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Nigeria's International Image Crisis: An Evaluative Analysis

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Abstract

Nigeria's international image crisis has been a contentious issue resulting from adverse effects created by stringent socio-economic and political conditions facing Nigerians. The state of affairs defiled approaches aimed at redress. Image branding of Late Prof Dora Akunyili was unable to ameliorate the situation. Imperatively, this paper evaluated Nigeria's international image crisis - presenting international perceptions of its image on different fronts. The study is qualitative and descriptive in orientation. Data gathering was based on documented evidence and informant interview. Image Theory of International Politics by Keneth Boulding (1959) served as a theoretical guide for the explanation. The study revealed that Nigeria's international image in crisis is enveloped in the poor international perception of Nigerian business environments, poor perception of Nigeria/Nigerians Abroad and the international perception of corruption in Nigeria. This is seen in the withdrawal of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), ill-treatment/ unwarranted suspicion of Nigerian nationals abroad, the deportation of Nigerian nationals, visa ban, and Nigeria's corruption perception index and poor ranking reports. The paper enjoined the Nigerian government to step up in attitudinal character for best international practice in governance; strictly adhere to the rule of law and prosecute fraudulent government officials lawfully. This will sanitize the system and ensure acceptable behaviour in governance. More so, there is a need for a strong strategic plan to ensure Nigerian leaders and diplomats' premise Nigerian foreign policies on positive-image making and achievement of national interests. Strong institutions are the unavoidable condition for the achievement of the above goals.

Keywords: International Image, Image, Image Crisis, Nigeria's International Image Crises

1. **Introduction**

The national image both at home and abroad is a critical issue. It may appear intangible but the benefits flowing from a good image are inestimably unquantifiable. The perception of a country by members of the international community is based on relations with other states and citizens' behaviours (Zimako, 2009). Thus, image-making is an essential feature of leadership character. Holsti (1996) clarifies this point when he defined image as an individual's perception of an object, fact or condition in terms of badness or goodness as well as the meaning ascribed to or deduced. If we extrapolate from that, we can conclude that image-building must necessarily constitute a fundamental element of leadership character and a nation's foreign policy, suggesting that the way a country is perceived is a function of her national image (Adeniyi, 2012).

Accordingly, image-building forms an essential element in the strategy for national interest and foreign policy formulation and implementation, in any country, when well-focused, good leadership character helps to sustain, create and reinforce favourable images to the external world (Alimi, 2005:335). Consequently, the image a country attempts to create and project, through leadership character, must conform to its national interests, and the image expectations of other members of the international community.

Indeed, national image is a product of perception. There is yet no universally acknowledged scientific standard for perception as it is pervasively subjective to different interpretations. Human societies are complex, perception is a complex phenomenon (Jackson cited in Zimako, 2009). The perception of a nation in international relations is the perception of its people, and the perception of its people is also partly a function of the political leaders' actions and character. Thus, Nigeria's leadership character over the years has been grossly sabotaged and undermined by ineptitude, corruption, and nepotism, leadership deficit and poor democratic credentials, which have negatively affected the international reputation of the country (Achebe, 1983; Nwoke, 2014).

Nigeria's role in Afro-centrist policies was informed and guided by its foreign policy for the first four decades of her independence. This culminating in the country's massive investment in human and material resources for the prosecution of the "war" against racism and imperialism in Africa which yielded little or no diplomatic dividends for the country. Akinboye (2013) puts it most eloquently:

> Unfortunately, and disappointingly, many of the countries that have benefitted tremendously from Nigeria's largess often turned around to show ingratitude to both its citizens and the government itself. ...South Africa exhibited xenophobic attacks against Nigerian citizens living in that country... Some of these countries equally harbour or even offer training facilities for terrorists, while others campaign openly against Nigeria's bid to occupy one of the permanent seats of the United Nations Security Council. From these instances, it has become clear that the age-long philosophical notion of Africa as the centrepiece of the country's foreign policy has become moribund, mundane and anachronistic (Akinboye, 2013:43-44).

Specifically, as far back as 2004, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at a public forum in Lagos, concluded that Nigeria's poor external image has been denying it the much-needed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to accelerate its economic growth. This is understandable given the fact that Nigeria has for long been bogged down by its perception as one of the most corrupt nations in the world (Adeniyi, 2012).

