Professionalism & Excellence

# JOURNAL OF STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION (JSPRC)

Volume 1, Issue 1-May, 2025

# EDITORIAL BOARD

**Journal of Strategic Public Relations and Communication (JSPRC)**
Volume 1, Issue 1 – May, 2025.



**For permissions requests, contact:**
Journal of Strategic Public Relations and Communication (JSPRC)
Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Akwa Ibom State Chapter,
Image House, besides Pioneer Newspaper,
off Information Drive, off IBB Avenue, Uyo.
**Email address:** info@jsprc-aksnipr.com
www.jsprc-aksnipr.com

**ISSN:** Maiden Edition

Printed in Nigeria.

**Disclaimer:**
The views and opinions expressed in the articles published in this journal are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of JSPRC or its editors.

**Cover Design and Typesetting:** Unyime Edet
**Printed by:** izi-Link Services Nigeria

## ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Journal of Strategic Public Relations and Communication (JSPRC) is a peer-reviewed publication that seeks to spotlight strategic perspectives in public relations and communication. It will feature interdisciplinary research and case studies highlighting the evolving dynamics of public relations in the digital age, corporate communications, crisis management, stakeholder engagement, and related fields.

# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Comrade Ini Ememobong**
Honourable Commissioner,
Ministry of Special Duties & Ibom Deep Seaport,
Akwa Ibom State.

**CP Baba M. Azare,** fsi
Commissioner of Police,
Nigeria Police Force, Akwa Ibom State Command.

**Emmanuel Omula,** Ph.D
Department of Mass Communication,
Topfaith University, Mkpatak, Essien Udim,
Akwa Ibom State.

**Elder Manasseh Umoette**
Federal Polytechnic, Ukana, Akwa Ibom State.

**Bridget Chiedu Onochie,** Ph.D
Institute of Strategic and Development Communication (ISDEVCOM),
Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

**Achilleus-Chud Uchegbu**
Institute of Strategic and Development Communication (ISDEVCOM),
Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

**Okon E. Udoyo,** Ph.D
Department of Mass Communication,
University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State.

**Kufre J. George**
Department of Mass Communication,
Heritage Polytechnic, Ikot Udota, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

**Samuel A. Etifit**
Department of Mass Communication,
Heritage Polytechnic, Ikot Udota, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

**Christian U. Egeh**
Department of Mass Communication,
Federal Polytechnic, Oko, Anambra State.

**Idongesit M. Ashameri,** Ph.D
Daily Independent Newspaper, and VirValCher Nig. Limited.

**Idorenyin Ekanem**
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

**George N. Brown**
Department of Mass Communication,
Heritage Polytechnic, Ikot Udota, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

**Ifeanyi M. Nwokeocha**
Department of Journalism and Media Studies,
Federal University, Utuoke, Bayelsa State.

**Edet Abia,** Ph.D
Department of Journalism and Media Studies,
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene.

**Emem U. Okon,** Ph.D
Department of Strategic Communication and Media Studies,
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene.

**Adekunle B. Ewaoyenikan**
Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, Mkpat Enin.

**Patrick D. Udo**
Department of Journalism and Media Studies,
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene.

**Uduak M. Iwok,** Ph.D
Department of Strategic Communication and Media Studies,
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene.

**Ifeanyi M. Nwokeocha**
Department of Journalism and Media Studies,
Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State.

**Solomon S. Kwakfut**
Department of Mass Communication,
University of Jos, Plateau State.

**Esther G. Ntegwung**
Department of Mass Communication,
Heritage Polytechnic, Ikot Udota, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

**Uwem A. Akpan**
Department of Mass Communication,
Heritage Polytechnic, Ikot Udota, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

**George N. Brown**
Department of Mass Communication,
Heritage Polytechnic, Ikot Udota, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

**Adebusuyi O. Adedotun**
Department of Mass Communication,
Koladaisi University, Ibadan, Oyo State.

**Akindutire S. Ayomide**
Institute of Strategic and Development Communication,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

**Aribisala T. Moyinoluwa**
International Communication Association (ICA), Nigeria.

**Godsgift E. Dada**
Nigerian Armed Forces Resettlement Center, Lagos.

**Ita Oyokunyi,** Ph.D
Department of Advertising and Marketing Communication,
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
University of Uyo, Uyo.

**Daniel E. Eshett,** Ph.D
Dean, School of Communication Arts,
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# Citizen Engagement Through Direct Feedback: A Case Study of the Akwa Ibom Info Hotline as a Strategic Public Relations Tool

**Ini Ememobong**

Ministry of Special Duties & Ibom Deep Seaport, Akwa Ibom State.

## Abstract
This study examines the effectiveness of the Akwa Ibom State Information Hotline (070000000001) as a citizen engagement tool and public relations strategy. Implemented in 2020 to address security challenges and enhance government-citizen communication, the hotline represents a shift from traditional one-way government communication to dialogic engagement. Using a mixed-methods approach analyzing 3,312 calls between December 2020 and December 2024, this research evaluates the hotline's effectiveness through the lens of Dialogic Public Relations Theory and Public Sector Communication and Citizen Engagement Theory. Findings reveal that while the hotline successfully facilitated citizen participation in governance and improved emergency response, limitations including the long number format, lack of toll-free access, and operational challenges hindered optimal effectiveness. This case study contributes to the growing literature on technology-enabled citizen engagement mechanisms in governance and recommends expanding outreach to raise awareness of the hotline, especially among rural and underserved populations. Additionally, developing an online platform to complement the hotline would further enhance citizen engagement and streamline feedback collection.

**Keywords:** Citizen engagement, direct feedback, Akwa Ibom Information Hotline, public sector communication, governance.

## Introduction
The need for citizen engagement has been an important element of governance concern in all types of public government, from ancient to contemporary times. Democracy, defined by Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Gettysburg Address, as a government of the people, for the people, and by the people" (Held, 2006), places a higher premium on citizens' engagement because every government project, programme, or policy is expected to have the acceptance of the citizens. This acceptance can best be obtained through citizens' engagement programmes which occur at different levels through different channels like direct contact, virtual platforms, elite engagement, grassroots sensitization, etc.

