

Assessment of Communication Strategies Adopted by Free Trade Zone Authorities for Investment Promotion in Nigeria

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Abstract

The communication strategies of Free Trade Zone (FTZ) Authorities in Nigeria play a pivotal role in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and driving economic growth by offering various incentives and streamlined business processes. This study evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies and explores areas for enhancement, using a mixed-methods approach that involved surveys and interviews with 161 respondents. Guided by the Investment Climate and Location Theory, the research investigates the diverse channels FTZ Authorities utilize to promote investment and foster engagement with potential investors. The findings reveal that FTZ Authorities in Nigeria employ a combination of digital and traditional media communication strategies, including online advertising, press releases, and social media. They also utilize trade fairs, solo exhibitions, and public relations activities to raise awareness about investment opportunities. Investment forums and town hall meetings emerge as particularly effective tools, enabling direct engagement and relationship-building with investors. These strategies allow FTZ Authorities to showcase the unique advantages of Nigerian Free Trade Zones, such as tax incentives, infrastructure benefits, and ease of doing business. However, the study identifies several challenges that limit the effectiveness of these communication strategies. Resource constraints, cultural and religious differences, technological limitations, and regulatory issues hinder the reach and impact of FTZ Authorities' efforts. These obstacles complicate efforts to establish consistent and persuasive communication with international and domestic investors. To address these issues, the study recommends that the Federal Government of Nigeria enhance the operational capacity of FTZs by enacting supportive regulations that facilitate seamless communication initiatives. By bolstering resources and addressing regulatory and technological barriers, the government can empower FTZ Authorities to more effectively communicate the benefits of investing in these zones, ultimately contributing to

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increased FDI and sustained economic growth. This study underscores the need for a strengthened, coordinated communication framework to optimize the role of Free Trade Zones in Nigeria's economic development trajectory.

Keywords: *Free Trade Zones, investment, promotion, communication strategies, foreign direct investment, economic growth.*

Introduction

Communication is an essential aspect of daily life, significantly impacting businesses, public institutions, and non-profit organisations. Effective communication fosters a positive reputation and enhances both corporate brand image and product perception. Organisations engage in both internal and external communication to manage their operations efficiently. A robust communication strategy aids an organisation in achieving its objectives and goals through effective information dissemination.

According to Gitnux (2022), a communication strategy is a business and marketing tool that helps an organisation determine the optimal approach to conveying a message or information to reach all stakeholders most effectively. These strategies are tailored to the interests and needs of an organisation's audience, with the mission of achieving specific objectives. A communication strategy is a written reference document used to assess progress, developed through collaboration between business or project leaders and communication professionals. A comprehensive communication strategy identifies measurable communication objectives, the relevant audience, available channels, a plan of activities, a timetable, communication risks and mitigation strategies, and resources (both financial and human). These strategies are crucial for planning site-related communication with the public, stakeholders, and colleagues, enhancing the interactive nature of communication, and ensuring that target audiences receive pertinent information.

Communication strategies serve as roadmaps for organising internal and external communication to facilitate the execution of an organisation's overall strategy (Pimia, 2015). These strategies are fundamental in articulating, explaining, and promoting a vision and a set of well-defined goals. As Kibe (2014) asserts, they build a reliable, cohesive "voice" that unifies various activities and goals, appealing to an organisation's stakeholders. Sackey (2014) suggests that communication strategies also shape the nature of relationships and collaboration with key constituents, such as investors, who are vital for the successful implementation of programmes.

Free Trade Zones (FTZs) play a crucial role in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and stimulating economic growth by offering various incentives and streamlined processes for businesses. An FTZ is a distinct economic zone within a country that provides special privileges related to trade and business policies for companies operating within that zone, particularly regarding taxes. FTZ is a special area within a country where foreign and local companies can import materials, manufacture goods, export products, and perform services without being subject to customs, tax, labour, and other bureaucratic regulations (FIAS, 2008).

Despite extensive literature on communication strategies, there is limited information regarding the communication strategies employed by organisations responsible for promoting investment in Free Trade Zones in Nigeria. Evaluating these communication strategies is essential for assessing their effectiveness and identifying areas for

improvement. Thus, this study aims to evaluate the communication strategies employed by Free Trade zone authorities in Nigeria for investment promotion.

Statement of the Problem

The contemporary reshaping of the global economic landscape has been characterised by the ascent of free trade zones, recognised as significant drivers of economic advancement. In Nigeria, the deliberate establishment of Free Trade Zones (FTZs) seeks to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and stimulate industrialisation. However, amidst these ambitious objectives, a focal point for scrutiny and concern centres on the efficacy of communication strategies employed by Free Trade Zone Authorities (FTZAs) to facilitate investment.