Based on the foregoing, the paper explores the distortions and nuances that have attended Nigeria's attempt to redefine and re-focus her image perception to reflect the changes in contemporary international relations. Thus, Nigeria's image problem is analyzed from three evidential fronts: the international perception of Nigeria's business environment, the international perception of Nigeria within the diplomatic circle, and the international perception of corruption in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

The study is qualitative and descriptive. It relied on documented evidence, such as annual security reports, corruption perception index, democratic rating index, human rights report, journal articles, media publications and textbooks. Data were presented in tabular, pictorial and textual forms while Kenneth Boulding's Image Theory of international politics was employed as the theoretical framework for explanation. The general view of image theory of international politics is that leadership and its primary characteristics, images, perceptions or stereotypes are relevant in international relations because they determine and justify a nation's reaction or treatment to another nation. The purpose of leadership in any country is to construct the desired image. A good leadership character is image-making in the international community.

Applicably, the international image crisis is enveloped in the poor international perception of Nigeria's business environment, the country within the diplomatic circle, and the international perception of corruption in Nigeria. This is seen in the withdrawal of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), ill-treatment/unwarranted suspicion of Nigerian nationals abroad, the deportation of Nigerian nationals, visa ban, and the corruption perception index of Nigeria by Transparency International and other related reports. Owing to these, Nigeria's stand in the international community is not solid.

3. Image Crisis

Image building must necessarily constitute a fundamental element of a nation's foreign policy, the way a country is perceived is a function of its national image (Adeniyi, 2012). Sadly, Nigeria's image suffers. There is a dire need for the government and citizens alike to sit up. A positive perception of any country's image is an important gauge for judging its standing in the international political system (Egwemi, 2010). A good image translates to respect, influence, and prestige. On the other hand, a bad or negative perception of a country's image indicates that such a country lacks respect, influence and prestige among the comity of nations. Therefore, countries endeavour to build, maintain and enhance their image with one another. The factors that determine a nation's image (for good or for bad) can be both internal and external (Egwemi, 2010). Internally, a succession of regimes of bad policies and practices can lead to this. Externally, it could be through participation in

foreign military and humanitarian missions. An image crisis usually occurs when there are both internal and external factors that sway the pendulum towards a bad/negative image. Nigeria's democratic failure or success has been a major gage for assessing its external image, Egwemi furthered. In line with the foregoing, it is sad that Nigeria has little or no standing in the international community due to its incessant corruption, maddening disregard for accountability, and transparency, insecurity, terrorism, and abuse of human rights.

However, a section of the international system often derives joy in advertising negative occurrences in Africa and conveniently ignoring the positive aspects. Africa's economic weakness, poor communication capacity and control left the responsibility of projecting African image with the biased West. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America (VOA), the Cable Network News (CNN), and other Western media carry this bias (Saliu, (2012). Nigeria policymakers should have been more transparent in public affairs, thus it exists in a hostile environment. The failure of leadership to rise to the level commensurate with the manifested destiny of Nigeria to lead Africa and the black world gave the external environment the impetus to confer pariah status on the country (Saliu, (2012). This position is, however, evident in the racism and hatred most westerners mete out to black people. Nigeria should adopt the strategy of self-reliance where everyone is mobilized to transform its physical, technological, critical, economic and social environments.

In a country with an image, the crisis is difficult to shop or advertise in the diplomatic market. Laundering the battered image of such a nation in the international arena is as difficult as trying to engage in image-making for an international terrorist gang like Al Qaeda. A country with a battered image is like damaged goods, which, despite its packaging, cannot fly (Ajayi, 2006). The way Nigerians are suspected and treated in international airports, and overseas; once you present Nigeria's green passport, they become apprehensive of you is the epitome of the situation. Nigeria has assumed a pariah status among civilized countries and has been plagued by abnormalities in many facets of its national life (Olorunyomi, 2014). The perception of a nation in international relations is

the perception of its people; and the perception of its people is partly a function of the political leaders' actions and character (Achebe as cited in Nwoke, 2014). Thus, Nigeria's foreign policy, over the years has been grossly sabotaged and undermined by ineptitude, corruption, nepotism, leadership deficit and poor democratic credentials, which have negatively affected the reputation of the country internationally.

