

Labour Practices and Plastic Manufacturing Firms' Image in Nigeria

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Abstract

Image of plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria have come under severe criticisms for numerous reasons. One of the many issues that is yet to adequately gathered empirical support is the spate of unfair labour practices which might have been responsible for negative image of the plastic firms in Nigeria and it was against this backdrop that this study examined labour practices and plastic manufacturing firms' image in Nigeria. To achieve the objective of the study, a survey was conducted among two hundred and thirty-eight (238) employees of selected plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria. It was revealed in the processed data that there is significant relationship between unfair labour practices and plastic manufacturing firms' image in Nigeria. Specifically, the study discovered that female employees' were exposed to unfair labour practices in plastic manufacturing firms than male employees' and this have really affected the image of plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Similarly, employees with low retention tendencies were found to have experienced more unfair labour practices which have earned the firms negative image than those with high retention tendencies. The study concluded that unfair labour practices have contributed significantly the battered image of the Nigerian plastic manufacturing firms. It was recommended that urgent steps must be taken to reposition the Nigerian plastic manufacturing firms to earn positive image and make it more employees' friendly in order to enhance the productivity level of the industry in Nigeria.

Key Words: 1. Corporate image, 2. Firms, 3. Labour practices, 4. Plastic manufacturing, 5. Nigeria

Introduction

Extant studies have articulated the growing importance of corporate image with some contributory factors such as product quality, advertisement, corporate social responsibility, business environment, among others (Lievens, 2017; Adejumo, Ogunbade&Akinbode, 2014), to the continuity and profitability of corporate organizations. In spite of the growing importance and identified contributory factors, limited studies have recognised employees' status as part of corporate image forgetting that 'employees' is also a springboard of image formation and sustenance. Activities and experiences of employees' in an organization for instance constitute significant image to customers, employees' family members, friends and potential employees' (Mazıcı & Gölğeli, 2017; Salam, Shawky & Nahas, 2013). This makes treatment melted on employees' is assumed to have significant contribution to image of the organization.

One of the ways through which the treatments meted on employees' have been conceptualized as 'labour practices', which encapsulate human resource practices governing the relationship between employee and employer in an organization (Andai, 2015; Ikeije, Akomolafe&Onuba, 2016). Studies have shown that such practices can be fair or unfair (Thato, 2015; Akinbode&Uwem, 2013).According to Thato (2015), fairness represents what is reasonable, just, equitable, honest, balanced and lawful. On the contrary, unfairness would entail unjust, dishonest and unlawful. Therefore, unfair labour practices are certain actions taken by employers that violate Labour Act (Adu-Pakoh, 2017). In context, unfair labour practices are unjust treatment by an employer of labour of her employee(s).

There is a quantum of unfair labour practices around the world today and this varies in context (industries, continents, gender, among others). In Nigeria, the common ones are discrimination of all sort (gender, age, religion, among others), casualization, unsafe work environment, and labour union subjugation experienced among others (Ikeije, Akomolafe & Onuba, 2016; Daniel, 2015). The experience of unfair labour practices has dehumanised employees' and created negative impression in their minds about the organization they work with too the people around them.Such unfair labour practices probably come with negative image of the firms in the plastic manufacturing industry in Nigeria. It was against the backdrop that the study was carried out to find out the nature of relationship between labour practices and plastic manufacturing firms image and further seek clarifications on gender dimension to issues of labour practices and employees' retention as regards their contribution to plastic manufacturing firms' image in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Image is a total perception, beliefs, and assessment of a person or group about an object such as human subject or entity. As regard 'entity', such as 'firm' this refers to 'corporate image'. The concept 'corporate image' is definitely not a new management lexicon, extensively discussed by notable authorities (Mazıcı & Gölgeli, 2017; Margulies, 1977). Such image is centred on people's (investor, host community, customer, employee, supplier, and government) impressions of a corporate entity (Mazıcı & Gölgeli, 2017). In this regard, existing studies have shown different dimensions to the concept and that is why multiple perspectives have evolved on the concept (Lievens, 2017; Adeniji, Osibanjo & Abiodun, 2013; Yeo, 2010). This implied the possibilities of different images in the minds of different stakeholders. For instance, host community is often interested in 'corporate social performance' and investor as a stakeholder would be interested in 'financial strength image of the company'. In context, employees are often interested in 'fair labour treatment' that is fair labour practices a metric they use to express their perception about the image of the firm. Adeniji, *et al* (2013) remarked that from employee perspective, such image represents the creation of good identity for the employees. This is possible when employees are fairly treated by employer at all times in the organization.