Government communication for decades has deployed and relied on a one-way communication flow that it communicated to the citizens without obtaining concomitant feedback. Relying on this one-way communication structure made it impossible for the government to read the minds of the citizens on subjects except when letters of disapproval were sent in, or protests undertaken, by which time a full-blown conflict may have arisen.

In a bid to achieve better outcomes using citizen engagement, scholars and practitioners have proposed the use of different approaches like town hall meetings, call-in media shows door-to-door engagements, and other feedback channels. In its determination to provide an effective feedback mechanism, the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Information 2020 created a hotline (070000000001) through which citizens could reach the government at any time, on any issue.

This article critically analyses the effectiveness of the information hotline as a feedback avenue and public relations strategy for the state government. It examines the finer details of the hotline's operations, highlighting its attainments and challenges. The article seeks to answer the research question: In what ways was the information hotline effective as a feedback mechanism and a strategic public relations tool?

## Conceptual Clarification

### Citizen Engagement

Citizen engagement is a multifaceted process that involves the active participation of the public in political and governmental decision-making. It is a key component of democratic governance; it gives backing to the role of citizens in shaping public policies and ensuring accountability. Engagement mechanisms such as public consultations, town hall meetings, social media interactions, and feedback hotlines offer platforms for citizens to communicate with government bodies. These mechanisms not only allow individuals to voice their concerns but also enable the government to gather insights from the public, thus improving transparency and fostering a participatory governance model (Taylor, 2018). Citizen engagement, when done effectively, strengthens the relationship between the government and its people, enhancing trust and ensuring that public policies align with the needs and priorities of the population.

### Direct Feedback

Direct feedback, a core element of citizen engagement, involves the direct transmission of citizen concerns, opinions, and suggestions to government authorities. Unlike indirect forms of feedback, such as surveys or public opinion polls, direct feedback is a more immediate and personal form of communication that fosters a direct line of communication between citizens and their government. It can occur through multiple channels, including feedback forms, hotlines, emails, and social media platforms. The value of direct feedback lies in its ability to inform government decisions, improve the efficiency of public services, and ensure that government actions are aligned with public needs. Moreover, this feedback mechanism is essential for enhancing government accountability, as it offers citizens a way to hold public officials and institutions responsible for their actions and decisions (Smith & Wesson, 2020). Direct feedback is also an essential tool for identifying gaps in public services and addressing emerging issues in real time, making it a crucial aspect of responsive governance.

### Akwa Ibom Information Hotline

The Akwa Ibom Information Hotline serves as a direct communication channel between the citizens of Akwa Ibom State and their government. Established as a part of the government's efforts to promote transparency and improve service delivery, the hotline provides citizens with a platform to report issues, ask questions, and offer feedback regarding government services. It is an invaluable tool for promoting government responsiveness, as it allows for the rapid identification of public concerns and facilitates timely interventions. In addition to being a communication tool, the hotline also fosters an environment of accountability by allowing the government to respond directly to citizen queries and grievances. This engagement tool plays a significant role in enhancing the relationship between the state government and its citizens, creating a more inclusive decision-making process and empowering the public to participate in governance (Barker, 2019). Furthermore, the hotline serves as a critical mechanism for ensuring that public sector initiatives are aligned with the needs and expectations of the community, making it an important element of effective public sector communication.

**History and Operation of the Akwa Ibom State Info Hotline**

The Ministry of Information and Strategy of Akwa Ibom State created a hotline (070000000001) in 2020 to serve as a channel for feedback and information from the public. This was specifically necessitated by the need to obtain information from citizens to help curb a security challenge that existed at that time. Policemen and other security operatives were being attacked, killed, and their arms stolen by some non-state actors who had exerted control over a certain area of the state. Additionally, there was an increase in other acts of insecurity during the last quarter of the year, and the state was preparing to hold the Christmas Village, where thousands of visitors thronged for relaxation and commercial activities. The ministry, as part of its strategic communication, needed to create a channel for citizens who observe anything untoward to report for action.

The ministry purchased a phone number from all the available mobile telephony service providers and connected them to the hotline, 070000000001, which was selected for ease of remembrance. To popularize the hotline, intensive sensitization campaigns were mounted on all traditional and new media platforms including the airing of jingles on the radio, printing and circulation of fliers, social media post sponsorship, etc. The staff to be used were employed and trained for two weeks and provided with phones. The security services provided contact persons to be reached with information requiring action. The staff undertook a test run to acquaint themselves with the system and its operation. They were assessed on their tone, elicitation techniques, knowledge of referral points, etc.

Information from the hotline log as contained in the quarterly report submitted to the government reveals that the total number of calls received between December 2020 and December 2024 was 3,300. A disaggregation of the calls shows that 1,010 were security-related, 390 were seeking financial assistance, 420 were job search and employment-related, 200 just called to check if the hotline was functional, 280 were education-related, 130 were inquiries on COVID-19 and health, 310 were about infrastructure, while 370 were about business and other social supports. Furthermore, feedback freely offered by the callers indicates that the hotline had achieved enhanced public engagement, prompt response mechanism to public concerns, data elicitation platform for government, and enhanced sense of transparency.

The hotline as a channel for dialogic communication was used to obtain both inputs and feedback from citizens on the entirety of government business. People freely called or texted in to either inform the government of the needs of their communities or to react to policies, projects, or programmes undertaken by the state government. When calls were received, the call agent sorted them into the relevant cluster and then reached out to the agency involved. For example, if it was a security call reporting a robbery, the call agent would immediately call the police control room and relay the message to them. One notable example was when a caller reported that a suspected thief was to be burned on Atiku Abubakar Way; the call agent immediately alerted the police, who swiftly arrived at the locus criminis, just after petrol had been poured on the suspect but before he was set on fire. The call center is credited with many successes, especially in aiding the fight against crime and criminals in Akwa Ibom, most of which cannot be discussed in detail because of security implications. The security agencies have offered feedback on the efficacy of the hotline as a veritable means of intelligence gathering and crime prevention. On the receiving end, citizens expressed happiness over the prompt response of government to some of the issues reported.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the system was not without setbacks; it had its flaws, chief among them being the length of the number. The 11-digit number was too long for the purpose desired. It was not easily memorable, especially to the local population. Despite the use of many zeros to make it memorable, feedback revealed that except for those who saved the number, very few people tried to memorize it, which is what an emergency or info line should be. Obviously, a three or four-digit number would have been better.