Studies on communication strategies and promotion of FTZ have been conducted by scholars in Nigeria and outside Nigeria (Evans, 2019; Ndibe 2008; Farol & Akinci(2011); Yesbergan, 2020; Bello, 2018). For instance, the study by Bello (2018) focused on evaluating the effectiveness of communication strategies in African Free Trade Zones. Ndibe (2008) worked on understanding the FTZ Scheme, and Nigeria's perspectives. Evans (2019) studied the impact of government communication strategies on free trade zone development. Yesbergan (2020) investigated attracting foreign direct investment through strategic marketing tools: the case of Kazakhstan. However, none of these studies dwelled on the evaluation of communication strategies by free trade zone authorities for investment promotion in Nigeria. This is the gap that this current study bridged.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to evaluate the communication strategies utilised by Free Trade Zones Authorities to promote investments in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include:

- i. To find out the current communication strategies employed by Free Trade Zones (FTZ) Authorities in Nigeria for promoting investment.
- ii. To assess the effectiveness of the communication strategies in place, in terms of increasing awareness and understanding of investment opportunities within the Free Trade Zones.
- iii. To identify the key challenges faced by Free Trade Zones Authorities in Nigeria in implementing successful communication strategies for investment promotion.

Conceptual Clarifications

Communication Strategies

Strategy can be defined as a plan of action, intended to accomplish a specific goal (Bessette, 2018). A communication strategy, therefore, identifies the key stakeholders for whom the communication is meant, the key messages to be sent to them, and specific channels that are considered appropriate to reach the target communities. The communication strategy also states ways and means through which its success or failure will be measured, and the desired behavioural change expected from members of the communities it is targeted at. For a communication strategy to succeed, it should have accomplished the intended goals and objectives determined for it (Servaes, 2017). Communication strategies help in planning site-related communication with the public, stakeholders, and colleagues. Good communication strategies can improve the

interactive nature of communication and help permit applicants and/or permitting agencies to receive information from their target audiences. A communication strategy provides a structure for identifying events (e.g. issues, problems, and actions) that require outreach; considers potential messages and audiences; and develops vehicles to deliver information.

Communication strategies are the roadmaps designed to organised internal and external communication so that an organisation's overall strategy can be executed (Pimia, 2015). These strategies are fundamental in articulating, explaining, and promoting a vision and a set of well-defined goals. Kibe (2014) maintains that they build a reliable, cohesive "voice" that links varied activities and goals in a manner that appeals to an organisation's stakeholders. Sackey (2014) opines that communication strategies also determine the nature of relationships and collaboration created with the most important constituents of the organisation such as investors... who are critical in the successful implementation of the programme.

Free Trade Zone

Free trade zones (FTZs) are as heterogeneous as their real-life manifestations are diverse (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2019). FTZs are fundamentally aimed at boosting (foreign) investment, increasing exports, diversifying the economy, and generating direct and indirect jobs. They come in all guises, sizes, and shapes, from small industrial park-type zones to entire cities. Despite their diversity, all FTZs share common features. In its most basic definition, an FTZ is an area where national rules and regulations of doing business differ from the remainder of the country. The differentiated regulatory regime aims to render the zone more attractive for foreign and local investment. A Free Trade Zone (FTZ) is a strategically designated geographical area within a country's borders that offers distinct economic advantages to businesses engaged in international trade and investment. The primary purpose of establishing FTZs is to stimulate economic growth by facilitating and promoting trade, manufacturing, and export activities. Within these zones, businesses enjoy several key benefits, including reduced or eliminated customs duties and tariffs, simplified customs procedures, and the ability to defer import duties until goods are sold in domestic markets. FTZs often attract foreign direct investment (FDI) by offering a favourable environment for business operations, which, in turn, leads to job creation, technological advancements, and the development of local industries. These zones play a pivotal role in enhancing a country's competitiveness in the global market and promoting economic development while fostering collaboration with international partners, ultimately contributing to the prosperity of the region in which they are established. Some key aspects of the concept of Free Trade Zones to include: (a) it is a geographically delimited area, usually physically secured; (b) it has a single management or administration; (c) it offers benefits for investors physically within the zone; and (d) it has a separate customs area (duty-free benefits) and streamlined procedures (FIAS 2008).

