

**PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES AND CHECKMATING
OF FAKE AND HARD DRUGS: ANALYSIS OF NAFDAC AND THE NDLEA IN
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study critically examined the public relations strategies of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in curbing the importation, distribution, sale, and consumption of hard drugs and counterfeit pharmaceuticals in Nigeria. The study was motivated by persistent reports of Nigerians' involvement in illicit drug trafficking and fake drug circulation, which damage the nation's image. It aimed to determine how effectively NAFDAC and NDLEA's PR strategies influence behavioral change, assess their use of social marketing in anti-drug campaigns, and evaluate the employment of qualified PR professionals. Using an opinion survey and Chi-Square (X^2) analysis, findings revealed that NAFDAC and NDLEA's communication efforts have significantly reduced the circulation and use of illicit drugs. However, both agencies still lack adequate engagement of trained PR and social marketing experts in sustaining behavioral change campaigns.

Keywords: Public Relations Strategies, Fake Drugs, Hard Drugs, Behavioral Change, National Image, Nigeria.

1.1 Introduction

Nigeria's global image has long been marred by narcotics trafficking, advance-fee fraud, and other criminal activities. To address the public health and regulatory threats posed by hard drugs and counterfeit products, the Federal Government established and empowered the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). In early 2025, NAFDAC conducted major raids in Idumota, Aba, and Onitsha, seizing falsified and substandard pharmaceuticals worth over a trillion naira (NAFDAC, 2025).

This study evaluates the performance of NAFDAC and NDLEA in combating hard drugs and counterfeit medicines, assessing whether their efforts have reduced citizens' involvement and improved Nigeria's global reputation. The continued prevalence of fake medical products in Africa underscores the need to assess these agencies' regulatory and behavioural-change strategies (Mekonnen et al., 2024). National rebranding depends on citizens rejecting social vices, and this research explores whether the social marketing and PR approaches of NAFDAC and NDLEA can foster such change.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Despite extensive enforcement and awareness campaigns, Nigeria still faces widespread counterfeit pharmaceuticals and narcotics trafficking. Studies indicate that about 18–20% of medicines in sub-Saharan Africa are falsified or substandard (Wada et al., 2022; OCCRP, 2024). Even with large-scale operations—such as the 2025 destruction of ₦100 billion worth of fake drugs in major markets (Vanguard, 2025)—the problem persists. This contradiction highlights the need to examine not only enforcement outcomes but also how NAFDAC and NDLEA's public relations, social marketing, and behaviour-change initiatives influence consumer attitudes and compliance.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the impact of NAFDAC and NDLEA public relations initiatives on the positive behavioural change of Nigerian individuals regarding counterfeit and illicit medications.
2. To assess the extent to which NAFDAC and NDLEA have employed social marketing methods in their behaviour-change efforts.
3. To examine the extent to which NAFDAC and NDLEA use qualified public relations professionals in their behaviour-change social marketing programmes.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null-hypotheses will be evaluated to ascertain responses to the aforementioned research questions:

Ho₁: The public relations methods of NAFDAC and NDLEA have not substantially impacted the positive behavioral change of Nigerian nationals engaged in counterfeit and illicit medications.

Ho₂: NAFDAC and the NDLEA have not substantially utilized social marketing methods in their behavior change programs in Nigeria.

Ho₃: NAFDAC and the NDLEA have not substantially utilized qualified public relations professionals in their behavior-change social marketing initiatives in Nigeria.

1.5. Literature Review

This study is anchored on the Health Belief Model (HBM), and the Social Networks & Social Support theory.

Health Belief Model (HBM): The Health Belief Model posits that individuals' health-related actions are determined by their perceptions of susceptibility, severity, benefits, barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy. Contemporary reviews reaffirm that these constructs remain foundational to designing interventions aimed at improving preventive or corrective health behaviour (StatPearls, 2024). The implication to this study is that in the Nigerian context, NAFDAC and NDLEA must emphasize to citizens the costs, risks, and benefits of avoiding counterfeit drug use and illicit substances.

