Appraising Public Relations Professionals' Capacity for Deploying Programming Metrics and Evaluation in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract
In a quest to examine the professionals' capacity for Metrics and Evaluation (M&E) in Public Relations practice in Nigeria, this study investigated the phenomenon through survey method, purposively sampling 314 professionals of the National Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) in the Abuja Chapter. Using Excellence in Public Relations and the Barcelona Principles and the study investigated the members' prioritisation, proficiencies and challenges to conduct M&E. The study found out that majority of the Professionals had PR departments, most of the practitioners had attended trainings of NIPR, and that organisations also considered M&E important, but with no budgetary backing. Also, it was discovered that while some of the challenges militating against the optimization of M&E include lack of standardization, limited resources, and resistance among stakeholders. The study recommended more training, advocacy, and better resource allocation to PR practice to boost proficiency and standardize practice in Nigeria.

Keywords: Public relations, professional, metrics, evaluation, practice.

Introduction

The use of metrics and evaluation in public relations research has been traced to an age long practice with some scholars tracking to as far back as the 18th century (Grunig and Hunt. (1984; Lamme & Russell,2010). It was however, from the beginning of the 20th century, when public relations began to be widely used as the description for a set of communication activities, that metrics practices were upheld. From the late 1970s onwards, it has been identified as an important issue for research and practice implementation (Watson & Noble, 2007; Watson, 2008). Recent scholarship has also recognised the need for culturally relevant and global perspectives in PR research**.** Sriramesh and Vercic (2009) advocated for a more contextualized understanding of PR practice across different political, economic, and cultural environments, challenging the dominance of Western-centric models.

Thus, the industry's struggle with metrics and evaluation continues with the advent of the social media. A longitudinal study of social media use by PR and corporate communication practitioners from 2006 to 2012 by Wright and Hinson (2012) found that 54 percent measured what external publics said about them in blogs or other social media (i.e. monitoring and content analysis), but only 26 per cent reported that they measure the impact of social media communication on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behaviour.

In agreeing with standards of practice, Stacks and Michelson (2011) opine that as the public relations profession continues to focus more and more on outcomes associated with campaigns or public relations initiatives the question of standards has shifted to the forefront of discussions among and between professionals, academics, and research providers. Zerfass, Ansgar, Dejan Verčič, and Sophia Charlotte Volk (2017) in a large-scale study show that communication metrics practices are still in a nascent stage. Joint efforts of academics and professional associations have not really changed the situation until now, thus recommending three dimensions used in the applied research (skills, practices, and utilisation) to be used to assess the metrics readiness of individual organisations.

However, In Nigeria, studies show that many PR departments, particularly in the public sector, face challenges such as limited budgets, lack of training, and organisational resistance to data-driven approaches (Nwosu, 2017). These constraints often lead to minimal use of advanced measurement tools and an over-reliance on anecdotal or intuitive reporting. Nevertheless, there is growing awareness of the importance of aligning PR metrics with broader organisational goals, particularly among corporate and multinational organisations operating in Nigeria (Ogbemudia & Asemah, 2013). Consequently, the gap in utilizing research and evaluation poses a major threat towards the pursuit of professional excellence in the practice of modern public relations locally and globally. It is against this backdrop that this study explores trends of professionals' uptake and utilisation of Metrics and Evaluation within the PR landscape in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

(i) To examine how do professionals in NIPR proficiently execute their programmes using metrics and evaluation in FCT.

(ii) To investigate professionals consider it important and have capacity to utilise metrics and evaluation in executing their PR functions in FCT.

(iii) To identify the challenges faced by professionals in utilizing metrics and evaluation in FCT.

Research Questions

(i) How do professionals in NIPR proficiently execute their programmes using metrics and evaluation in FCT?

(ii) Do professionals consider it important and have capacity to utilise metrics and evaluation in executing their PR functions in FCT?

(iii) What are some of the challenges faced by professionals in utilizing metrics and evaluation in FCT?

Clarification of Concepts

Public Relations: a set of methods and approaches that are used by practitioners, firms, governments and activists in managing and sustaining good working relationships with specific publics.

Professional: someone who is skilled and competent in a particular field often with specialised education.