Investment Promotion

Investment promotion is fundamentally about marketing a country as a location for investment. FIAS assists in improving the products offered by countries by providing business-enabling environment and investment policy advice and assistance in designing institutional frameworks for investment promotion. The technical assistance arm of the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) assists IPAs in developing and implementing investment promotion strategies (FIAS, 2006). The main purpose of

investment promotion is to reduce the costs of FDI by providing information on business conditions and opportunities in the host economy and by helping foreign investors cut through bureaucratic procedures. Investment promotion activities encompass: advertising, investment seminars and missions, participation in trade shows, one-to-one direct marketing efforts, facilitating visits of prospective investors, matching prospective investors with local partners, helping obtain permits and approvals, preparing project proposals, conducting feasibility studies and servicing investors whose projects have already become operational. As obtaining information on investment opportunities in developing countries tends to be more difficult than gathering data on industrialized economies, investment promotion should be particularly effective in a developing country context (Torfinn & Javorcik, 2007).

Review of Empirical Studies on Communication Strategies and Investment Promotion in Free Trade Zones

Yesbergan et al. (2020) conducted a research study titled "Attracting Foreign Direct Investment through Strategic Marketing Tools: The Case of Kazakhstan." The investigation centered on harnessing strategic marketing tools to draw Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) within the context of Kazakhstan. The primary objectives were to delve into the role of strategic marketing tools in FDI attraction and offer recommendations to enhance Kazakhstan's communication strategies in this realm. Employing a secondary research methodology, the study derived insights and conclusions from existing literature and materials. Anchored in Nation Branding Theory, which guides a country's efforts to shape its global image, the theory provided a framework for understanding how Kazakhstan's branding could influence potential investors' perceptions. The study's findings proposed that Kazakhstan could bolster its appeal to foreign investors by focusing more on the content of its Marketing Communication Tools (MCTs) and by providing additional information on the advantages of FDI. Emphasizing the evolving complexity of marketing communication, the study underscored its role in shaping stakeholders' thoughts, behaviors, and actions. The researchers recommended initiating a nation branding strategy to enhance Kazakhstan's overall image and address both positive and negative perceptions. While Yesbergan's study concentrates on a specific country's image and FDI allure, the present research seeks to offer a more localized perspective, specifically within the framework of Nigeria's free trade zones. This contribution aims to provide a nuanced understanding of effective communication for investment promotion.

Smith (2021) investigated "Assessment of Communication Strategies of Free Trade Zones in Promoting Investment in Nigeria". The study's primary focus was to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by Free Trade Zones (FTZ) in Nigeria and their impact on investment promotion. The research sought to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies and provide recommendations for their enhancement. To achieve these objectives, the study employed a mixed-method approach that combined surveys and in-depth interviews. The survey participants included FTZ, government officials, and investors, providing valuable quantitative data. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to gather qualitative insights. This research was grounded in the Communication for Development (C4D) framework, emphasizing the vital role of effective communication in driving development initiatives. It also drew upon existing literature related to investment promotion and communication strategies. The study revealed several critical findings,

including: Lack of coordination and consistency in communication efforts within FTZ, Insufficient utilization of digital platforms and social media for outreach and engagement., Limited interaction with potential investors in the planning and implementation of communication strategies and the need for better targeting and customization of communication materials. The study aimed to bridge significant gaps identified by current research. These gaps encompassed: A scarcity of empirical research assessing the effectiveness of communication strategies within Nigerian Free Trade Zones, Limited availability of studies offering practical recommendations for improving investment promotion through enhanced communication, and the opportunity to connect theoretical concepts, such as the C4D framework, with practical application by evaluating the real-world effectiveness of communication strategies. The research not only addressed these gaps but also shed light on areas where FTZ in Nigeria could improve their communication strategies to further promote investment and economic development.

Evans (2019) assessed "The Impact of Government Communication Strategies on Free Trade Zone Development". The primary focus was to examine the influence of government communication strategies on the development of free trade zones (FTZs). The central objectives were geared towards evaluating the efficacy of government communication in attracting foreign investments and nurturing the growth of FTZs. This research conducted cross-national analyses, scrutinizing government communication strategies and their relation to FTZ development in diverse countries. Data collection involved perusing government publications, economic reports, and interviews with government officials, with comparative analysis serving as the method for drawing conclusions. The study was grounded in the Stakeholder Theory, emphasizing the significant role of government communication in engaging various stakeholders, including prospective investors and business entities. Additionally, insights were derived from the realms of international trade and economic development literature. The research revealed that government communication played a pivotal role in the prosperity of FTZs. Governments that effectively communicated the advantages, incentives, and regulatory frameworks associated with their FTZs enjoyed greater success in attracting foreign investments and fostering economic growth. The presence of clear and consistent government messaging emerged as a key factor in shaping a positive image for FTZs. Evans' research focused on the impact of government communication strategies on FTZ development in a global context. While it examined the broader spectrum of FTZ development and government communication, the current research narrows its focus to the specific strategies employed by Free Trade Zone authorities in Nigeria. It aims to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies in promoting investment within the Nigerian context. Therefore, the gap being addressed is the need for a more localized, in-depth examination of communication strategies tailored to a specific country (Nigeria) within the realm of FTZs.