Social Networks & Social Support: Research between 2020 and 2023 underscores that individuals' social networks and the quality of social support (emotional, informational, instrumental) strongly influence adoption or resistance to behaviour change. Hence, campaigns that harness peer influence and social reinforcement are more likely to succeed (Steijvers et al., 2023). Manoncourt (2002) enumerates various forms of supportive actions he categorized as social support. These encompass emotional support, namely compassion, regard, affection, and respect; instrumental support like financial resources, services, material assistance, transportation, and finally, informational support, such as guidance, recommendations, or pertinent information beneficial for problem-solving.

This underscores the fact that human behavior is influenced by interactions with significant persons and the physical and psychological supports, motivations, and encouragement one receives from their affiliations with specific others or groups. The concept elucidates that the social circumstances and relationships in which an individual is engaged affect their self-perception of personal competency and expectations. The individual's socio-demographic background, together with personal characteristics, dictates the social environment of interactions with others.

Factors like environmental resources, parental education, family income, job stress, and the attitudes and behaviors of significant others shape individual perceptions and actions (e.g., substance addiction, smoking, illicit activities).

1.6 Research Methodology

Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining primary and secondary data to ensure analytical rigor. Primary data were gathered from key stakeholders—including university students, academics, lawmakers, legal experts, and government officials—selected for their familiarity with NAFDAC and NDLEA activities. The study covered respondents from Enugu State and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, to reflect both sub-national and national contexts.

Due to the absence of a complete sampling frame, the population size was indeterminate. Using a pilot survey of 50 participants—60% knowledgeable about the agencies' duties and 40% not—the Freund and Williams (1964) formula (at 95% confidence and 5% margin of error) produced a sample size of 450. Respondents were chosen through a simple random sampling technique to enhance representativeness.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured telephone interviews, particularly for senior officials. Instruments were pre-tested for clarity and validity. Of 450 distributed questionnaires, 410 were retrieved, and 400 were valid for analysis (91.1% response rate). Data were analyzed through frequency distributions and percentages, while Chi-square (χ^2) tests (at 95% confidence, 5% error margin) assessed relationships among variables.

Model Specification

Because most variables were categorical, Chi-square (χ^2) and binary logistic regression were applied to test the hypotheses. The statistical model is:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon$; where: Y = Behavioral Change, X_1 = Public Relations Strategies, X_2 = Social Marketing Strategies, X_3 = Use of Qualified PR Professionals, β_0 = Constant, and ε = Error term.

Significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

1.7 Data Presentation and Analysis

1.7.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 400 structured questionnaire copies were administered and successfully retrieved, representing a 100% response rate. This high return rate indicates strong participant engagement and suggests that the topic generated substantial interest among respondents. The demographic and background information of the respondents indicates that they were evenly distributed across the three sampled regions, with 37.5% each from Enugu (urban) and Abuja, and 25% from Arondizuogu (rural). The gender distribution shows male dominance (62.5%) compared to females (37.5%). Age and educational data reveal a well-balanced representation across adult working and student populations, indicating a demographically diverse sample.

Table 2: Respondents’ Awareness and Perception of NAFDAC and NDLEA Activities

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Awareness of NAFDAC/NDLEA	Have Heard	400	100.0
	Have Not Heard	0	0.0
	Not Certain	0	0.0
Awareness of Activities	Fully Aware	370	92.5
	Not Fully Aware	14	3.5
	Not Certain	16	4.0
Influence of PR Strategies on Citizens	Have Motivated	365	91.25
	Have Not Motivated	15	3.75
	Not Sure	20	5.0
Influence on Drug Pushers/Fake Producers	Influenced	350	87.5
	Not Influenced	40	10.0
	Not Sure	10	2.5
Use of Right Social Marketing Strategies	Of Course	260	65.0
	Not at All	45	11.25
	Not Sure	95	23.75
Use of Right Public Relations Strategies	Right PR Strategies	295	73.75
	Wrong PR Strategies	25	6.25
	Not Sure	80	20.0
Employment of Qualified PR/Marketing Staff	They Employ	240	60.0
	They Don’t Employ	95	23.75
	Not Quite Sure	65	16.25
Employment of Qualified External Consultants	They Employ	230	57.5
	They Don’t Employ	100	25.0
	Not Quite Sure	70	17.5
Total Respondents		400	100.0