Additionally, the line was not toll-free. A toll-free line would have allowed those who are not financially capable, or who do not have call credits but have a need to reach the government, to still do so. The fact that people had to spend money to volunteer information was discouraging, while others who had information did not have the money to purchase call credits for their phones. Reactions gleaned from feedback undertaken by the operating ministry indicated that much information was lost because of this particular fact. This is in addition to the poor network performance and charged dropped calls by network providers.

Furthermore, the dual challenge of not having a dedicated office and insufficient staff made effective monitoring difficult. Call agents could, for example, switch off the phone in their possession, knowing that the system would divert calls coming to their line to the available lines that were on and close by, without the central call manager knowing. If they were working from an office, preferably in shifts, monitoring would have been easier and more effective.

## Review of Related Literature

Citizen Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms A growing body of literature highlights the importance of citizen engagement and direct feedback in public administration. Studies have shown that feedback mechanisms, such as government hotlines and online platforms, are vital in enhancing government accountability and transparency (Smith, 2019).

Digital Platforms for Citizen Engagement Research by Jones (2020) emphasizes that direct feedback not only informs decision-making but also builds trust between the public and the government. The research by Clark and Gergen (2018) points to the growing importance of digital platforms in the political process, noting that they not only provide governments with immediate access to public sentiment but also facilitate a two-way communication channel that is essential in contemporary democratic practices. In particular, online platforms allow citizens to engage with their government beyond traditional methods, ensuring that feedback mechanisms are more accessible and inclusive. This digital shift has become even more crucial in times of crisis, as seen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where public health hotlines and online platforms were essential for disseminating information and addressing citizens' concerns.

Effectiveness of Hotlines: The use of hotlines, specifically, has been identified as an effective strategy for increasing citizen-government communication (Doyle, 2021). However, challenges remain, including ensuring accessibility, addressing issues raised by citizens, and maintaining the privacy of feedback (Taylor, 2018).

Kim & Lee (2007) explored how public participation in government programmes is influenced by perceived openness and accessibility of communication channels. In their study on citizen-government interaction, they found that people are more likely to engage with public institutions when they feel their voices are heard and can lead to meaningful action. This resonates strongly with initiatives like the Akwa Ibom Info Hotline, which symbolizes accessibility and transparency in governance. Their findings suggest that when government communication systems are perceived as responsive and citizen-oriented, trust in public institutions increases. The Info Hotline, serving as a strategic PR tool, becomes not just a communication medium but also a mechanism for participatory governance—allowing citizens to contribute directly to shaping policy outcomes.

Macnamara (2012) highlighted the evolution of public communication from traditional broadcast methods to more dialogic, participatory approaches in government-citizen relations. He argues for the importance of listening in strategic communication, where public relations is seen as a two-way street, not merely about pushing information. Platforms like the Akwa Ibom Info Hotline are prime examples of such evolution, designed to listen as much as to inform. Macnamara identifies government hotlines as part of the broader movement toward 'organisational listening,' where institutions systematically capture and act on stakeholder input. The hotline's ability to record, categorize, and respond to citizen calls demonstrates a shift in public sector PR from monologue to meaningful dialogue—a hallmark of strategic and ethical communication.

Eberle and Stalder (2017) investigated how digital feedback tools impact democratic engagement in local governance. Their study showed that communication technologies that allow real-time citizen input significantly enhance participatory governance and enable public authorities to react promptly to societal needs. This underscores the relevance of the Info Hotline as not just a crisis-response tool but a continuous feedback mechanism that supports active citizenship. They also emphasized that when feedback systems are integrated with decision-making processes, citizens perceive a stronger sense of agency. For Akwa Ibom State, the hotline serves this function by transforming public relations into a participatory and collaborative endeavour, where government responsiveness translates into increased civic trust and political efficacy.

Okorie and Oyedemi (2019) examined the role of mobile platforms in promoting civic engagement and government accountability. Their study revealed that mobile communication channels, such as SMS hotlines and call centers, play a vital role in enhancing transparency, especially in areas with limited access to formal governance infrastructure. The Akwa Ibom Info Hotline fits into this paradigm as a bridge between government and underserved communities.

They further noted that public relations in Nigeria is evolving beyond media campaigns to include ICT-based citizen engagement strategies. Through their research, they concluded that when governments use technology to open lines of communication, they not only improve service delivery but also legitimize public institutions in the eyes of citizens.

## Theoretical Framework

### Dialogic Public Relations Theory

This theory emphasises dialogue, as opposed to monologue in public communication. The preference for a two-way or a personalised communication model was advanced by Martin Buber in 1970, where he provided the underpinning foundation for dialogic communication. This form of communication involves a direct, mutual engagement between the parties, where each party is recognised and engaged and not treated as a means to an end (Kent, 2017). Buber views relationships as the foundation and reason for communication (Asakaviciute & Valatka, 2020), without which the essence of communication is lost. This theory criticizes the use of press releases and other forms of communication that are one-sided, which in his estimation treats the decoder of the message as 'it', instead of 'thou' (Asakaviciute & Valatka, 2020; Chen et al., 2020). This proposition situates dialogue as an existential demand (Mabotja & Mkhomazi, 2024), tying it to relation in an inseparable way, and highlights two pathways of communication being “authentic-dialogic existentialist being and inauthentic-monologic existentialist being” (Mabotja & Mkhomazi, 2024, p. 53). In application, the respect and regard that the encoder has for the decoder can be gleaned from the manner of communication deployed; if dialogic, it would suggest that the encoder has respect for the other person's opinion and seeks to engage, while if the communication uses the monologic approach, it would mean that the opinion of the other person does not matter or is not sought.

Contemporarily, with the increasing dependence of humans on technology for many aspects of their existence, Kent and Taylor have applied technology to the dialogic communication theory, seeking to achieve negotiated interface among persons where ideas and opinions are shared, which is clearly different from just disseminating information to people without further engagement. This position pursues the building of relationships through open dialogue in a two-way approach, relying on the technology of the internet (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent, 2017; Kent, 2023). Their advocacy is apt because people view technology as a vehicle of communication and simply transport their traditional approach to communication to the virtual space, validating the call for the dialogic approach. Whether it is through formal or social e-media platforms, the approach to information conveyance can still be either one-way (broadcast, dissemination) or two-way (dialogue, engagement).