Bello (2018) examined "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Communication Strategies in African Free Trade Zones". The primary aim was to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies in African free trade zones. The central objectives were focused on evaluating the impact of communication on the attraction of investments and the promotion of regional economic integration in African FTZs. To achieve these goals, the study employed a combination of surveys, interviews, and content analysis of

communication materials within selected FTZs in Africa. Data collection involved engagement with FTZ Authorities, investors, businesses, and stakeholders, with statistical analysis and qualitative coding used to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies. The research was grounded in the Integration Theory, emphasizing the pivotal role of effective communication in fostering regional economic integration. Insights were also drawn from the body of literature about international trade in the African context. The study's findings underscored the critical importance of effective communication strategies in the efforts of African FTZs to attract investments and promote regional economic integration. African FTZs that actively engaged in proactive communication with various stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and the public, experienced heightened levels of investors' interest and enhanced cooperation in trade agreements. While Bello's research provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of communication strategies in African free trade zones, the current research takes a more specific and localized approach. It hones in on the communication strategies employed by Free Trade Zone Authorities in Nigeria, with a particular focus on their effectiveness in promoting investment. The gap being addressed is the need for a dedicated examination of communication strategies tailored to the unique Nigerian context within the realm of Free Trade Zones. By concentrating on Nigeria, this research offers practical insights and recommendations for stakeholders in the Nigerian Free Trade Zones, enhancing the body of knowledge with a more specific and regionally relevant perspective.

Similarly, Adebayo (2016) studied "Investment Promotion in Nigeria: The Role of Free Trade Zones and Communication Strategies". Adebayo's research investigated the intricate interplay between Free Trade Zones (FTZs) and the communication strategies wielded by authorities to catalyze investments. The study underscores the significant role of FTZs as catalysts for economic development in Nigeria, positing that these zones have substantial potential to significantly contribute to the country's economic growth by providing a conducive environment for trade and investment. The research aligns with established economic theories emphasizing the crucial role of FTZs in promoting economic activities and enhancing global competitiveness. Central to Adebayo's study is the exploration of communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities. The argument posits that while FTZs hold promise, their impact on investment promotion hinges on the effectiveness of communication strategies. Aligned with the current study's objectives, Adebayo (2016) aims to unravel the contribution of FTZs to Nigeria's economic growth, evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies, and assess stakeholders' perceptions. A significant revelation from the study is that existing communication strategies could be augmented to better capitalize on investment opportunities. This insight emphasizes the need for a strategic and targeted approach to conveying the benefits and opportunities offered by FTZs to potential investors. Adebayo's (2016) research methodology, employing a mixed-methods approach, enhances the robustness of the findings by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The study implicitly draws on economic theories related to investment and development, emphasizing the economic potential of FTZs in attracting investments and fostering economic growth. Additionally, it integrates communication theories to analyze the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities. Despite its strengths, the study identifies gaps, particularly in the form of limited recommendations for improving communication strategies.

Adebayo (2016) acknowledged the potential for enhancement in communication but fell short in providing specific recommendations for refinement. This underscores the imperative for further research to furnish practical insights for FTZ Authorities to strengthen their communication efforts. Adebayo's study stands as a commendable resource for comprehending the interplay between FTZs, communication strategies, and investment promotion in Nigeria. Its comprehensive approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, aligns with the overarching theme of the research, emphasising the potential economic benefits of FTZs. Nevertheless, a more nuanced analysis of communication challenges and concrete recommendations for improvement would amplify the practical applicability of the study.

The study authored by Adebayo (2016) provides a pertinent foundation for the current research thesis. It furnishes a comprehensive understanding of the potential and challenges associated with FTZs and their communication strategies. However, the study could benefit from a more nuanced exploration of communication challenges and specific recommendations for improvement. The review significantly contributes to the understanding of investment promotion in Nigeria, emphasizing the significant role of FTZs and the need for enhanced communication strategies. Nevertheless, further research may be warranted to address the identified gaps and provide actionable recommendations for FTZ Authorities in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Investment Climate and Location Theory. The Investment Climate and Location Theory, introduced by John Dunning in 1980, constitutes a conceptual framework aimed at elucidating the factors that shape the decisions of multinational enterprises (MNEs) in selecting investment locations. This theoretical framework transcends mere economic considerations, acknowledging the intricate nature of investment determinations by incorporating political and social dimensions. At its core, the theory is encapsulated in the Ownership-Specific Advantages (OLI) model, encompassing Ownership-specific advantages (O), Location-specific advantages (L), and Internalization advantages (I).