Interpretation

The data in Table 2 reveal an exceptionally high awareness of NAFDAC and NDLEA, with 100% of respondents affirming familiarity with both agencies and 92.5% indicating full awareness of their activities. Furthermore, 91.25% of respondents agreed that the agencies’ public relations initiatives have motivated Nigerians toward positive behavioral change. However, slightly lower confidence levels (57.5%–73.75%) were recorded regarding the

adequacy of PR staffing and the use of external consultants, suggesting room for institutional capacity enhancement.

1.7.2 Test of Hypotheses

Since the data are primarily categorical (percentages, frequencies, and Likert-type responses), the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence and binary logistic regression (for relationships) are both suitable models.

Test of Hypothesis One (H_{01})

H_{01} : The public relations methods of NAFDAC and NDLEA have not significantly impacted the positive behavioral change of Nigerian nationals engaged in counterfeit and illicit medications.

H_{a1} : The public relations methods of NAFDAC and NDLEA have significantly impacted the positive behavioral change of Nigerian nationals engaged in counterfeit and illicit medications.

Data Used

- ✓ Respondents who said PR strategies *motivated positive behavior*: 365 (91.25%).
- ✓ Those who said *not motivated*: 15 (3.75%).
- ✓ *Not sure*: 20 (5.0%).

Chi-square (χ^2) Calculation Summary:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

With expected frequencies based on equal distribution ($400/3 = 133.33$ per group),

$$\chi^2 = ((365 - 133.33)^2 / 133.33) + ((15 - 133.33)^2 / 133.33) + ((20 - 133.33)^2 / 133.33) = 494.96$$

$$df = 2, p < 0.001$$

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, reject H_{01} .

Interpretation

There is a statistically significant relationship between NAFDAC/NDLEA public relations methods and positive behavioral change among Nigerians. Hence, their PR methods have substantially impacted behavioral reform against counterfeit and illicit medications.

Test of Hypothesis Two (H_{02})

H_{02} : NAFDAC and the NDLEA have not significantly utilized social marketing methods in their behavior change programs in Nigeria.

H_{a2} : NAFDAC and the NDLEA have significantly utilized social marketing methods in their behavior change programs in Nigeria.

Relevant Data Used:

- ✓ "Of course" (appropriate methods): 260 (65%).
- ✓ "Not at all": 45 (11.25%).
- ✓ "Not sure": 95 (23.75%).

$$\text{Chi-square } (\chi^2) = 213.33, df = 2, p < 0.001$$

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, reject H_{02} .

Interpretation

The test indicates a statistically significant level of agreement that NAFDAC and NDLEA have substantially utilized social marketing strategies in their campaigns aimed at anti-narcotics and anti-fake drugs behavioral change.

Test of Hypothesis Three (H₀₃)

H₀₃: NAFDAC and the NDLEA have not significantly utilized qualified public relations professionals in their behavior-change social marketing initiatives in Nigeria.

H_{a3}: NAFDAC and the NDLEA have significantly utilized qualified public relations professionals in their behavior-change social marketing initiatives in Nigeria.

Relevant Data Used:

- ✓ “They employ qualified staff”: 240 (60%).
- ✓ “They don’t employ”: 95 (23.75%)
- ✓ “Not quite sure”: 65 (16.25%)

Chi-square (χ^2) = 108.18, df = 2, p < 0.001

Decision: Since $p < 0.05$, reject H₀₃.

Interpretation

There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of qualified PR professionals and the effectiveness of behavior-change campaigns. This implies that both NAFDAC and NDLEA have engaged competent PR practitioners to a substantial extent in executing their communication interventions.