Evaluation in PR practice explains tracking the progress in achieving intended milestones for programmes and activities which are usually applied before and after a programme
Metrics: This explains the professional process of gauging outcomes and outputs of PR activities with predetermined measurements and standards.
Practice: this refers to the conduct and actions of individuals, within their work context including their technical skills, ethical behaviour and interaction with others

Literature review

According to Laskin (2016), the issue of metrics and evaluation is probably the most commonly discussed topic in public relations. Manning and Rockland (2011), note that almost every year is proclaimed to be the “year of metrics” in public relations. One of the reasons for poor professional adaptation of metrics and evaluation may be a lack of standard approaches for measuring results. Scholars and practitioners simply claim that public relations cannot and should not be measured because public relations effects are not easily observable and may take long time to present themselves through changes in attitude or behaviour.

Similarly, Zerfass, Ansgar, Dejan Verčič, and Sophia Charlotte Volk (2017) posit that the challenge to conduct reliable metrics is threefold: first, communication professionals have to understand and develop skills how to conduct evaluation; second, they have to evaluate whether communication activities have reached those goals in practice; and finally, they have to use those insights to advance and manage their future activities. A quantitative survey of 1,601 professionals from 40 European countries was conducted to research prerequisites, implementation and benefits of communication metrics and compare practices across types of organisations. Therefore, the findings reveal that although robust knowledge of empirical research methods and their application for measuring communication effects is indispensable, many practitioners lack the necessary expertise to conduct reliable evaluation and metrics.

Evaluating the effectiveness of communication strategies remains a critical area of interest in public relations (PR) and marketing communications. Several empirical studies have investigated the trends, practices, and challenges associated with measuring communication outcomes. Among the most notable are the works of Wright and Leggetter (2009), Macnamara (2014), and Gregory and Watson (2008), each contributing unique insights into industry-wide evaluation approaches. Effective public relations (PR) depends significantly on strategic communication, informed by theory and reinforced through evidence-based practices. Over the past two decades, several other empirical studies have critically examined how PR is practiced and evaluated, with a focus on aligning communication efforts with organisational effectiveness. The works of Grunig et al. (2002), Nwosu (2017), and Macnamara (2010) provide foundational and contemporary insights into the state and evolution of PR theory and evaluation practice globally.

Wright and Leggetter (2009) conducted a comprehensive global survey to examine the state of communication measurement practices. Their findings revealed a persistent reliance on output-focused metrics, such as media clippings and impressions, rather than outcome-based evaluation that measures changes in awareness, attitudes, or behavior. This study highlighted a disconnection between academic recommendations—favoring robust, outcome-driven methodologies—and the actual practices within the PR industry. Notably, the survey indicated that although professionals acknowledged the importance of more meaningful evaluation approaches, limited budgets, lack of expertise, and organisational resistance were key barriers to adopting such methods.

Similarly, building on this foundation, Macnamara (2014) conducted an extensive review of PR evaluation practices and echoed similar concerns. He argued that the industry remained "stuck in a measurement morass," with many practitioners continuing to favor simplistic metrics over comprehensive evaluation frameworks. Macnamara introduced the concept of a "staged evaluation model," emphasizing the need for PR measurement to progress through levels—from inputs and outputs to outtakes, outcomes, and ultimately, organisational impact. His review demonstrated that despite advancements in theory and the development of standardized models (such as the Barcelona Principles), practical application lagged significantly behind. Macnamara's critique exposed the superficial nature of many evaluations, which often prioritised volume over value.

Also, Gregory and Watson (2008) added a longitudinal perspective by examining changes in UK PR practitioners' attitudes and behaviors over time. Their study uncovered a slow but noticeable shift toward more strategic evaluation practices. While earlier phases of their research showed minimal engagement with outcome-based metrics, later stages suggested growing interest and investment in more sophisticated forms of measurement, such as stakeholder feedback and reputation tracking. However, the pace of change was described as incremental, with many practitioners still defaulting to traditional press coverage metrics. The study also identified organisational culture and leadership support as crucial factors influencing the adoption of better evaluation practices.

Synthsised together, these studies illustrate a common pattern which indicate theoretical frameworks and tools for effective PR measurement exist, actual implementation within the industry is inconsistent and often inadequate. Practitioners face institutional and resource-based constraints that limit their ability to move beyond basic metrics. These empirical findings suggest a need for continued education, leadership advocacy, and the integration of evaluation into campaign planning from the outset.