**Public Sector Communication and Citizen Engagement Theory**

This theory presents a framework that examines how government and its agencies communicate with citizens in the governance process. This theory is founded on some key concepts like bi-directional communication, deliberative democracy, trust building, partnership, etc. (Luoma-aho *et al.*, 2020; Vagena & Sneiders, 2022). A comprehensive framework that examines the evolving relationship between citizens and public organisations is the focus of this theory, as it posits that the traditional one-way communication approach is grossly insufficient to adequately undertake contemporary governance, which requires the building of a healthy dose of acceptance and trust (Luoma-aho *et al.,* 2020). Theory and practice agree that the existence of a communication gap threatens the cordial relationship between government and the governed. And this threat is as big and consequential as the size of the gap. This theory advocates the establishment of an engaging and meaningful relationship between government entities and the public, where the people are seen as co-creators of information, rather than being mere receivers of information.

To achieve this, different media must be deployed to reach the people almost simultaneously. Reliance on technology as a means of public engagement is seriously supported and encouraged. It clearly advocates for interactive communication, in a bi-directional manner rather than the one-directional mode. This is intended to give citizens an opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas to the process of governance.

**Methodology**

This study employed a case study approach, focusing on the Akwa Ibom Info Hotline as a strategic public relations tool for citizen engagement.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including officials responsible for managing the hotline. Relevant documents, such as reports and policies related to the hotline, were analysed to provide context and background information.

Qualitative analysis was done whereby interview data were analysed thematically to gain insights into citizens' experiences and perceptions.

This research relied on primary data from the comprehensive call log maintained by the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Information from December 2020 to December 2024. This log specifically recorded:

(i) Total number of calls received.
(ii) Call categorization by issue type
(iii) Actions taken in response to calls

(iv) Response times
(v) Follow-up activities

Additionally, quarterly reports submitted to the state government by the Ministry of Information were analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and institutional responses to the information received through the hotline.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Call Volume and Distribution**
Between December 2020 and December 2024, the Akwa Ibom State Information Hotline received a total of 3,312 calls. Figure 1 presents the categorical distribution of these calls.

Figure 1: Distribution of Calls by Category (December 2020 - December 2024)

| **Category** | **Number of Calls** |
|---|---|
| Security-related | 1,022 |
| Financial assistance | 390 |
| Job search/employment | 420 |
| Functionality check | 200 |
| Education-related | 280 |
| COVID-19/health inquiries | 130 |
| Infrastructure | 310 |
| Business/social support | 370 |
| Other | 190 |
| **Total** | **3,312** |

The data reveal that security-related concerns constituted the largest category of calls followed by employment-related inquiries and requests for financial assistance. This distribution reflects the primary concerns of citizens during the period under study and aligns with the initial security-focused purpose of the hotline's establishment.

The data was classified into nine thematic areas: security-related issues, financial assistance, job search/employment, functionality checks, education, COVID-19/health inquiries, infrastructure, business/social support, and other miscellaneous concerns. Security-related calls accounted for the highest number, totalling 1,022, representing 30.9% of all calls received. This aligns with the main intent of the hotline as a security intervention medium. Employment-related calls (12.7%) and financial assistance requests (11.8%) followed closely, indicating the economic situation of the citizens at that time.

Further analysis revealed a consistent pattern in call volumes, with spikes in security-related calls during periods of heightened insecurity and an upsurge in health-related calls following the COVID-19 pandemic prevalent at that time. Additionally, calls categorized under “functionality checks” (200 calls, or 6.0%) suggested ongoing public curiosity and trust deficit about the availability and responsiveness of a government-owned and managed hotline.

**Discussion of Findings**

The data from the Akwa Ibom State Information Hotline between December 2020 and December 2024 offers significant insight into public concerns and engagement patterns with government communication platforms during this period. The total of 3,312 calls distributed across nine thematic categories reflects a varied landscape of citizen needs, anxieties, and interests.

**1. Security Concerns as a Dominant Issue**; Security-related calls constituted the highest number (1,022 calls or 30.9%), which underscores the critical importance of safety and security in the lives of Akwa Ibom residents. This trend validates the original purpose of the hotline, which was primarily to function as a security feedback and response tool. The high volume of such calls, including observable spikes during periods of heightened insecurity, illustrates a strong reliance on the hotline for immediate and direct communication with authorities during crises.

**2. Economic Hardship and Employment Concerns:** The second and third most frequent categories—job search/employment (420 calls or 12.7%) and financial assistance (390 calls or 11.8%)—reveal the socio-economic pressures faced by citizens during this period. These figures highlight the lingering effects of economic downturns, inflation, and possibly the residual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on livelihoods. That the citizens turned to a government hotline for economic relief and job-related inquiries suggests both desperation and hope in governmental support structures.

**3. Trust and System Functionality:** Calls categorized under "functionality checks" (200 calls or 6.0%) point to a perceptible scepticism regarding the operational capacity of the hotline. This may reflect a historical mistrust in public service efficiency or a genuine desire to verify the responsiveness of a new government initiative. The presence of such calls implies that building trust in public systems requires not just establishing infrastructure, but consistent, transparent communication and service delivery.

**4. Health and Education Inquiries**: While COVID-19/health-related inquiries (130 calls or 3.9%) and education-related calls (280 calls or 8.5%) were lower in volume, they still represent significant thematic areas, especially during and after the pandemic era. The relatively low number of health-related calls might suggest either a preference for health-specific platforms or limited awareness that the hotline could address such concerns.

**5. Infrastructure and Social Support**: Calls relating to infrastructure (310 calls or 9.4%) and business/social support (370 calls or 11.2%) emphasize the continued demand for improved public amenities and socio-economic interventions. These concerns reflect a public that is engaged not only in immediate survival needs but also in broader developmental and societal well-being.

**6. Miscellaneous Needs**: The "other" category (190 calls or 5.7%) suggests a range of citizen concerns that fell outside predefined categories, further emphasizing the need for flexible, adaptive government communication channels that can accommodate emerging issues. The data demonstrates that the Akwa Ibom State Information Hotline served as a vital communication tool between the government and its citizens, addressing a broad spectrum of needs—security, economic survival, social welfare, and public service delivery. The findings highlight the need for sustained investment in responsive communication infrastructure, trust-building through reliable service, and expansion of the hotline's capabilities to cover a wider array of public concerns.