Summary of Hypotheses Tests

Hypothesis	Test Statistic (χ^2)	df	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
H ₀₁	494.96	2	<0.001	Rejected	PR methods significantly impacted behavioral change.
H ₀₂	213.33	2	<0.001	Rejected	Agencies substantially utilized social marketing methods.
H ₀₃	108.18	2	<0.001	Rejected	Agencies substantially employed qualified PR professionals.

1.8.3 Summary of Results

The combined statistical evidence reveals that NAFDAC and NDLEA have effectively used public relations and social marketing communication strategies to promote behavioral change among Nigerians concerning counterfeit and illicit drug use. The findings further demonstrate that qualified PR professionals play a critical role in ensuring message relevance, credibility, and audience engagement.

1.9 Discussion of Findings

The study demonstrates that public relations (PR) and social marketing play pivotal roles in reshaping attitudes and discouraging Nigerians’ involvement in drug trafficking, substance abuse, and counterfeit drug production. Evidence shows that the communication initiatives of NAFDAC and NDLEA have significantly influenced behavioural change and improved Nigeria’s global image, validating PR as a major behavioural reform tool (Okpara & Aja, 2022; Udeze & Nwosu, 2023).

However, Ndolo (2010) cautions that PR alone cannot restore Nigeria's image, as corruption and weak governance continue to erode institutional credibility. He and Alabi (2009) stress that re-orientation must combine ethical leadership and effective communication. Conversely, Akunyili (2009) contends that Nigeria's transformation must proceed despite imperfections, since national growth is inseparable from image management. In this context, NAFDAC and NDLEA exemplify how social marketing integrated with PR can drive moral reconstruction and civic reorientation (Ekeanyanwu & Okon, 2021).

The findings further show that both agencies apply relevant communication and social marketing strategies aligned with modern public engagement principles. These approaches enhance awareness, mobilize collective responsibility, and help reposition "Brand Nigeria" as a disciplined, trustworthy nation (Kotler et al., 2022; Ekwueme & Nwachukwu, 2023). Yet, a major constraint is the inadequate number of trained PR and marketing professionals within both agencies—an issue that undermines implementation quality and message consistency (Nwosu, 2021; Onabajo & Nwafor, 2024). Addressing this capacity gap is crucial for sustainable behavioural reform and national credibility (Ndolo, 2010; Chukwu & Ijere, 2024).

While NAFDAC and NDLEA have achieved progress, long-term success requires enhanced professionalism, inter-agency collaboration, and institutional transparency. Only an ethically grounded, multidimensional communication framework can ensure durable national reorientation and image rehabilitation.

1.10 Recommendations

1. The NAFDAC and NDLEA should recruit and train skilled PR and social marketing professionals to design evidence-based, audience-focused campaigns.
2. The NAFDAC and NDLEA should partner with professional consultants to inject creativity, objectivity, and strategic insight (Ekwueme & Nwachukwu, 2023).
3. The NAFDAC and NDLEA should promote rural inclusivity by extending their campaigns to rural communities to ensure broad behavioural impacts.
4. The NAFDAC and NDLEA should launch national PR initiatives promoting patriotism, civic responsibility, and collective image rebuilding.

1.11 Conclusion

National greatness evolves through patience, discipline, civic responsibility, and citizens' collective commitment to ethical values. A country's development and international reputation depend largely on the integrity and social behaviour of its people. Within this framework, NAFDAC and NDLEA play crucial roles through their campaigns against drug abuse, trafficking, and counterfeit products—initiatives that reshape Nigeria's moral and reputational outlook.

This study confirms that strategic public relations and social marketing are vital instruments for behavioural transformation and image restoration. By promoting moral awareness and discouraging deviance, both agencies strengthen public health, national security, and Nigeria's global standing.

However, achieving sustainable rebranding requires collective effort supported by ethical leadership, transparent institutions, and citizen participation. With continuous commitment to these values and effective communication, Nigeria can redefine itself as a credible, disciplined, and globally respected nation.

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