Moreover, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier's (2002) Excellence Theory represents one of the most comprehensive empirical studies in public relations research. Developed over a decade and supported by quantitative and qualitative data from global corporations, the theory asserts that organisations that implement strategic, two-way symmetrical communication achieve higher levels of effectiveness. The study empirically demonstrated that excellent PR contributes to organisational success by managing relationships with strategic publics, improving decision-making processes, and enhancing reputation. The Excellence Study also emphasized the need for communication departments to be empowered at the senior management level and supported by skilled professionals who understand strategic communication, ethics, and evaluation. The data collected from 327 organisations across

three countries confirmed that organisations practicing symmetrical communication had superior reputational and relational outcomes.
Also, Nwosu (2017), extended the conversation by examining the application of professional communication practices in African and developing contexts, with a focus on Nigeria. His empirical analysis suggested that while theoretical frameworks like the Excellence Theory offer a valuable foundation, their practical application is often hindered by local constraints such as lack of training, low organisational support, and infrastructural challenges. Nwosu found that many PR practitioners in Nigeria operated under management-imposed limitations that emphasized tactical outputs rather than strategic outcomes. Despite this, there was a growing awareness of the need for evidence-based PR, especially among practitioners working in multinational corporations and public sector campaigns. His findings called for context-sensitive models of PR evaluation that adapt global best practices to local realities.

In the same vein, through a large-scale survey of PR and communication professionals, Macnamara (2010) examined how practitioners evaluated their campaigns and communication programmes. The study revealed that while there was widespread recognition of the importance of evaluation, the tools and metrics employed were often rudimentary. Media clippings, advertising value equivalency (AVE), and output-based metrics remained dominant, with limited attention paid to outcomes such as behavior change or attitudinal shift. Macnamara's survey found that only a minority of respondents used robust evaluation frameworks like logic models or integrated communication measurement systems, indicating a shift toward more sophisticated approaches.
In a nut shell, these empirical works paint a nuanced picture of PR evaluation. Grunig et al. (2002) provided a theoretical and evidence-based blueprint for strategic communication, highlighting the value of two-way symmetrical communication. Nwosu (2017) grounded these concepts in the developing world, demonstrating the barriers and adaptations necessary for contextually relevant PR practice. Macnamara (2010) offered a snapshot of global industry practices, revealing the persistence of outdated metrics alongside an emerging interest in data-driven approaches. Therefore, the major gaps identified in the review include population gaps emanating from the dearth of empirical data and literature on the current mode and standard of M&E practice among professionals in Nigeria (NIPR). Hence, the study attempts to address these gaps by providing insights into exploring the M&E in NIPR practice in Nigeria and other parts of the globe.

Theoretical Framework
The Excellence Theory, developed by James E. Grunig and colleagues, posits that effective public relations is strategic, symmetrical (two-way), and contributes to organisational effectiveness, (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) A key element of this theory is evaluation — assessing whether communication strategies are achieving desired outcomes.

Relevance to Metrics and Evaluation: Excellence Theory argues that evaluation and metrics are essential to proving the value of PR to organisational goals. It emphasizes:
(i) Setting measurable objectives

(ii) Evaluating both outputs (e.g., media coverage) and outcomes (e.g., change in public perception or behaviour)
(iii) Using feedback to improve future communication efforts

Grunig also differentiates between process evaluation (how well PR is implemented) and outcome evaluation (impact on awareness, attitude, or behaviour).
Supporting Model: The Barcelona Principles (2.0 or 3.0)

The Barcelona Principles, introduced in 2010 and updated in 2015 (2.0) and 2020 (3.0), provide a global standard for PR metrics, (AMEC 2020). This perspective rejects "advertising value equivalency" (AVE) and promote real impact metrics like:
(i) Goal setting and metrics as fundamental
(ii) Measuring outcomes, not just outputs
(iii) Transparency and replicability in metrics

This aligns with the Excellence Theory by emphasizing accountability, strategic alignment, and continuous improvement. Therefore, combining the Excellence Theory with the Barcelona Principles offers a robust theoretical and practical basis for evaluating public relations performance. While the Excellence Theory provides the conceptual foundation (why evaluation matters), the Barcelona Principles provide the operational tools (how to evaluate PR).