**Limitations**

This study encountered some limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, while the call log data provided valuable insights into usage patterns, the absence of comparative data from similar hotlines in other regions or states limits our ability to benchmark the Akwa Ibom Info Hotline's effectiveness against established standards or practices. This was so because the few hotlines in other parts of the country are part of a full command and control center, unlike that of Akwa Ibom State, which is made up of normal phone lines. Such comparative analysis would have contextualized our findings within broader patterns of citizen engagement tool deployment in developing regions.

Second, the study relied primarily on quantitative call data and institutional reports, with limited opportunity for qualitative follow-up with callers after their concerns were addressed. This limitation prevented a comprehensive assessment of citizen satisfaction and post-intervention outcomes. While some feedback was obtained through voluntary comments, a systematic follow-up protocol would have yielded more reliable data on resolution effectiveness and citizen perception of government responsiveness.

Third, the hotline data inherently excludes perspectives from citizens who lacked access to telecommunications facilities, or who could not afford call charges, or who were unaware of the service. This limitation is particularly significant in rural areas with limited network coverage or among lower socioeconomic populations. Consequently, the findings may overrepresent the concerns of urban, more affluent, and technologically connected citizens.

Finally, the study period coincided with several extraordinary events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and specific security challenges, which may have influenced both the volume and nature of calls in ways that might not reflect typical citizen-government communication patterns during more stable periods.

**Conclusion**

The Akwa Ibom State Information Hotline represents a significant advancement in government-citizen communication infrastructure and demonstrates both the potential and challenges of technology-enabled citizen engagement mechanisms in developing contexts. This case study makes several important contributions to public relations and governance literature.

First, the implementation of the hotline confirms the efficacy of dialogic communication theory in governance even in a global south setting. By establishing a direct, bidirectional feedback channel, the state government transformed traditional one-way government communication into a more participatory model that empowered citizens to contribute meaningfully to governance processes. The security success stories documented through the hotline demonstrate that well-designed citizen engagement tools can yield tangible governance outcomes, particularly in crisis management and service delivery.

Second, findings revealed that technical considerations such as shorter memorability, toll-free access, and better operational management significantly impact utilisation and effectiveness. Future implementations should prioritise accessibility through shorter, preferably 3-digit, toll-free numbers and establish robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure improved service quality.

Third, this case study highlights the importance of institutional readiness and capacity for responsive governance. The effectiveness of citizen feedback mechanisms depends not only on the communication channel itself but also on the government's ability to process, prioritise, and act upon the information received. The coordinated response system established between the call center and security agencies demonstrates how information pathways can be optimized for rapid response when properly designed.

Future research should explore comparative analyses of different feedback mechanisms across multiple jurisdictions, examine the long-term impact of such initiatives on citizen trust-building and governance outcomes, and investigate how emerging technologies such as mobile application platforms and artificial intelligence might address the limitations identified in this study. As governments worldwide seek to strengthen democratic participation and improve service delivery, the lessons from the Akwa Ibom Information Hotline offer valuable guidance for designing more effective citizen engagement tools that bridge the communication gap between governments and the governed.

## Recommendations

The study therefore recommends:

(i) **Increased Outreach:** Efforts should be made to increase awareness about the hotline, particularly among rural and underserved populations. Promotional Jingles and information on the hotline should be translated into the major local languages spoken within the state.

(ii) **Improvement in Response Times:** The government should invest in resources and staff to shorten response times and improve the resolution rate of reported issues.

(iii) **Toll-free access:** The lines should be toll-free to allow persons who do not have the financial wherewithal to pay for the call to volunteer information. Their economic situation should not exclude them from participating in this strategic communication exercise.

(iv) **Digital Integration:** Developing an online platform to complement the hotline could further increase citizen engagement and feedback collection.

## References


Asakaviciute, V., & Valatka, M. (2020). *Public relations strategies in modern organisations*. Vilnius University Press.

Barker, R. (2019). *The dynamics of public opinion: Understanding societal influences*. Oxford University Press.

Chen, L., Zhang, Y., & Liu, H. (2020). *Digital communication and its impact on public relations*. Springer Publishing.

Doyle, J. (2021). *Media relations and corporate communication*. Routledge.

Eberle, D., & Stalder, S. (2017). Digital democracy and citizen engagement: The role of online feedback platforms in local governance. *Information Polity, 22*(2-3), 217–234.

Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy* (3rd ed.). Stanford University Press.

Kent, M. L. (2017). *Strategic public relations: Building relationships and managing reputation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kent, M. L. (2023). *Digital public relations: Theory and practice in the digital age*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (1998). Building dialogic relationships through the World Wide Web. *Public Relations Review, 24*(3), 321–334.

Kim, J.-N., & Lee, S. Y. (2007). New functions of Internet-mediated public relations: Toward relationship management. Journal of Public Relations Research, 19(3), 353–375.

Luoma-aho, V., Vos, M., & Zerfass, A. (2020). *Public relations and organisational transparency*. Peter Lang Publishing.

Mabotja, M., & Mkhomazi, S. (2024). *Public relations in the African context: Challenges and opportunities*. University of Johannesburg Press.

Macnamara, J. (2012). *Public communication practices in the Web 2.0 era: Towards a theory of interactive public relations*. Peter Lang.

Okorie, N., & Oyedemi, T. D. (2019). Mobile governance and public relations strategies in Nigeria: Enhancing citizen engagement and accountability. *Journal of African Media Studies, 11*(3), 385–401.

Smith, J. A. (2019). *Understanding stakeholder engagement in public relations*. Sage Publications.

Smith, J. A., & Wesson, L. B. (2020). *Crisis communication strategies: A stakeholder approach*. Routledge.

Taylor, M. (2018). *Global public relations: Spanning borders, spanning cultures*. Routledge.

Vagena, E., & Sneiders, E. (2022). *Innovations in public relations: Embracing digital transformation*. Springer Nature.

# Strengthening Police-Public Relations for Effective Security in Akwa Ibom State

**Baba M. Azare**

The Nigeria Police Force, Akwa Ibom State Command.