4. Nigeria's International Image Crises

A country's standing in the international arena, although dependent on some other factors, is highly based on its image perception - positive or negative. A good image results in respect, influence, and prestige. A bad perception of a country attracts a lacks of respect, influence and prestige (Egwemi, 2010). National image, both at home and abroad, is an ethical issue that appears intangible but the benefits and advantages flowing from a good image are inestimably unquantifiable (Zimako, (2009). The perceptions of a country, by members of the international system, how a country pursues its relations with others and particularly, the behaviour of its citizens at home and abroad, combine to determine the country's image. Thus, image-making is an essential feature of a nation's lead character. Holsti (1996) further clarified this point when he defined image as an individual's perception of an object, fact or condition in terms of badness or goodness as well as the meaning ascribed to it or deduced therefrom. In line with this, the international image of a nation affects the achievement of its foreign policy objectives.

Nigeria's international image has been negative, and its reputation is at its lowest ebb (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013).

> Nigeria's disfigured image in the global village has become an insignia of dishonesty, dishonour and disrespect; this is outright humiliation of a nation of almost 150 million people. The majority of Nigerians are industrious, God-fearing and law-abiding people. But a tiny minority is destroying the image of the country and the governance ineptitude is adding salt to the injury (Bamiduro and Aremu, 2012).

The positivity in the Nigerian state far exceeds the negativities from the foregoing affirmation, and as such recommend that, via credible, free and fair elections; invigorated/consistent anti-graft drive (without political interference); youth empowerment; promotion of entrepreneurship and financial support; and finally, the adoption of good leadership styles characterized by honesty, faithfulness, transparency, love and justice, the image of the country can be promoted.

However, Nigeria had indeed been battling with image crises for the past three decades. Corruption, insecurity, and terrorism have been the major factors undermining the country's image and until these fundamental domestic sources of Nigeria's image crisis are checked, Nigeria's aspiration to be a regional influence will remain an illusion Akinboye (2013). Accordingly, Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2013 Report showed a scale of 0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) and 100 (perceived to be highly clean), Nigeria scored 25% in contrast to her 27% score in 2012. This score was derived from 9 surveys carried out in 2013. This ranked her 144th out of 177 countries globally (*Transparency International*, 2013). This factor as revealed by Transparency International gives a perception to the world that Nigeria is indeed a highly corrupt country and when this is the case, the image of the country becomes negative to the world.

Nigeria's international image crises are presented and analyzed in:

1. International Perception of Nigerian Business Environment.
2. Perception of Nigeria/Nigerians Abroad
3. International Perception of Corruption in Nigeria.

5. International Perception of Nigerian Business Environment

(a) Withdrawals of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI): FDI provides more lasting advantages for the economy. Yet, it fell dramatically during the 2016 recession - FDI inflow was contracted from $2.3 billion in 2014 to $1 billion in 2016. FDIs subsequently tumbled. Events that worsened the fall include the MTN repatriation scandal, the backlog of taxes slammed on oil companies and the withdrawal of two global financial institutions in Nigeria. Foreign investors thus reacted negatively to these developments and withheld investments due to the perceived risk and uncertainty surrounding the Nigerian business environment. The proportion of FDIs to total investment flows dropped from 20% in 2016 to 4% in 2019. The plunge in crude oil prices

also encouraged foreign portfolio investors to take their leave. Nigeria's full market potential remains unrealized because of significant impediments such as pervasive corruption, inadequate power and transportation infrastructure, high energy costs, and inconsistent regulatory and legal environment, insecurity, a slow and ineffective bureaucracy and judicial system, and inadequate intellectual property rights protections and enforcement. Nigeria's underdeveloped power sector remains a particular bottleneck to broad-based economic development. Power on the national grid currently averages 4,000 megawatts, forcing most businesses to generate much of their electricity. The World Bank currently ranks Nigeria 171 out of 190 countries for ease of obtaining electricity for business. Reform of Nigeria's power sector is ongoing, but investor confidence continues to be shaken by tariff and regulatory uncertainty.