From the perspective of employees' and their associates, assessing image of the entity has to do with frequency of industrial accidents and injuries, disruption of manufacturing activities and employees' attrition tendencies (Oketunji, 2014;). Studies have established link between industrial accidents and injuries in the workplace and corporate image (Oketunji, 2014; Makori, Thuo, Kiongera & Muchilwa, 2013). By this, the perception of corporate image can be associated with the frequency of industrial accidents and injuries in an organization or industry. Industrial accident is an unpleasant occurrence in the work organisation that causes any person to be harmed. It is an unexpected, usually sudden occurrence including in particular emission, fire or explosion, resulting from abnormal development in the course of industrial activity (Sadullah and Kantan, 2009).This occurrence always leads to different forms of injuries such as muscle injuries, musculoskeletal disorders, disabilities and might result into death. The assumption is that when industrial accidents and injuries are high, corporate image tend to be negative and when industrial accidents and injuries are low, corporate image tend to be positive.

Extant studies have also suggested the tendencies for manufacturing activities disruption to have impacted on corporate image (Muchiri, Pintelon, Martin, & De Meyer, 2010; Süleyman & Seçkin, 2009). Cases of frequent industrial accidents and employees' injuries have been identified as one of the reasons for manufacturing activities disruption and this definitely come with a cost such company image issue (Makoriet al., 2013; Süleyman & Seçkin, 2009). Furthermore, studies (Budhwar, Varma, Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2009) have shown that employees' attrition tendencies are connected to corporate image. Employee attrition is the rate at which employee leave an organisation and when it is functional attrition it do have negative effect on the organisation (Mrope & Bangi, 2014; Ernest and Young Report 2012; Abdali, 2011). Studies (Mrope & Bangi, 2014; Sujeewa, 2011) have attributed increase in functional employee attrition to unfair treatment of employees. For instance, the study Sujeewa (2011) explained that grievance handling practice in Sri Lanka have been found to have contributed to high functional attrition rate of employees because it is considered unfair and injustice. Similarly, the study of Mrope and Bangi (2014) attributed that the cause of employee attrition in organisations to management practices. In this instance, some of these are management practices can be classified as unfair labour practices because they are negative practices in the organisation which the employees are not comfortable with hence their exit from the organisation. This in the opinion of Budhwar, Varma, Malhotra and Mukherjee (2009), have made working conditions unfriendly increase attrition rate.

Central to the issues above is the resource at the receiving end 'labour'. Labour as human being in this context refers to employees' that are engaged in the service of a firm. The state of employees' in the world of work is often judged by existing practices. Such 'practice' includes not only habitual action but also a single act or omission. Around the world, labour practices have been of concerns. Right to fair labour practices have remained critical to labour and human right movements. Studies have shown some degree of unfair labour practices in Nigeria against employees by employers of labour (Ikeije, Akomolafe & Onuba, 2016; Daniel, 2015). According to Ikeije, Akomolafe and Onuba (2016), labour practices in Nigeria is an embodiment of low wage, precarious working condition, indecent work, non-recognition of employees' right, among others. The description of what Ikeije, Akomolafe and Onuba (2016) identified as the features of labour practices in Nigeria portrayed an unfair labour practices because these features are not only inhumane but also unjust. There are unlimited numbers of unfair labour practices as they keep emerging in different dimensions, affecting employees' chances of healthy living and secured future. Some of these practices are discussed below:

Discrimination is any distinction, exclusive or preference made on the basis of race, colour, gender, religion, political opinion, and national extraction or social origin which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and treatment in employment or occupation (International Labour Organization Convention No 111). Dipboye and Colella (2005) perceived discrimination as the 'process of differentiation among persons based on characteristics that are not adequate or relevant for the activity for which the differentiation is made'. This has made studies such as Vettori & Nicolaidis (2016), and Steyn & Jackson (2015) to have perceived discrimination as an unfair act. However, discrimination in the world of work has assumed different dimensions such as employee discrimination, gender discrimination, age discrimination, gender discrimination, among others (Osah, Ukoha & Alagah, 2017; Omoh, Owusu & Mendah, 2015; Abbas, Hameed & Waheed, 2011). For instance, discrimination manifest in the work place the moment an employee is given preferential on unmerited ground (Osah, Ukoha & Alagah, 2017). There is a perception that female is at a disadvantage compared to male in all aspects of labour employment (Gandhi, 2010). The study of Cotton and Tuttle (1986) and Weisberg and Kirshenbaum (1993) found females more likely to leave than males organisations on the ground of discrimination in the work place. On the contrary, the study of Steyn and Jackson (2015) on gender-based discrimination in South Africa found difference between male and female treatment and discovered unfair treatment against males on labour issues such as remuneration.

Casualization of labour is another obvious unfair labour practice in this part of the world and it has gained ground in Africa and specifically in Nigeria (Okoye, Okolie, & Aderibigbe, 2014; Hamilton, 2006). Casualization of labour is the use of temporary, contract, part-time and casual labour (Batch & Windsor, 2014; Okoye *et al.*, 2014; Fapohunda, 2012). Studies (Fapohunda, 2012; Okafor, 2007; Quinlan, 2003) identified casualization as labour practice, what however makes it unfair are its features such as low remuneration and nonstandard working conditions, job insecurity, resistance to labour unionisation, dehumanisation of workers, job dissatisfaction, and lack of employment benefits (McGann, White & Moss, 2016; Adewusi, 2015; Fapohunda, 2012; Wandera, 2011; Fleetwood, 2007).

Furthermore, unsafe work environment has been classified under unfair labour practices (Nor-Ruslan, Zakaria, Malik, Kardi & Osman, 2014; Chandrasekar, 2011). Environment in this context connote where people work and encapsulate physical scenery such as noise, equipment, heat and basics of the job itself such as task, workload, and complexity (Gitonga & Gachunga, 2015; Shin & Jung, 2013; Srivastava, 2008). It refers the totality of forces, actions and other influential factors that are currently owned, or potentially contending with work setting. Activities in work settings such as noise, temperature, and lighting, among others over decades have posed serious challenge to work environment and rendered the environment unsafe for stakeholders especially workers (Nor-Ruslan, Zakaria, Malik, Kardi & Osman, 2014). Chandrasekar (2011) identified excessive noise, inadequate ventilation, and inappropriate lighting as some of the issues that makes workplace unsafe for employees. These components of work environment have been linked to issues that related to corporate image like safety of employees at work (Lee & Guerin, 2009; Juslen & Tenner, 2005; Hygge & Knez, 2001). For instance, lighting and workplace safety have been studied and results have shown that insufficient lighting leads to increased error rates and injuries. Advocates of safe work environment have called for the adoption of ergonomics theory to guarantee workplace efficiency and safety (Gitonga & Gachunga, 2015; Garbie, 2014). It is therefore imperative to examine how unsafe work environment have contributed to corporate image.

Notable studies (Amwayi, 2015; Godard, 2004) have also identified labour union subjugation as an unfair act. Labour union subjugation implied attempt by employer of labour to suppress union through different gimmicks and actions. These come inform of employers' intimidation and resistance to union's demands (Finnemore, 2013). Bacon and Storey (1996) argue that partnership initiatives between trade unions and employers have been frustrated in a number of firms, owing to the lack of management commitment to the process leading to nothing more than rhetoric of partnership. Active employer resistance to trade union activities in an attempt to subdue them has been overt (Cullinane & Dundon, 2012; Ruhemann, 2010; Fiorito, 2006). In developing countries Africa inclusive, have been treated with suspicion by employers and governments (Chukwuemeka, Ugwu, Enugu & Igwegbe 2012; Guest and Philip, 2008).