In the context of the present research project, the theoretical foundation is drawn from the Investment Climate and Location Theory. Dunning's proposition suggests that the allure of an investment location is shaped by a multitude of factors, spanning economic, political, and social realms. Specifically, the research centers on elucidating how communication strategies employed by Free Trade Zones (FTZ) Authorities contribute to molding the investment climate within the Nigerian context.

The selection of the Investment Climate and Location Theory is of paramount significance due to its direct relevance to the primary focus of the study: the evaluation of communication strategies employed by Free Trade Zone Authorities in Nigeria. The theory's capacity to illuminate the intricacies of factors influencing investment decisions and its acknowledgment of the role played by location-specific conditions underscores its importance for policymakers, investors, and FTZ Authorities alike. The seamless alignment of the theory with the research questions and objectives facilitates a comprehensive investigation into the impact of communication strategies on the investment climate within the Free Trade Zones in Nigeria. The resulting conceptual framework visually depicts the interrelationships among key concepts within the chosen theoretical framework. Central variables, including communication strategies, investment climate, and location-specific factors, are operationalised through the

examination of specific communication tactics, economic conditions, political stability, and social factors within the Free Trade Zones in Nigeria. It is imperative to note that the scope of the framework is delimited to the assessment of communication strategies within the Free Trade Zones in Nigeria and their influence on the investment climate, without extending to broader investment trends or communication strategies beyond the FTZ context.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The rationale for adopting a mixed-method approach includes several key factors. Firstly, it aims to address the limitations of one method by complementing it with the strengths of the other. Secondly, the qualitative approach provides participants with the freedom to express their feelings in their own words and possibly in their local dialect. Thirdly, findings from both qualitative and quantitative data sources can be compared, enriching the overall analysis. Lastly, using mixed methods allows the results of one approach to bridge gaps identified in the other. Overall, the mixed-method strategy facilitates the generation of comprehensive and diverse data, ensuring the research objectives are met and reliable conclusions can be drawn.

The study's population comprised staff from the Corporate Communications departments of the Nigeria Free Trade Zones Authorities and their CEOs. It also included business owners (investors) within the zones, clearing agents, and other clients such as logistics and transportation providers, researchers, and consultants. The total population of the study was 161, including 11 corporate communication staff from the two Authorities, 96 managing directors and their communication staff from 20 functional zones, and 54 clearing agents, researchers, and consultants.

Given the relatively small population size, a census sampling technique was adopted. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and an interview guide. The initial drafts of these instruments were face-validated by the researcher through personal scrutiny, followed by feedback and observations. Subsequently, two additional research experts, including the researcher's supervisor, reviewed and modified the instruments before they were administered to the respondents. The reliability of the instruments was established using the test-retest method, where a sub-sample of 20 individuals from a similar organisation was tested twice, with a two-week interval between tests. This sub-sample included individuals familiar with similar communication strategies but not part of the study population.

Descriptive statistics, including tables, charts, figures, frequencies, percentages, and the mean deviation of a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), were used to present the quantitative data. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, analysed, and presented in a narrative format, ensuring a comprehensive and detailed depiction of the findings.

Presentation of Data

A total of 161 questionnaires were administered to respondents, with 157 retrieved, representing a 97.5% response rate. Consequently, 157 completed questionnaires were used for data analysis. A graphical illustration of this is shown below:

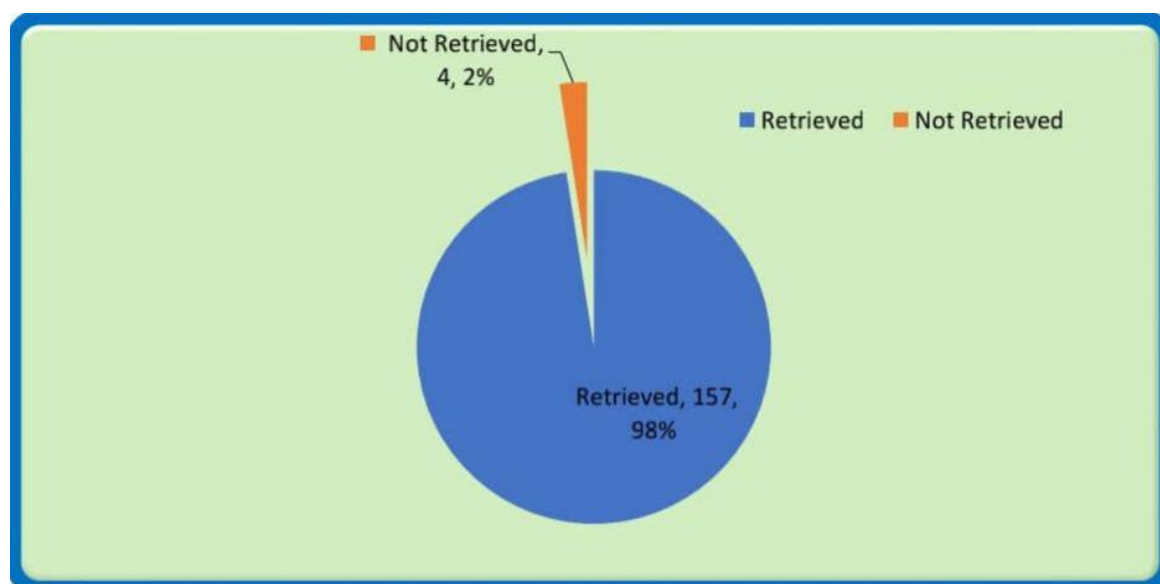


Figure 1: Response Rate Analysis

Table 1: Current Communication Strategies Employed by Free Trade Zones (Ftz) Authorities in Nigeria for Promoting Investment

Options	AS	A	U	SD	D	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Public relations communication strategies	143	12	2	0	0	157	4.8	Accepted
Investment forum/town hall meetings	141	8	8	0	0	157	4.7	Accepted
Use of conventional and online media communication strategies	134	19	4	0	0	157	4.8	Accepted
Trade fairs/solo exhibition communication strategies	133	15	9	0	0	157	4.7	Accepted

Field Survey, 2024

Based on the results in Table 1, the communication strategies currently implemented by Free Trade Zones Authorities in Nigeria to promote and attract investment are comprehensive and holistic. These strategies incorporate both traditional and modern twenty-first-century techniques to reach potential investors globally.

The findings from the qualitative reports corroborate the quantitative results. Excerpts from the transcribed interviews with key informants reveal that the Free Trade Zones (FTZ) Authorities in Nigeria employ various communication strategies tailored to the needs and audiences. This adaptable approach enables effective promotion and attraction of investment, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

"The Authority has an adaptable communication strategy as a benchmark for the promotion and attraction of necessary investments into the free trade business

ecosystem. Both traditional media and social media are consistently leveraged. Other forms of promotional activities include trade fairs, business forums, public relations, advertisements, roundtable discussions with media executives, and billboards and signage."

Another respondent highlighted the communication channels currently utilised:

"Communication channels currently employed are advertising, public relations activation, business investment forums, and trade fairs."

The reasons for adapting communication strategies, as mentioned by one respondent, include:

- Availability of funds and cost-effectiveness
- The needs of the moment, such as trade fairs
- Target audience and demographics, specific goals, and results of past campaign performance

Table 2: Effectiveness of the Communication Strategies by Free Trade Zones Authorities for Investment Promotion in Nigeria

SN	Options	Aware / Agree	No Response / Neutral	Not Aware / Disagree
1	To what extent do you believe the online presence (websites, social media, etc.) of Free Trade Zones (FTZs) Authorities in Nigeria communicate and promote investment opportunities?	104 (66.2)	44 (28)	9 (5.1)
2	Do you agree that trade fairs/solo exhibitions are good communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria to attract investment?	118 (75.1)	19 (12.1)	20 (12.7)
3	In your opinion, how effective are the online platforms (websites, social media, etc.) utilized by FTZs Authorities in Nigeria in conveying information about investment opportunities?	116 (73.8)	0	41 (26.1)
4	To what extent do you believe FTZs Authorities in Nigeria engage with potential investors through their communication strategies?	155 (98.7)	2 (1.3)	0
5	How much impact do you think the communication strategies employed by FTZs Authorities in Nigeria have on the decision-making process of potential investors in investment opportunities?	108 (68.7)	2 (1.3)	47 (29.9)
6	Do you agree that public relations activities are good communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria to attract investment?	126 (80.2)	31 (19.7)	0
7	Do you agree that investment forums/town hall meetings are a good communication strategy employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria to attract investment?	126 (80.2)	29 (18.5)	2 (1.3)

Field Survey, 2024

The results in Table 2 indicate a significant relationship between the communication strategies currently employed by Free Trade Zones (FTZ) Authorities in Nigeria and investment promotion and attraction. In other words, these communication strategies lead to an increase in investment promotion and attraction.