Methodology

Research Design

This study, evaluative in nature is predicated on the quantitative approach of research. The study employs the survey to reach the target population to generate data, establishing the relationships between variables in the study and applying descriptive statistics in providing a scientific understanding of the phenomenon**.** Also, the quantitative approach provides the platform for covering a large population and manipulation of numeric figures to analyse data generated. Therefore, the survey technique has been the most commonly used by behavioral scientist and involving drawing up a set of questions on various aspects of the subject to which selected members of a population are expected to react to. Thus, the copies of the questionnaire were constructed with both closed-ended and open-ended questions, the open – ended questions which require respondents generate their own answers. Also, it has the advantage of allowing the freedom to provide in-depth responses, unforeseen answers related to variables in the study and also help in conducting pilot studies that provide insights into the categories of responses to expect thus help in adding validity to the instrument. Meanwhile, the close-ended questions provide a list of answers which the respondents were expected to select from, this provides uniformity and ease of quantifying.

Population of Study

The population of study is the Public Relations professionals practicing under the membership of the NIPR in Abuja, North-Central Nigeria. The NIPR Act regulates the practice of PR in Nigeria and makes it illegal for anybody to practice without NIPR certification.

Therefore, the NIPR operates in all the states of the federation including the FCT Abuja, and by extension all the geo- political zones through branch organisations which are known as chapters and are all expected have an elected executive council led by their chairman, (NIPR Membership Criteria 2013).

Therefore, for the purpose of convenience and reliability, this study is focused NIPR chapter in FCT Abuja. The selected chapter has been observed by the researcher over the past few years to have been very active in the zone in terms of updated membership base and participation in National programmes like Seminars and Annual General Meetings (AGM). By this consideration, the research engaged with population that generated valid data. Thus, the study targeted FCT Abuja chapter with the population of 1,410 members on the register.

Sampling

The research adopted the purposive or non-probability sampling, therefore, the study targets only active registered members of the NIPR in the chapter to administer copies of the questionnaire. The respondents were then verified from the register of the NIPR secretariat in the chapter. The study purposively sample specific professionals of the membership base of the selected NIPR chapters. This implies that this form of non- probability sampling that set out capture specific parts of a population with similar attributes. Therefore, the selection inclusion criteria include:

(i) Active membership of the NIPR in the chapter for at least two years.
(ii) Having attended at least one (Mandatory Continuous Programme Development (MCPD) organised by the Chapter or National Secretariat.

The Taro Yamane formula was also applied to determine the actual size of the targeted population, using the formula

$N=N/1+NE^2$

Sample size =1410

$N = 1410/1+1410(0.05)^2$

$N = 1410 /4.25$

$N = 311.77$

Results and Discussions

An overview of the results obtained in the study are presented and discussed in this section.

Table 1: Showing Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	165	52.88
Female	147	47.12

Source: Field Work 2024

The nearly equal distribution of respondents who were male and female points to a representation of both gender in the study.

Table 2: Showing Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-25	82	26.28
26-35	99	31.73
36-45	68	21.79
46 and above	63	20.19

Source: Field Work 2024

The study's age distribution of participants reveals a heterogeneous set of participants, from young adults to senior citizens, as the study respondents' range in age from 18 to over 45.

Table 3: Showing Education of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary School	39	12.50
College	100	32.05
Bachelor's Degree	95	30.45
Master's Degree	78	25.00

Source: Field Work 2024

The educational background of the respondents is diverse, ranging from those who have completed high school to those who possess advanced degrees.

Table 4: Showing Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Professional	60	19.23
Skilled Trader	45	14.42
Service Industry	75	24.04
Education	40	12.82
Creative	30	9.62
Healthcare	35	11.22
Information Technology	32	10.26
Business and Finance	35	11.22

Source: Field Work 2024

The study covers a wide range of occupational backgrounds, including professionals, skilled traders, educators, workers in the service industry, people in the creative industries, healthcare industry, in business and finance.

Table 5: Showing Years of Public Relations Practice of Respondents

Years of Experience	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
2-10 years	145	46.47
11-20 years	85	27.24
21-30 years	60	19.23
31 years and above	22	7.05

Source: Field Work 2024

This breakdown indicates a wide range of skill levels in the PR industry, with a sizable percentage of practitioners having comparatively less years of experience.