Table 1: Nigeria's Foreign Direct Investment, Percent per GDP (2009-2019)

Year	Nigeria in World Ranking	Value of Nigeria FDI for the year	Average Value of all Countries
2009	95 of 187 countries	2.93	9.56
2010	134 of 187 countries	1.67	9.73
2011	118 of 187 countries	2.18	9.3
2012	137 of 186 countries	1.55	10.07
2013	146 of 186 countries	1.09	5.26
2014	150 of 186 countries	0.86	6.28
2015	153 of 184 countries	0.63	12.68
2016	135 of 184 countries	1.10	10.01
2017	149 of 184 countries	0.93	7.44
2018	155 of 183 countries	0.50	4.01
2019	148 of 178 countries	0.74	4.15

Source:

https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/Foreign_Direct_Investment/#Nigeria

Table 1 above unveils the effects of Nigeria's international image crises on Nigeria's Foreign Direct Investment from 2009 to 2019. The highest value of FDI into Nigeria within the reviewed period was 2.93 in 2009; although, there was low FDI into Nigeria and far from the average of all countries (9.56). Nigeria's lowest value of FDI within the reviewed years was in 2018 with the value of 0.50, followed by 2015, 2017 and 2019 with the value

of 0.63, 0.93 and 0.74 respectively. From the year 2015 to 2019, Nigeria's FDI continued to encounter a serious decline.

Figure 1: The Trend of Nigeria's Foreign Direct Investment, billion USD (1999-2019)
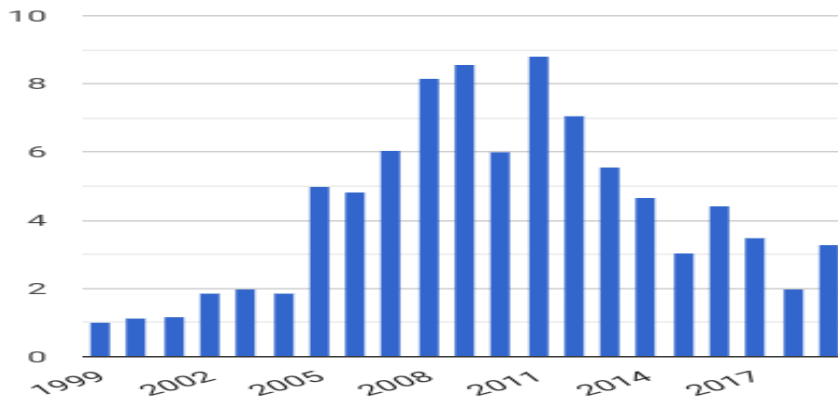
Source:

https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/Foreign_Direct_Investment/#Nigeria

Figure 1 illustrates the annual trend of Foreign Direct Investment in Nigeria in billion USD, ranges from 0 to 10 billion USD. The first look at this chart shows a continuous increase in Nigeria's FDI in the first 11years (1999-2009), there was a significant increase in Nigeria's FDI, from 1.0 billion USD to 8.56 billion USD. However, Nigeria had her greatest decline in FDI, from 8.56 in 2009 to 6.03bn USD, in 2019; Nigeria's FDI has declined to 3.30bn USD due to fear of insecurities and terrorism by foreign investors resulting from leadership character.

(b) Lack of Confidence in Business Relations with Nigeria Due to Bad Government Policies, Insecurity, and Inflation: The multinational business managers in Nigeria operates in a dynamic political environment characterized by risks of multiple taxations, currency devaluation, inflation, repatriation, confiscation, campaigns against foreign goods, mandatory labour benefit legislation, kidnapping, terrorism, and civil unrest (Griffen,

2005). Actions are taken by the government such as regulatory, legal framework, and political changes may decrease business income and act as barriers to foreign investment. Political risks induced by the government constitute some laws directed against foreign firms. Some government-induced risks are very drastic. There are expropriation, confiscation and domestication (Auster & Choo, 1993). The Nigerian political environment is characterized by frequent changes in government policies and programs thereby negatively affecting corporate long-term planning. This is attributable to party politics with threats of conflicts and wars, growing levels of crime and terrorism, kidnapping, bomb blast, corruption, insurrection among others thereby hindering business patronage and scaring away foreign investors from the country.

Table 2: 2019 World Bank Business Report

Measure	Year	Index/Rank	Website Address
World Bank's Doing Business Report "Ease of Doing Business"	2019	146 of 190	http://www.doingbusiness.org/en/rankings

Source: World Bank Business Report, 2019.

Above is a table indicating that Nigeria ranked 146 0ut of 190 countries in the World Bank Business Report, 2019.