Furthermore, the qualitative reports corroborate these quantitative findings. Excerpts from transcribed interviews with key informants reveal that the communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria to convey investment opportunities to potential investors are effective. Respondents provided specific metrics to support their assertion that the communication strategies were effective. For example:

"The outcomes of media campaigns and other communication strategies are measured by the volume of prospective investors signing on to the scheme, FTZ investment volumes, and the level of public awareness regarding the scheme's contribution to the national economy."

Indicators to gauge communication success, as reported by one respondent, include:

- Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and Local Direct Investments (LDIs) inflows.
- Return on Investment (ROI): comparing the costs of campaigns to the value of investments attracted.
- Volume of feedback: measured by the number of inquiries, expressions of interest, or site visits.
- Partnerships and collaborations: the willingness of key stakeholders, especially the Nigeria Economic Zones Association (NEZA), to jointly engage in promotional activities with NEPZA.
- Media coverage and reach: measured by the depth of media coverage and the traction generated among top media experts.
- Policy impact: media campaigns should sustain the necessary policy discourse to influence changes for better management.

Another respondent highlighted the effectiveness of communication strategies in attracting investment opportunities to the Nigeria Free Trade Zones. She stated: "Specific metrics used to gauge success include:

- Investment inflows: measuring the actual investment attracted to the country or sector as a result of the communication strategy.
- ROI: evaluating the return on investment by comparing the costs of the communication strategy to the value of investments attracted.
- Lead generation: tracking the number and quality of leads generated through various communication channels, such as inquiries, expressions of interest, or site visits.
- Partnerships and collaborations: evaluating the success of partnerships and collaborations formed due to the communication strategy, such as joint promotional activities with industry associations or investment agencies.
- Feedback and stakeholder engagement: gathering feedback from investors, businesses, and other stakeholders to understand their perceptions of the communication efforts and identify areas for improvement.
- Media coverage and reach: measuring the extent of media coverage and the reach of communication efforts through traditional media, social media, and other channels.
- Policy impact: assessing whether the communication strategy has influenced policy decisions or regulatory changes conducive to investment."

Based on the quantitative and qualitative results, it can be deduced that the communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria are significantly effective in conveying investment opportunities to potential investors.



Figure 2: Challenges Faced by Free Trade Zones Authorities in Nigeria in Implementing Successful Communication Strategies for Investment Promotion

Based on the results in Figure 2, it can be inferred that Free Trade Zones (FTZ) Authorities in Nigeria face significant challenges in implementing communication strategies for investment promotion.

The qualitative reports align with this quantitative finding. Excerpts from the transcribed interviews with key informants reveal that inadequate resources and regulatory constraints, termed "external influences" by one participant, affect the implementation of communication strategies by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria. One key informant stated:

"It is no gainsaying that communication and media are some of the most expensive services globally. The Authority has, therefore, painstakingly ensured that the scheme is put on the front burner despite these known challenges and encumbrances: poor budgetary allocation for the corporate communication unit; external influences; high cost of media deliverables; delays in releasing media messages; countering 'bad press'; and competition from local industries and associations."

Another respondent highlighted regulatory challenges as a major factor affecting the implementation of communication strategies by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria: "Promoting free trade zones (FTZs) presents several key challenges, including:

- **Regulatory Complexity:** Navigating regulatory requirements, including customs procedures, tax regulations, and labour laws, can be challenging for businesses operating within FTZs.
- **Infrastructure and Logistics:** Insufficient infrastructure, including transportation, utilities, telecommunications, and electricity, can hinder the attractiveness and competitiveness of FTZs, requiring investment and development to meet the needs of businesses.

- Awareness and Perception: Many potential investors may lack awareness or have misconceptions about FTZs, requiring extensive education and outreach efforts to highlight the benefits and dispel myths.
- Competition: FTZs often compete with other economic zones and jurisdictions for investment, requiring strategic positioning, differentiation, and marketing efforts to attract businesses and investors.
- Bureaucracy and Red Tape: Excessive bureaucracy, administrative burdens, and delays in obtaining permits or approvals can deter investors and undermine the efficiency of FTZs, necessitating streamlining and reform efforts.
- Labour Issues: Challenges related to labour availability, skills mismatch, and labour market regulations may impact the attractiveness of FTZs for certain industries, requiring workforce development initiatives and labour market reforms.
- Social Impact: FTZ development may have social implications, including the displacement of communities, labour market changes, and income inequality, necessitating social impact assessments and community engagement initiatives."