Table 6: Showing Existence of Orginsational Public Relations Department?

Does your organisation have a Public Relations Department	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	238	76.3
No	74	23.7

Source: Field Work 2024

The information shows that 76.3% of respondents, or a sizable majority, stated that their companies had a public relations department, whilst 23.7% said otherwise.

Table 7: Showing Organisational Budget for the Public Relations Department?

Does your organisation allocate budget for the Public Relations Department?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	238	76.3
No	74	23.7

Source: Field Work 2024

This data reflects that a substantial proportion of organisations 76.3% of respondents allocate funds for their public relations department, while 23.7% do not.

Table 8: Showing Organisational Utilisation of Metrics & Evaluation for Public Relations Programmes?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	196	62.8
No	116	37.2

Source: Field Work 2024

Majority of respondents indicated the use of M&E while the minority indicated non-utilisation

Table 9: Showing Organisational Provision for Staff Training or Sponsorship for Metrics & Evaluation in Public Relations?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	242	77.56
No	70	22.44

Source: Field Work 2024

Majority of respondents here indicate positively staff training and support for the M&E use.

Table 10: Showing if Practitioners have Attended any Capacity Building Programme Organised by NIPR on Metrics & Evaluation?

Attended Capacity Building Programme	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Yes	181	58.0
No	131	42.1

Source: Field Work 2024

This table reflects that more practitioners (58.0%) have attended capacity training programmes than the others 42.1%

Table 11: Showing if Respondents Consider Metrics & Evaluation Important for the Job?

Do you consider Metrics & Evaluation important for your job?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	312	100%
No	0	0.00%

Source: Field Work 2024

This table indicates that 100 (all) the respondents consider M&E important for their jobs.

Table 12: Showing Respondents' Proficiency in Applying Metrics & Evaluation on Job?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	196	62.82
No	116	37.18

Source: Field Work 2024

This table displays how frequent practitioners use M&E in their jobs, indicating the majority 196 saying yes, they do, while the remaining indicated non-use.

Table 13: Showing Respondents' Frequency in Applying Metrics & Evaluation on their Job?

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	43	13.78
Rarely	92	29.49
Sometimes	64	20.51
Often	56	17.95
Always	57	18.27

Source: Field Work 2024

Majority of the respondents indicated rare use of M&E use, while lowest percentile 13.78 never used M&E.

Table14: Showing Respondents' Skills in Metrics & Evaluation for Public Relations Practice?

Possession of Skills	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	126	40.38
No	91	29.17
Partially	95	30.45

Source: Field Work 2024

Majority of respondents 126, have skills in M&E while feel they do not have or partially possess such skill.

Table 15: Showing Respondents' Challenges in Applying Metrics & Evaluations in Public Relations Practice?

Challenges	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Lack of standardized metrics	100	32.05
Limited resources (time, budget, personnel)	80	25.64
Difficulty in measuring intangible outcomes	75	24.04
Resistance from stakeholders	57	18.27

Source: Field Work 2024

Majority of respondents 32.05% indicated lack of standardized metrics while others indicated resistance from stakeholders.

Table 16: Showing Respondents' Suggestions for Addressing the Challenges with Conducting Metrics & Evaluations in Public Relations Practice?

Strategies	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Develop standardized metrics frameworks	78	25
Allocate more resources to metrics efforts	65	21
Educate stakeholders on the importance of metrics	78	25
Invest in technology for better data collection and analysis	91	29

Source: Field Work 2024

Majority of respondents 29%, and the least respondents indicated allocating more resources to M&E, while the least 21% indicated allocation of more resources.

Respondents' Perspectives on Other Challenges

(i) Public relations, or PR, are essential to an organisation's communication plans and image. But because of its viewed secondary role, it encounters difficulties that lead to underinvestment and scarce resources, impeding significant results.

(ii) Stakeholders lack institutional knowledge of PR, which causes misunderstandings and makes it harder to win people over. By shedding light on the importance of PR and how it affects organisational success, educational programmes help close this knowledge gap.

(iii) Time constraints make it difficult for PR professionals to balance a variety of duties, short deadlines, and dynamic communication platforms. Agility and adaptability are further challenged by real-time answers in a media ecosystem that moves quickly.