6. Perception of Nigeria/Nigerians Abroad:

(a) Ill-treatment/ Unwarranted Suspicion of Nigerian Nationals Abroad: The committee on Vision 2010 outlined one of the consequences of Nigeria's poor external image as harassment of Nigerians in foreign countries by such security agencies as immigration, customs and the police, mostly on unwarranted suspicion, Shonekan (2007). Similarly, Alhaji Adamu Ciroma – one-time Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, lamented on the international absurdities that Nigeria and Nigerians were subjected to,

including the rough and unpleasant treatment Nigerians receive from the customs and security officials of other countries based on the general assumptions that all Nigerians were crooking (Isa 2005). In several reported instances, Nigerians were singled out from queues at international airports and kept waiting for hours or subjected to humiliating bodily searches. On numerous occasions, even Nigerian diplomats and diplomatic baggage were subjected to some kind of treatment, clearly in breach of their diplomatic immunity and privileges.

(b) The Deportation of Nigerian Nationals: The acute unemployment in Nigeria among youths without any social security scheme to cushion its effect ignites the migrating spirit of Nigerians. Again, the protectionist tendencies of the industrialized European nation make the acquisition of travel documents very difficult. These two factors push people into desperate measures to overcome the obstacles to travel. Even when some Nigerians could procure these documents legally, getting an interview appointment is a herculean task. This barricade at European embassies in Nigeria gave rise to the presence of touts. Thus, each embassy had a colony of touts or agents through whom one could first secure an interview appointment and sometimes through whose influence the procurement of visa could be made possible (Okeke, 2009). Many irregular migrants who fail to enter Europe settle in North Africa rather than face the humiliation of returning home. But the costliest price of irregular migration is loss of life. About 3000 Africans are believed to be drowning each year while attempting illegal crossings to Europe (Adepoju & Wiel, 2007). Those seeking economic survival see irregular migration as the best alternative, given the difficulty and resources involved in migrating through regular and legitimate processes. In most cases, very few survive, and yet face a chance of deportation (Egbuta (2019). Thailand bound ship captain had to make a detour on the high sea and came back to Tincan Island port, Lagos, to off-load an illegal human cargo of twenty (20) young men discovered hiding in the engine room of his ship when they left Nigeria. They were all handed over to the Nigerian immigration authority for debriefing and possible prosecution (Okeke (2014). Other migrants do not care to legalize their papers and live-in different parts of Europe illegally. These groups of migrants perform illegal jobs popularly called black jobs. This type of job is provided by Europeans who know they are breaking European laws by

providing jobs to people who are undocumented labourers. These people work under inhuman conditions in remote parts of Europe. Indeed, some of these migrants including those whose stay had been regularized and those yet to be regularized sometimes for lack of jobs, are under pressure from home or the syndicates who bankrolled their trips and assisted in the procurement of their papers, to indulge in criminality, prostitution, and drug peddling.

(c) Visa Ban: In February 2020, former President Donald Trump added Nigeria to an expanded list of visa bans, which included Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Sudan, Tanzania, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen, Somalia. Nigerians were prevented from being able to apply for permanent immigrant visas to the US. This affected family and spousal reunion, and students, skill-based immigrants and firms that needed them were also dealt with. Even before the immigrant visa ban, there had been a gradual tightening of rules under the Trump administration which seems to disproportionately impact Nigeria. It included national reprisals for visitor visa overstays and student visa restrictions, to rising visa application fees and making it more difficult for regular visitors to renew their visas. U.S. officials cited reasons for the ban on issues such as sub-par passport technology and failure to sufficiently exchange information on terrorist suspects and criminals.

7. International Perception of Corruption in Nigeria:

Nigeria is perceived as a country deep in corruption without clear policies to address the menace, (Transparency International Report, 2020). The report disclosed that Nigeria ranked 149 on Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2020, out of 183 countries. This was contained in a publication by Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, CISLAC, and made available to *Vanguard*, indicating that Nigeria again recorded a decline in the CPI in 2020. According to the report by CISLAC/TI Nigeria, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), and BudgIT, Nigeria scored 25 out of 100 points in the 2020 CPI, falling back by one point compared to 2019. The report also indicated and explained that the CPI aggregated data from eight different sources that provided perceptions by Nigeria's business community and country experts on the level of corruption in the public sector. This is an indication of the perception of the Nigerian public about the state of corruption in Nigeria.