It can therefore be deduced that two key factors—resource constraints and regulatory challenges—significantly affect the implementation of communication strategies for investment promotion by Free Trade Zones Authorities in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

As shown in Table 1, 134 respondents (mean rating of 4.8) strongly believe that Free Trade Zone (FTZ) Authorities uses both online and conventional media communication strategies. Additionally, 133 respondents (mean rating of 4.7) strongly agree that FTZ Authorities employ trade fairs and solo exhibitions as communication strategies to attract investment. Similarly, 143 respondents (mean rating of 4.8) strongly agree that public relations activities are employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria for attracting investment. Finally, 141 respondents (mean rating of 4.7) strongly agree that investment forums and town hall meetings are effective communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria for promoting investment.

Table 2, the analysis of five statements assessing the effectiveness of the communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria in conveying investment opportunities to potential investors revealed that 63% or more of respondents agreed with all five statements. Specifically, 118 out of 157 respondents (75.1%) confirmed that trade fairs and solo exhibitions are effective communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities for attracting investment. 156 respondents (99.4%) believe that FTZ Authorities in Nigeria effectively engage with prospective investors to promote investment opportunities. 116 respondents (73.8%) opined that the online platforms, websites, and social media utilised by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria for conveying information about investment opportunities are very effective. 108 respondents (68.7%) agreed that the communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria have a significant impact on the decision-making process of potential investors regarding investment opportunities. In the same vein, 116 respondents (73.8%) rated the overall communication efforts of FTZ Authorities in Nigeria in promoting investments as very effective.

Based on the results in Table 2, the effectiveness of the communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria in conveying investment opportunities to potential investors was rated high. This rating is based on the perceived results recorded

in FTZs over the last decade. Yesbergan (2020) corroborates this finding by stating that the use of marketing communication strategies boosts foreign investment policies and programmes. Bello (2018) also supports these results, finding that effective communication strategies are crucial in attracting investments and promoting regional economic integration. This underscores the significance of the Investment Climate and Location Theory. The theory's capacity to illuminate the intricacies of factors influencing investment decisions and its acknowledgment of the role played by location-specific conditions underscores its importance for policymakers, investors, and FTZ Authorities alike.

Further, as presented in Figure 2, findings revealed that out of the five statements used to assess the key challenges faced by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria in implementing communication strategies for investment promotion, many respondents (60% and above) agreed with all five statements. These statements include:

1. FTZ Authorities in Nigeria face challenges in effectively planning and strategising their communication efforts for investment promotion.
2. Resource constraints pose a challenge for FTZ Authorities in Nigeria in implementing successful investment promotion.
3. Cultural differences constitute challenges in formulating communication strategies.
4. Religious and technological barriers hinder FTZ Authorities in Nigeria from effectively utilising digital platforms for investment promotion.
5. Regulatory challenges pose obstacles for FTZ Authorities in Nigeria in implementing successful communication strategies for investment promotion.

It can be deduced that the communication strategies used in investment promotion by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria face challenges that affect the smooth running of the zones. An earlier study by Smith (2021) established that lack of coordination and consistency in communication efforts by FTZ Authorities, insufficient use of digital platforms and social media for outreach and engagement, and limited interaction with potential investors in the planning and implementation of communication strategies are challenges confronting free trade zones.

Conclusion

The focus of this study has been the evaluation of communication strategies employed by Free Trade Zone (FTZ) Authorities for promoting investment in Nigeria. The findings indicate that FTZ Authorities effectively utilise both online and conventional media communication strategies. They also employ trade fairs and solo exhibitions as part of their communication strategies. Additionally, FTZ Authorities deploy public relations activities to attract investment. Investment forums and town hall meetings are further identified as effective communication strategies used by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria for promoting investment. This conclusion aligns with the first objective of the study, which aimed to identify the current communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria for promoting investment.

Furthermore, the study concludes that the communication strategies employed by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria are highly effective in conveying investment opportunities to potential investors. This conclusion is consistent with the second objective of the study, which sought to assess the effectiveness of these communication strategies in terms of

increasing awareness and understanding of investment opportunities within the Free Trade Zones.

Finally, the study concludes that FTZ Authorities in Nigeria face significant communication challenges. These challenges include resource constraints, cultural differences, religious and technological barriers that hinder the effective utilisation of digital platforms for investment promotion, and regulatory challenges. This conclusion corresponds with the third objective of the study, which aimed to identify the key challenges faced by FTZ Authorities in Nigeria in implementing successful communication strategies for investment promotion.

Recommendations

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should enhance the capacity of Free Trade Zones by implementing regulations that facilitate seamless communication initiatives aimed at promoting investment in these areas.
2. Communication strategies, particularly the use of online tools, should be strengthened through the improvement of communication networks and supporting infrastructure.
3. Further studies should be conducted to expand the existing literature on communication strategies for investment promotion in Free Trade Zones.

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