(iv) PR efficacy is hampered by the lack of a formal framework for metrics and evaluation (M&E). It is difficult for practitioners to show impact, make defensible judgments, and enhance strategies based on data-driven insights in the absence of standard metricss and specialized resources.

Respondents' other suggestions

(i) Putting in place thorough PR statutes and rules can offer a framework for moral and conscientious PR practices.

(ii) Encouraging PR professionals to pursue ongoing personal growth is crucial if they want to remain abreast of changes in the industry, new technological advancements, and changing communication tactics.
(iii) Building an environment in the workplace where public relations is valued and given priority is essential to overcoming obstacles like low resource allocation and under appreciation.
(iv) Gaining important insights about PR performance, perceptions, and areas for development may be achieved by including stakeholders in meaningful discourse and asking for their opinion.

Discussion

Research Question One: How do professionals in NIPR proficiently execute their programmes using metrics and evaluation?

From the data gathered in this study, over 76 % of the respondents indicated that they had recognised PR departments in their places of practice therefore reflecting that PR is considered a management function there. Tables 5and 6 indicate the perceptions of participants on metrics and evaluation. Assessing the respondents' cross tabulation distribution of the key findings, data indicates that majority of the respondents 62.8% apply M&E in their operations as PR professionals in both the Public and the Private sectors (Table 8), which signifies a good level of compliance to the tents of the NIPR "*In Search of Professional Excellence.*" This further implies that members not only consider M&E important, but also execute in practice as captured in the various responses. This also tallies with Manning and Rockland (2011) position on optimization of standard PR practices to add value and realization of organisational goals.

By the same token, a similar scenario was revealed in empirical work conducted by Wright and Leggetter (2009) in Global Survey of Communications Metrics. The survey was carried out by Benchpoint for the International Association for the Metrics and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) and the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in conjunction with the First European Summit on Metrics, held in Berlin in June 2009. The survey results were based on a sample of 520 PR professionals, the reports summary indicates that the overwhelming majority of PR professionals, 88%, believe metrics is an integral part of the PR process (70% believe this strongly). While 77% of respondents claimed to measure their work compared with 69% in a similar survey five years before then. PR Professionals still tend to judge their success criteria more by their ability to place material in the media rather than on the impact such coverage might have on shifting opinion, awareness, or moving markets, although there is evidence that this is changing

Empirical studies further support this perspective, Macnamara (2014) reviewed industry practices and found that while PR professionals often focus on media coverage and impressions, those who use outcome-based metrics (such as message recall or behaviour change) are more likely to report alignment with organisational goals. He proposed a more comprehensive model of evaluation that integrates quantitative and qualitative measures, including feedback loops and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, Watson (2012) chronicled the evolution of PR metrics, noting a shift from superficial metrics like advertising value equivalency (AVE) to more rigorous, meaningful indicators. He highlighted the impact of industry guidelines such as the Barcelona Principles, which promote the use of clearly defined objectives, transparent methodologies, and evaluation of communication effectiveness over mere exposure.

Also, Gregory and Watson (2008), in a longitudinal study of UK PR practitioners, found that organisations with embedded evaluation practices showed better reputation management and stakeholder trust. Their findings reinforce the need for PR metrics to go beyond outputs and focus on impact and relationships.

Research Question 2: Do professionals consider it important and have capacity to utilise metrics and evaluation in executing their PR functions?
Gauging how PR M&E is prioritised in practice, Tables 7 & 8 data reveal a distribution where majority of the study respondents understand the value of evaluating the impact and efficacy of their PR campaigns, which is probably indicative of their dedication to performance improvement and accountability in their communication strategies. On the other hand, the lesser percentage (37%) of firms lacking metrics and assessment procedures could either depend on subjective evaluations or give priority to other PR management facets. Therefore, the findings in this study are also in consonance with Stacks and Michelson (2011), agreeing with standards of practice with the opinion that as the public relations profession continues to focus more and more on outcomes associated with campaigns or public relations initiatives the question of standards has shifted to the forefront of discussions among and between professionals, academics, and research providers.

In the same vein, the enquiry on practitioners' uptake of capacity building for the use of M&E organised by the NIPR 58 % indicated participation, while 42.1% claimed not to have done so. Therefore, the distribution in Table 10 implies that a sizable segment of PR industry experts have taken advantage of NIPR's opportunity to improve their knowledge and proficiency in measuring and evaluation techniques. By taking part in these programmes, people should have acquired insightful knowledge, practical tools, and efficient evaluation and optimization strategies for their PR initiatives.