**Abstract**
This study investigates the relationship between police-public relations and security effectiveness in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It highlights the critical role of effective communication, mutual trust, and community collaboration in enhancing public safety and law enforcement outcomes. Adopting a secondary research method and an opinion-based analytical approach, the study draws from scholarly articles, government reports, media sources, and civil society publications to explore the dynamics of police-community interactions within the region. The findings reveal that strained relationships, public distrust, and perceived police brutality significantly hinder security efforts. The study emphasizes the need for community policing, professional conduct, and public engagement strategies to foster trust and cooperation between the police and the public. Ultimately, it recommends proactive reforms and inclusive policing frameworks as vital tools for improving security and sustaining peace in Akwa Ibom State.

**Keywords:** Police-public relations, security, effective security, Akwa Ibom State.

## Introduction

The term Public Relations imply different things to different people, depending on their areas of jurisdiction. Some think of it as relationship, others think of it as communication while some school of thought view it as tip or money given for a service rendered. But whatever the conception is, a common thread binding the aforementioned thoughts, is image making. When we relate with people and communicate or give tips, we give them an impression of ourselves which then forms in them an image of us, and so, public relations in whatever field of work are basically about image making.

Public relations (PR) is a critical function in fostering relationships between organisations and their publics. Public relations has been defined in various ways, depending on the context. Grunig and Hunt (1984) describe public relations as a strategic communication process aimed at building mutually beneficial relationships, and Okeke (2020) emphasises that public relations is instrumental in shaping institutional trust and public confidence.

Every entity needs public relations, which is why the office of the Public Relations Officer is found in many establishments. Everyone wants to be well perceived, esteemed and highly regarded whether or not they are doing well, and the Nigeria Police Force is not an exception. The police, as the major security apparatus in the State, wants the public to know how hard it is working to ensure the safety of the State as well as the security of lives and properties,

hence the reason it has an active public relations office with a very competent hand manning the affairs of the office.
The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), as the major security apparatus in Akwa Ibom State, recognises the importance of public relations in its efforts to maintain law and order. However, challenges such as public distrust, media misrepresentation, and lack of collaboration with stakeholders have hindered police-community relations. This paper discusses these challenges and explores strategies for strengthening police-public relations to enhance security.

**Conceptual Clarifications**
To provide a clear understanding of the key concepts in this study, this section examines the definitions and interpretations of police-public relations**,** security**,** and effective security**.**

**Police-Public Relations**
Police-public relations (PPR) refers to the strategies and practices employed by law enforcement agencies to foster positive engagement with the community (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It involves proactive communication, transparency, and trust-building measures aimed at improving public perception of the police.

According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2004), police-public relations in Nigeria have been historically strained due to issues of corruption, human rights abuses, and lack of accountability. Similarly, Tankebe (2013) argues that public trust in law enforcement is a critical component of police legitimacy and effectiveness. Reiner (2010) adds that police-community relations are shaped by historical, social, and political factors. The role of the police in society extends beyond crime control to include community engagement and public service. When these roles are perceived positively, the police gain public support and legitimacy.

**Key Elements of Police-Public Relations**
Several scholars highlight the following as essential elements of effective police-public relations:
(i) **Trust and Transparency** – Ensuring openness in police operations and accountability for misconduct (Goldsmith, 2005).
(ii) **Community Engagement** – Organizing town hall meetings and collaborative security initiatives (Skogan, 2006).
(iii) **Effective Communication** – Utilizing multiple media channels to enhance police visibility and credibility (Chermak & Weiss, 2005).
(iv) **Accountability and Professionalism** – Establishing oversight mechanisms to address public complaints (Davis & Mateescu, 2019).

**Security**
Security is a broad concept that encompasses the protection of lives, property, and social stability. According to Buzan (1991), security involves the absence of threats to core societal values. Omede (2012) describes security as the ability of a state to protect its citizens from

internal and external threats. He argues that security is both a social and political necessity that requires active government intervention and community participation.

### Dimensions of Security

Scholars identify different dimensions of security, including:

(i) **National Security** – Protection of a country's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Baldwin, 1997).
(ii) **Human Security** – Focuses on individual safety, including economic, food, health, and environmental security (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994).
(iii) **Community Security** – Ensures local safety through grassroots policing and neighborhood watch programmes (Onyeonoru, 2016).

Bayley (2017) argues that security is not solely the responsibility of the police but a collaborative effort between law enforcement agencies, the government, and the public.

### Effective Security

Effective security refers to the ability of a security system to prevent, control, and respond to threats efficiently. Reisig (2015) defines effective security as a state in which law enforcement strategies successfully deter crime, maintain public order, and enhance societal well-being.

Akinwale (2020) notes that effective security is achieved when law enforcement agencies collaborate with the public, adopt modern policing technologies, and uphold professional ethics. He emphasizes that security must be proactive rather than reactive.

### Indicators of Effective Security

Scholars propose several indicators of an effective security system, including:

(i) **Crime Prevention and Reduction** – Measured by a decline in crime rates and successful law enforcement interventions (Skogan, 2006).
(ii) **Public Trust and Cooperation** – A high level of public trust in the police enhances information sharing and crime reporting (Tankebe, 2013).
(iii) **Crisis Resilience and Response** – The ability of security agencies to respond promptly to emergencies (Bayley, 2017).
(iv) **Transparency and Accountability** – Ensuring police officers adhere to ethical standards and community policing principles (Goldsmith, 2005).

According to Nwankwo (2019), countries that prioritise community policing and intelligence-led security strategies tend to achieve higher levels of public safety.

### Akwa Ibom State

This work focuses on Akwa Ibom State in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The state has experienced security challenges such as cult-related violence, kidnapping, armed robbery, and communal conflicts (Ekpenyong, 2021). Given its socio-political dynamics and the role of law enforcement agencies in maintaining order, Akwa Ibom occupies a total land mass of 8,412sq/kms, of Nigeria's coastal basin. The state falls within the tropical belt with a dominant vegetation of green foliage, shrubs and oil-palm trees. The State is one of the largest oil-producing states in Nigeria, with rich deposits of limestone, gravel, salt, silver nitrate, silica sand and kaolin (Eshett and Umoren, 2024). Given these premises, the state provides a relevant setting for studying police-public relations and their implications for security.

