrayal of the individuals and national images. It is from this perspective that this article will view the role of language in projecting the positive image of Nigeria. (Over the years, Nigeria's image has been dented by the use of language in the mass media, video films, and fictional writings). This article shall examine the effects of the use of language in the above-mentioned media and how it affects the good image of Nigeria negatively.

### **2.1 The Mass Media**

Mass media here refers to the basic modern forms of media communication the radio, TV and the newspapers. These media have been used to tarnish the good image of Nigeria both at home and abroad. For instance, CNN, BBC, Sky News, etc. have been used to highlight the negative events that happen in Nigeria. This is possible because mass media has wide coverage as Bitner (1991:42) puts in:

*"This advantage has made it possible for the mass media to carry negative reports about Nigeria all over the world. Instances of these reports are so numerous to mention here. This is a common knowledge."*

### **2.2 Video Films and Music Industries**

The video films and music industries are another avenue through which bad image of Nigeria is projected to the world. This is because films have become a popular culture as Egya (2009:6) opines "Radio, TV and Music constitute the popular culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria". Video films such as "Ukwa in London", "Ibu in London", etc and music like "Zombie" by Late Fela Anipulapo Kuti and "Nigeria Jaga-Jaga", by Idris Abubakar are some of the music which portray bad image of Nigeria. For instance, "Zombie" portrays the Nigerian soldiers as a senseless set of people who are always pushed around by their commander. On the contrary, these same soldiers had performed excellently well in peace keeping missions in Nigeria and all over the world. "Jaga-Jaga" exposes the corrupt politicians and the suffering of the poor masses. While some of these criticisms may be true, the critics do not offer solutions to the problems. They are therefore not constructive criticisms.

### 2.3 Fictions

Prose fiction is defined as, “*the ordinary language of man either written or spoken*” (Omonode 1993:22). Novels are the common form of prose fiction. Therefore, they are veritable means of documenting the societal events. In the early 30, Joyce carry in one of his novels, *Mister Johnson* describes African society, especially Nigeria, as the state in violent conflict, and the traditional rulers were exposed to ridicule. This makes Taiwo (1976:22) to argue that, “*there was no reason to call Nigerian of 1936 savages, barbarians and bush pagans.*” Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Expo 77*, Festus Iyayi’s *Violence* just to mention but a few are some of the contemporary novels that portray Nigeria in bad image. This bad image must be deconstructed in this era of projecting the positive image of the country. In *Violence* by Festus Iyayi for instance, Iyayi describes Idemudia, the hero as one who sells his blood to feed his wife because of the economic hardship in Nigeria. The interpretation of Idemudias action is that, his action represents the Nigeria courage to eke out a living in the face of acute difficulties, instead of taking to criminalities as some characters would in such a situation. Adisa, the wife of the hero was described as one who commits adultery in order to pay her husband’s hospital bills. This action again represents the virtue of the Nigerian woman who is willing to stand by her husband at difficult times. This is the ability of a good wife to sacrifice for her husband. It shows that Nigerian women do not run away from their husband in times of trouble. Therefore, the language of the Nigerian prose fiction needs to be re-interpreted in an effort to project the good image of Nigeria.

### 3. Conclusion

It is truism that Nigeria image has been bastardized by the language used in the mass media, films and music, and the prose fiction, it is also true that some of these allegations may not be far from the actual condition of things in the country, but in the public. Nigerians need a re-thinking about what they say or write about their country in the media. This makes Levison (1983:21) to argue that, “*utterance involves the making or inference that will connect what is said to what is mutually assumed or said before*”. This implies that, whatever negative utterance that is made about Nigeria is what the people will assume to be the true state of thing in the country. Mass media, video films and music and fiction connect Nigeria to the world, therefore any negative language used in them will do a great damage to the image of the country. This will definitely do us no good at all.

#### 3.1 Recommendations

These recommendations should be steps in the right direction to achieving the objectives of projecting the positive image of Nigeria.

The Nigerian press should be encouraged to emphasize more on the positive side of Nigeria and the achievements of Nigerians in the national and international arena.

Literacy critics should be encouraged to re-interpret the Nigerian fiction in a positive manner.

Nigerian musicians should be encouraged to sing the praise of Nigeria instead of condemning the country for if we do not blow our trumpet no one else would.

Those few Nigerians whose activities are detrimental to the good image of Nigeria should be brought to book, no matter how highly placed in the society.

Religious leaders should let their followers understand that life is not all about earthly riches.

The Nigerian youths should be encouraged to shun drugs and other criminalities capable of denting the image of Nigeria.

The Nigerian Copy Right Commission should check the music and videos that brand Nigeria negatively.

The government and its agencies the private organization and the NGO's should intensify their efforts in sponsoring programmes that have to do with beatifying the country.

The war against fake news by the present government must be intensified and those who are engaging in the habit of spreading fake news concerning the country must be brought to book.

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