One of the existing theories that have provided some clue in explaining issues assumed in this paper is the human relations school of thought. Exponents of the theory such as Maslow (1954) and Mayo (1933) appreciated the essence of labour in the world of work and the need for individual employee to achieve self-fulfilment. Employees disposition to organisation therefore count in projecting the image of the company as their rights are respected and preserved, they intend to represent the company well beyond the capacity of employee but as ambassador of the organisation.

Hypotheses Formulation

H₀₁: There is a significant relationship between unfair labour practices and plastic manufacturing firms' image in Nigeria.

H₀₂: Female employees' in the Nigerian plastic manufacturing firms are exposed to unfair labour practices more than their male counterparts.

H₀₃: Employees' with low retention tendencies have experienced more unfair labour practices in the Nigerian plastic firms' than employees' with high retention tendencies.

Methodology

The study was carried out in the Nigerian Plastic manufacturing industry. This study adopted survey research design to gather data from employees of the firms in the plastic industry. All the employees of the Nigerian plastic manufacturing firms were considered as the target population. The study however was able to reach out to two hundred and thirty-eight (238) employees of selected plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria and their responses were relied on for data analysis.

The survey was conducted with the administration of questionnaire titled labour practice and plastic manufacturing firms Image. The instrument was divided into two sections namely; Section A: Labour Practices Questionnaire (LPQ) and Section B: Plastic Manufacturing Firms Image Questionnaire (PMFIQ). LPQ section was centred on issues around labour discrimination, casualization, unsafe work environment and labour union subjugation developed from the work of Vettori & Nicolaides (2016), Fapohunda (2012), Malik, Kardi & Osman (2014) and Amwayi (2015) with modifications using five-point scale of Likert for the twenty (20) items. PMFIQ was assessed through nineteen (19) items with issues around industrial accidents and injuries frequencies, manufacturing activities disruption frequency and employees' attrition tendencies developed with modifications from the work of Oketunji (2014), and Sadullah & Kanten (2009) with same Likert five scale point scale.

Summary of the reliability analysis is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Reliability analysis of LPQ and PMFIQ

Subscales of LPQ and PMFIQ	No of Items	Reliability
Discrimination	5	0.66
Casualisation of labour	5	0.73
Unsafe work environment	5	0.68
Labour union subjugation	5	0.71
Industrial accident and injuries frequencies	7	0.62
Manufacturing activities disruption frequency	6	0.68
Employees' attrition tendencies	6	0.54

The alpha reliability of labour practices such as discrimination, casualisation, unsafe work environment and labour union subjugation is 0.66, 0.73, 0.68 and 0.71 respectively shows that these proxies of LPQ are appropriate in evaluating Labour Practices. Also, the alpha reliability of PMFIQ that is industrial accidents and injuries frequencies, manufacturing activities disruption frequencies and employees' attrition tendencies were found to be 0.62, 0.68 and 0.54 respectively shows that the proxies are reliable measures of firms' image.

For data analysis, Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 was used in process data which were done with both descriptive statistics (frequency table and figures) and inferential statistics (cross tabulation and correlation)

Data Analysis

Table 2: Correlation matrix between unfair labour practices and plastic manufacturing firms' image

S/N	Proxies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Discrimination	1	0.314	0.232	0.131	0.089	-0.112	0.198	0.598	-0.167
2	Casualisation of labour	-	-	0.467	0.059	0.121	-0.149	0.067	0.782	-0.003
3	Unsafe work environment	-	-	-	0.052	0.020	0.154	0.108	0.832	0.107
4	Labour union subjugation	-	-	-	-	0.189	0.276	0.154	0.131	0.278
5	Industrial accident and injuries frequencies	-	-	-	-	-	0.507	0.114	0.054	0.831
6	Manufacturing activities disruption frequency	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.289	0.010	0.758
7	Employees' attrition tendencies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.018	0.564

Source: Data Computation, 2021.