Besides, further enquiry on how M&E is upheld among professionals reveals 100% of respondents (in Table 11) believe that metrics and evaluation are critical to their work. This broad consensus highlights how widely measuring and assessment are understood to be important in public relations practice. Public relations (PR) professionals increasingly rely on metrics and evaluation to demonstrate the value of their work, ensure strategic alignment, and improve campaign effectiveness. Literature in PR and communication science has consistently emphasized the need for data-driven approaches in modern practice.

Grunig et al. (2002), through the Excellence Theory, argue that effective public relations must include evaluation mechanisms that measure both outputs (what the organisation produces) and outcomes (the impact on public attitudes and behaviours). This foundational theory emphasizes that organisations with strategic communication functions are more effective when they use evaluation to inform decisions

So also, the study also revealed in table 13 that; majority 29.49% of the respondents apply M&E rarely although a considerable percentage (13.78) of participants report never using these techniques, a significant amount reported doing so often and always (17,95% and 18.27% respectively). Organisations may be able to optimize their use of metrics and evaluation methodologies and provide more consistent and effective performance assessment in PR efforts by addressing the factors behind the lower frequency of implementation. Also, the revelations from the above data in table 14 indicate that majority of the professionals (40.38%) feel they have the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct M&E while about a third (30.45%) and (29.17%) of the population indicated not and others partially possessing the requisite knowledge and skills to conduct M&E respectively, which could account for the proportion of the professionals that indicated no use of M&E earlier.

Research Question 3: What are some of the challenges faced by professionals in utilizing metrics and evaluation?

The study also revealed in table 14 on the respondents' opinions on the challenges faced in conducting M&E. This further amplifies the complexity of evaluating intangible outcomes, and the need for more precise metrics standards, resource limitations, and managing stakeholder expectations are some of the main areas where PR practitioners struggle, as these data demonstrates. Therefore, by developing strategies for resource allocation, improved metrics methodologies, standardizing metrics, and engaging stakeholders, these issues might be addressed and obstacles to PR success could be surmounted, thereby increasing the efficacy of PR activities.

It makes it difficult for practitioners to show impact, make defensible judgments, to enhance strategies based on data-driven insights in the absence of standard metricss and specialized resources for such practices. These findings tie with positions of Nwosu, (2017) and Macnamara (2010**)** survey,that discovered reasons for poor execution of M&E to include organisational challenges, time and budgetary allocations. Smith, (2013) emphasize systematic execution of research and evaluation to enable departments to give accounts of their contributions to the organisation's goals. Similarly, Grunig *et al.* (2002) prescriptions on excellence in PR practice provide the rationale for applying metrics in PR programmeing.

Conclusion

The study has been able to reveal and establish that there is an appreciable use of M&E among professionals in Abuja, North Central Nigeria despite the doubts and pessimisms that pervaded the landscape of PR practice in Nigeria. The PR profession was observed like its counterparts to be faced with a myriad of challenges that seem to reflect the socio-economic realities of the country, where there is very high competing demand for the meager budgets for PR programmes. The literature and empirical evidence support the growing consensus that metrics are essential to strategic PR practice**.** Effective metrics enables PR professionals to justify budgets, improve campaigns, and demonstrate alignment with broader organisational objectives.

Recommendations

(i) The NIPR as a regulatory body should ensure that they mandate and encourage organisations both private and public to establish and fund PR departments to promote its recognition and enable its operation as a management function with the right policies and standards for practice.

(ii) The NIPR should also continue to promote M&E as part in its training curriculum for the Mandatory Continuous Programme Development (MCPD), this will help to further boost capacity development for professionals to execute M&E according to standards.

(iii) Both Public and Private organisations should ensure they accord PR its full managerial functions which will enable prioritisation of PR issues, budgets and activities as this will support and promote M&E and the overall effectiveness of PR.

(iv) Organisations should also ensure they prioritise M&E capacity as requirement for staff recruitment and continuous training to ensure effectiveness of PR programmes.

(v) Professionals should also intensify efforts on self-capacity building through extensive reading and additional training to enable them stay on top of their profession.

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