The situation is even gloomier when we consider the unemployment data for the second quarter of 2020 released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). This survey by the NBS which is the government's statistical agency shows that one in two Nigerians is either unemployed (27.1%) or underemployed (28.6%), and this can be linked to corruption. It is observed that some worrisome factors that hamper the fight against corruption are lack of transparency & accountability, mismanagement of resources, nepotism and favoritism in public service appointments & promotions, lack of adequate anti-corruption legal framework, and interference by politicians in the operation of law enforcement agencies, the prevalence of bribery and extortion in the Nigerian Police, the security sector corruption. The first and second national corruption surveys conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in partnership with the government's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) released in 2017, and 2019 showed the Nigerian police is the institution with the highest prevalence of bribery amongst the institutions measured.
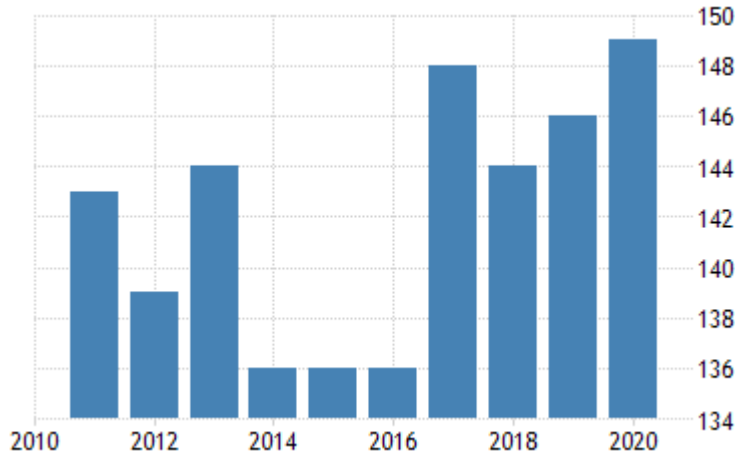
Figure 2: Nigeria Corruption Perception Index
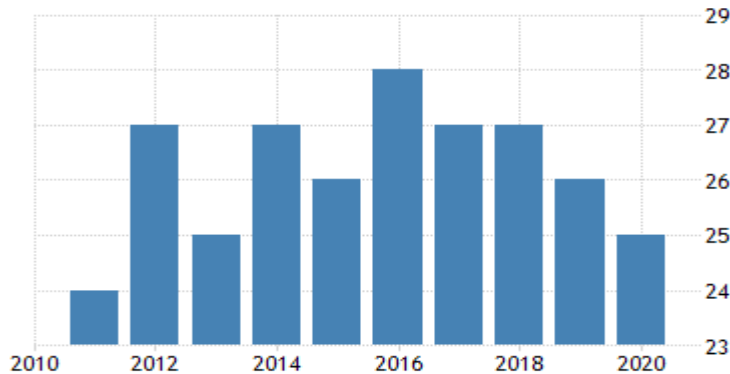
Source: Transparency International Corruption Index 2020

From the above chart, we see that Corruption Index decreased to 25 points in 2020 from 26 points in 2019.

Figure 3: Nigeria's Corruption Ranking

Source: Transparency International Ranking Index 2020

From the above chart, we can equally see that Corruption Rank in Nigeria increased to 149 in 2020 from 146 in 2019.

8.Conclusion

The importance of a good international image cannot be overemphasized. A good image results in respect, influence and prestige. On the other hand, a bad perception of a country indicates a lack of such values. Evidence on the ground shows that Nigeria's international image is facing perception crises resulting from a poor business environment, official corruption, and bad citizens' behaviour abroad. They are outcomes of the negative leadership character of Nigerian administrations within the time under review. The paper verified these positions and found them evidential supported. It examined Nigeria's business environment, corruption and citizen behaviour perceptions abroad using World Bank, Transparency International and Reports as yardsticks. Nigeria's international image crisis is enveloped in the poor international perception of the Nigerian business environment, poor perception of Nigeria within the diplomatic circle and the international perception of corruption in Nigeria. This is seen in the withdrawal of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), ill-treatment/unwarranted suspicion of Nigerian nationals abroad, the deportation of Nigerian nationals, visa ban, and the corruption perception index of Nigeria by Transparency International, World Bank, and other related reports. Owing to these, Nigeria's stand in the international community is not solid. Based on the findings of the

study, the researcher, therefore, made the following recommendations. The paper enjoined the Nigerian government to step up in attitudinal prerequisites for best international practice in governance; strictly adhere to the rule of law and prosecute fraudulent government officials lawfully. This will sanitize the system and ensure acceptable behaviour in governance. More so, there is a need for a strong strategic plan to ensure Nigerian leaders and diplomats' premise Nigerian foreign policies on positive-image making and achievement of national interests. Strong institutions are the unavoidable condition for the achievement of the above goals.

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