Data presented in Table 2 revealed the relationship strength and direction of both proxies of unfair labour practices and plastic manufacturing firms' image. It clearly established the insignificant difference among the proxies of unfair labour practices and selected plastic manufacturing firms' image in Nigeria. Of significant relationship was discrimination, casualisation of labour, and unsafe work environment proxies of unfair labour practices while the three proxies of corporate image namely industrial accident and injuries, manufacturing activities disruption, and employees' attrition rate were of significant relationship too.

Table 3: t-Analysis of Scores of male and female responses on unfair labour practices

Unfair labour practices	Male n = 142		Female n = 96		T	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Discrimination	35.92	7.25	26.37	6.44	4.05	0.005
Casualisation of labour	23.93	5.23	24.16	5.49	3.46	1.42
Unsafe work environment	17.46	4.12	21.33	5.01	1.98	2.15
Labour union subjugation	14.96	3.48	11.68	3.88	0.92	0.31
Total	92.27	8.03	83.54	6.88	2.12	0.24

*Degree of freedom, df = 236

Source: Data Computation, 2021.

It was also glaring from Table 3 that there was an insignificant difference between male and female employees' of plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria at 5 percent level of significance. This was obvious on

the four proxies of unfair labour practices investigated in the study. Discrimination ($t=4.05, p> 0.05$), Casualisation of labour ($t=3.46, p> 0.05$), Unsafe work environment ($t=1.98, p> 0.05$), and Labour union subjugation ($t=0.92, p> 0.05$). Sum of the results ($t=2.12, p> 0.05$) also shows significant level. This implied that employees' gender is significant to the issue of unfair labour practices in plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

Table 4: Gender differences on the selected plastic manufacturing firms' employees

Plastic Manufacturing Firms image	Male n = 142		Female n = 96		T	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Industrial accident and injuries frequencies	31.02	8.01	33.48	6.89	-0.823	0.344
Manufacturing activities disruption frequencies	33.64	6.14	34.45	7.46	0.090	0.826
Employees' attrition tendencies	28.74	6.74	32.44	13.02	-0.745	0.442
Total	93.40	8.22	100.37	9.54	2.65	0.008

* Degree of freedom, df = 236

Source: Data Computation, 2021.

Results in Table 4 shows significant difference in the gender of employees' in the selected plastic manufacturing firms image based on the three proxies investigated. Industrial accident and injuries ($t=0.823, p> 0.05$), Manufacturing activities disruption ($t=0.090, p> 0.05$), and Employees' attrition tendencies ($t=0.745, p> 0.05$). Similarly, the total result ($t=2.65, p> 0.05$) is also insignificant. By implication, corporate image is likely to affect employees' in the Nigerian plastic firms irrespective of their gender. Hence, either of the gender can be affected by the image of the firm.

Table 5: t-Analysis of employees' retention tendencies in relation to unfair labour practices

Unfair labour practices	1 - 5 years		6 - 10 years above		T	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Discrimination	27.40	7.44	23.32	5.33	1.32	0.382
Casualisation of labour	22.52	5.14	21.73	4.02	0.842	0.81
Unsafe work environment	14.02	3.88	13.11	3.14	0.64	0.72
Labour union subjugation	11.03	3.05	12.27	2.97	0.54	0.58
Total	74.97	6.14	70.43	5.13	1.02	0.22

* Degree of freedom, df = 235

Source: Data Computation, 2021.

Results expressed in Table 5 depict significant difference between employees' retention tendencies and unfair labour practices. This is detailed as follows: Discrimination ($t=1.32, p> 0.05$), Casualisation of labour ($t=0.842, p> 0.05$), Unsafe work environment ($t=0.64, p> 0.05$), and Labour union subjugation ($t=0.54, p> 0.05$). The sum is ($t=1.02, p> 0.05$) is also insignificant. This inferred that plastic manufacturing firms' employees' are likely to experience unfair labour practices irrespective of their years in the service of the firm.