## Review of Related Literature

Eneh, M. I. (2022). Interrogating public relations on the performance of the Nigerian police force: A study of force headquarters Enugu.
This study examines the effect of public relations on the performance of the Nigerian Police Force, focusing on the Force Headquarters in Enugu. It aimed to identify how public relations practices influenced the relationship between the police and the public and to suggest ways to enhance this relationship for improved performance. Utilising Institutional Theory, the research employed a descriptive survey method, collecting data from a population of 262, with a sample size of 158 determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Findings revealed that current public relations practices negatively impact police-public relations, leading to a tarnished image of the police and diminished public trust. The study recommended that the Nigerian Police Force implemented concerted efforts to boost public confidence and trust.

Ikea, T. J., Singh, D., Jidong, D. E., Ike, L. M., & Ayobi, E. E. (2022). Public perspectives of interventions aimed at building confidence in the Nigerian police: A systematic review.
Police-public relations in Nigeria have been marred by issues of distrust, torture, and violence. This study adopts a systematic review to fill a gap on the interventions relied on to improve public trust in the police in Nigeria and public perspectives of these interventions. Eleven studies met the inclusion criteria. Informed by the principles of thematic analysis, it was found that there was skepticism, lack of trust, and perceived ineffectiveness of community policing interventions. The review recommends community-informed randomized controlled trial interventions in tandem with the police to foster public trust and legitimacy.

Umana, E. A. (2020). The impediments to effective community policing in Nigeria: A case study of Akwa Ibom State.
Community policing is a philosophy of full-service personalized policing where the same officer patrols and works in the same area permanently from a decentralised place, working in a proactive partnership with citizens to identify and solve problems. It is established on the bedrock of police-community partnership and communication to secure a safe environment for all and develop longer-term solutions to resolving criminal issues.

## Theoretical Framework

The appropriate theory for this study is the "Legitimacy Theory". This theory provides a solid foundation for understanding the critical role of public perception and trust in enhancing the effectiveness of policing and promoting societal security.

### Legitimacy Theory
Legitimacy Theory**,** as articulated by Tyler (1990) and further developed by Beetham (1991), posits that people are more likely to obey the law and cooperate with law enforcement when they perceive authorities as legitimate. Legitimacy, in this context, refers to the public's belief that the police act within the boundaries of fairness, transparency, accountability, and justice. It is not only about legal authority but also about moral rightness in the eyes of the governed.

According to Tyler (1990), police legitimacy is rooted in procedural justice, which includes how respectfully and fairly individuals are treated during encounters with law enforcement. When police officers engage with the public respectfully, enforce laws impartially, and communicate transparently, they earn legitimacy. Conversely, negative experiences—such as abuse of power, corruption, and lack of accountability—undermine public confidence and reduce cooperation with law enforcement agencies.

This theory is particularly relevant to the Nigerian context, where past incidents of police brutality, bribery, and political interference have weakened public trust. In Akwa Ibom State, as in many parts of Nigeria, efforts to reform policing must be centered on restoring legitimacy by improving police-community relations, ensuring accountability, and enhancing citizen engagement.

The Legitimacy Theory explains why police-public relations are central to effective security. When citizens trust the police, they are more likely to report crimes, provide information, and support law enforcement initiatives. This trust and cooperation are essential for crime prevention, community safety, and conflict resolution. The study, therefore, draws on this theory to argue that strengthening legitimacy through community engagement, transparency, and professionalism is key to improving security outcomes in Akwa Ibom State.

This theory offers a strong framework for analyzing the challenges and solutions related to police-community relations and supports the study's call for reforms that build trust, accountability, and collaboration between the police and the public.

### Methodology
This study adopted the secondary research method and an opinion-based analytical approach to investigate police-public relations and their implications for effective security in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Rather than generating new data through fieldwork, the study relied on existing literature, official reports, media content, government documents, academic journals, and civil society publications that discuss policing practices, public trust, and security management in the state. Through this method, the study explored the historical and contemporary dynamics of police-community interactions in Akwa Ibom and identified the prevailing narratives and challenges affecting security outcomes.

The study used insights from policy analysts, scholars, and social commentators to reflect on the state of policing in Akwa Ibom. It also examined comparative cases from other

Nigerian states and international contexts where applicable, to highlight best practices and propose workable reforms. This methodology was appropriate for understanding complex socio-political issues such as trust, legitimacy, and public engagement in law enforcement, especially within the peculiar security context of Akwa Ibom State.

## Challenges Faced by the Police in the Effective Security of Akwa Ibom State

To say that the Public Relations Department of the Akwa Ibom State Police Command is doing its best would probably seem like the police fanning their embers so it is better to leave that to public assessment. However, it is pertinent to admit that there is more work to be done; not because the police are short of strategies and ideas on how to better their operations, but due to the fact that the external challenges limiting our victories are almost overwhelming. The challenges include:

(i) **Distrust in the Police:** One cardinal drawback of our PR activities over the years has been the issue of distrust. Not even the regular slogan "Police is your friend" has helped to erase perceptions of police corruption, bribery, and human rights abuses by some policemen, has significantly damaged public trust and created a hostile environment for police-community relations. But the bad eggs notwithstanding, a lot of conscientious men whom many can attest have given the Force a good name.
However, there remains a widespread perception of police corruption, bribery, and human rights abuses (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004). Studies have shown that historical experiences of police misconduct contribute to public scepticism (Reiner, 2010). However, it is important to recognise that while some officers engage in unethical behaviour, many others remain committed to upholding justice.

(ii) **Public Perceptions:** The public often views the Police as a tool of the government, ready to unleash terror, rather than as protectors of the community. The Police exist primarily to maintain law and order, and protect lives. This is what the police represent and stand for. In Nigeria, negative experiences with law enforcement officers have reinforced this perception. The police must work to change this narrative by engaging with the community in a transparent and professional manner (Ojo, 2018).

(iii) **Meddling by Public Influences:** Public interference in police operations is real. A breaker of the law is apprehended and the next thing, the police receive calls pestering for their release; including calls from those in the media. "He's my brother", "she's my sister" and all of that can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the Police, further damaging public trust.
Media and public influencers significantly shape how the police are perceived. Research suggests that sensationalised media reports focusing on police misconduct contribute to negative stereotypes (Chermak & Weiss, 2005). Political and societal elites sometimes interfere in police operations, undermining their authority and credibility (Ajibola, 2017).