Table 6: t-Analysis of employees' retention tendencies in relation to plastic manufacturing firms' image

Plastic Manufacturing Firms image	1 – 5 years		6 – 10 years above		T	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Industrial accident and injuries frequencies	32.03	5.89	28.58	6.22	1.46	0.163
Manufacturing activities disruption frequencies	35.33	5.68	33.18	7.14	0.745	0.50
Employees' attrition tendencies	32.01	5.60	31.23	6.38	0.522	0.742
Total	99.37	8.13	92.99	7.34	0.29	0.76

* Degree of freedom, df = 235

Source: Data Computation, 2021.

Table 6 reveals significant relationship between employees' retention tendencies and selected plastic manufacturing firms image in Nigeria. From the three proxies investigated; industrial accidents and injuries ($t=1.46, p> 0.05$), manufacturing activities disruption ($t=0.745, p> 0.05$), and employees' attrition tendencies ($t=0.522, p> 0.05$). Overall result ($t=0.29, p> 0.05$) is also insignificant. It is deduced here that corporate image does not really determine employees' retention tendencies especially in a country like Nigeria where unemployment rate is very high. The assumption that employees' attrition tendencies will be high with bad corporate image does not hold in this circumstance.

Discussion of Results

This study has investigated the relationship between labour practice and plastic manufacturing firms' image in Nigeria. The first findings revealed insignificant relationship among the proxies of unfair labour practices such as discrimination, casualization of labour, and unsafe work environment and those of plastic manufacturing firms' image proxies such as industrial accident and injuries frequencies, manufacturing activities disruption frequencies, and employees' attrition frequencies. This result implied that plastic manufacturing firms image in Nigeria have been undermined by unfair labour practices which have been reported to have been on the increase in the industry. This result is in agreement with the findings made by Ikeijeet *al.*, (2016) which established that unfair labour practices is prevalent in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study revealed that there is significant difference in the experience of unfair labour practices between male and female employees of plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria. This result shows that female employees' are exposed to unfair labour practices in plastic manufacturing firms than male employees' and have also undermined the image of plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria. This finding agrees with the views of Cotton and Tuttle (1986) and Weisberg and Kirshenbaum (1993) which submit that females are more likely to leave than males due to discrimination at work.

The third hypothesis result shows that there is significant relationship between employees' retention tendencies and plastic manufacturing firms' image in Nigeria. Employees' with low retention tendencies were found to have experienced more unfair labour practices which have earned the firms negative image than those with high retention tendencies. The result implied that plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria have recorded high labour attrition because of the prevalence of unfair labour practices. This result is in consonance with Mrope and Bangi (2014), and Sujeewa (2011) that established that unfair labour practices increased employees' attrition rate.

Conclusions

This study confirmed labour practices to have strong relationship with Nigerian plastic manufacturing image. Unfair labour practices have been found to have contributed to negative image that the Nigerian plastic manufacturing firms have earned. Labour discrimination, casualisation, unsafe work environment and labour union subjugation were found to have contributed significantly to the issues of negative image that the plastic firms have earned in Nigeria which are obvious in the frequencies of industrial accidents and injuries, manufacturing activities disruption and employees' attrition rates. Based on the findings, the study affirmed unfair labour practices as predictor of negative image that plastic manufacturing firms' have earned over the years in Nigeria. In essence, Nigerian plastic manufacturing would continue to earn negative image if unfair labour practices continue but if fair labour practices are promoted, the negative narrative image of the firms in the plastic industry would be changed.

Recommendations

Based on the results and conclusions, it was recommended that:

- It is imperative for firms in the Nigerian plastic industry to work on the mind-set of their employees to change the negative narrative.
- Elimination of identified unfair labour practices and enthrone of best labour practices will enhance corporate image of Nigerian plastic manufacturing firms.
- To check the increasing abuse of labour practices, management of plastic manufacturing firms in Nigeria need to know the extent of damage it has on their corporate image and address the various unfair labour practices.
- Provision and sustenance of safe work environment that would make employees comfortable at work.
- Active policies and legislations, and enforcement by employers and government through her management and agencies is also required

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