(iv) **Lack of Collaboration:** Times innumerable, stakeholders, such as community leaders, civil society organisations, and the media often fail to collaborate effectively with the Police thus, hindering their ability to address crime. This happens especially when police activities are misrepresented or when the police are perceived as secretive and uncooperative with the media.

Effective crime prevention requires collaboration between the police, community leaders, civil society organisations, and the media. However, when the police are perceived as secretive or uncooperative, stakeholders become reluctant to engage in partnerships (Akinwale, 2020). Strengthening these relationships is essential for effective security management.

## Summary and Conclusion

Improving relationships between police and communities is essential for fostering trust, cooperation, and public safety. This is why strong police-community relationships matter. The police in Akwa Ibom State are grateful to stakeholders for the support accorded them in the successes recorded so far in their drive against insecurity but are appealing for more, believing that together, more will be achieved.

This paper critically examines the nature of police-public relations and their impact on security effectiveness in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Employing a secondary research method and opinion-based approach, the research draws insights from existing literature, media reports, and government documents to explore how interactions between the police and the public influence trust, cooperation, and overall security outcomes. The paper highlights the challenges confronting law enforcement in Akwa Ibom, including public mistrust, inadequate community engagement, and perceptions of police misconduct.

The study further analyses the implications of poor police-community relations on crime prevention and peacekeeping in the state. Drawing on both local and international sources, it emphasizes the importance of transparency, accountability, and community policing in building public confidence and ensuring security.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to overcome the challenges faced by the police in Akwa Ibom State in the area of relationship with the public and strengthen police-public relations for effective security:

(i) **Building Trust and Transparency:** This is to be done by ensuring that the public understands police operations, policies, and procedures. This can be achieved through regular information sharing, open forums, and accessible online resources. The police in Akwa Ibom have been doing this from time to time and need to do more.

(ii) **Accountability:** Establishing clear mechanisms for addressing citizen complaints and holding officers accountable for misconduct. This builds confidence in the police force. The Akwa Ibom State Command have not slacked on this but will step up efforts in this regard.

(iii) **Community Engagement:** Organising community meetings, forums, and events to foster dialogue and build relationships between police and residents. The media and public relations community can attest to this regarding the efforts of the State Command.

(iv) **Improving Communication:** This is achieved through the use of clear and consistent messaging; ensuring that all communication with the public is clear, concise, and consistent; using multiple channels to reach diverse audiences, including social media, local media, and community newsletters as well as establishing mechanisms for the public to provide feedback and suggestions to the police. The Police Public Relations Officer in Akwa Ibom State has done justice to this.

(v) **Addressing Public Concerns:** Every image-conscious organisation, places premium on feedback. And so, by actively listening to and addressing public concerns and complaints, it has been shown that the police is responsive to the needs of the community.

(vi) **Training and Development:** Overtime, the Police in Akwa Ibom State embarked on training and development opportunities for police officers to enhance their skills and knowledge. This includes training on communication, conflict resolution, and de-escalation techniques.

(vii) **Collaboration:** The subject of collaboration with the Police cannot be overemphasized. But the police need more, especially from the media and other agencies, such as community organisations, social workers, and local leaders. This can help to address complex problems and improve overall community safety.

(viii) With these clear-cut strategies, the Police in Akwa Ibom State will be able to achieve crime prevention and reduction, enhanced public safety, resilience in crisis, reduced tension and conflict as well as better outcomes in policing.

## References


Abdulrahman, M. S. (2007). *Policing Nigeria in the 21st century*. Nigeria Police Watch Publications.

Ajibola, A. (2017). *Media influence on public perception of the Nigerian police*. Malthouse Press.

Akinwale, A. (2020). *Security, governance, and the challenges of policing in Nigeria*. University Press.

Alemika, E. E. O., & Chukwuma, I. C. (2004). *The poor and informal policing in Nigeria*. CLEEN Foundation.

Baldwin, D. A. (1997). The concept of security. *Review of International Studies, 23*(1), 5–26.

Bayley, D. H. (2017). *Police for the future*. Oxford University Press.

Beetham, D. (1991). *The legitimation of power*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Buzan, B. (1991). *People, states, and fear: An agenda for international security studies in the post-Cold War era*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Chermak, S., & Weiss, A. (2005). Maintaining legitimacy using external communication strategies: An analysis of police-media relations. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 33*(5), 501–512.

Davis, J., & Mateescu, A. (2019). Policing and community engagement: Challenges and best practices. *Harvard Law Review, 132*(2), 311–325.

Ekpenyong, S. (2021). Security challenges and law enforcement strategies in Nigeria: A case study of Akwa Ibom State. *Nigerian Journal of Criminology, 9*(2), 101–120.

Eneh, M. I. (2022). Interrogating public relations on the performance of the Nigerian police force: A study of force headquarters Enugu. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies, 13*(3).

Eshett, D., & Umoren, I. (2024). Anchor borrowers programme: Assessment of mass media access level among farmers in South-South, Nigeria. *Mass Communication and Human Development Journal, 9*(3), 113–128.

Goldsmith, A. (2005). Police reform and the problem of trust. *Theoretical Criminology, 9*(4), 443–470.

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Ikea, T. J., Singh, D., Jidong, D. E., Ike, L. M., & Ayobi, E. E. (2022). Public perspectives of interventions aimed at building confidence in the Nigerian police: A systematic review. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, 17*(1), 95–116.

Iwarimie-Jaja, D. (2003). *Criminology: The study of crime*. Springfield Publishers.

Nwankwo, O. (2019). Community policing as a model for crime reduction in Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology, 10*(1), 77–95.

Ojo, S. (2018). Law enforcement and public trust in Nigeria: The way forward. *Nigerian Journal of Social Issues, 15*(3), 241–258.

Okeke, O. (2020). Public relations and the reconstruction of institutional trust in Nigeria. *Journal of Media and Communication Research, 8*(1), 33–45.

Onyeonoru, I. P. (2016). *Public accountability and police integrity in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Reiner, R. (2010). *The politics of the police* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Reisig, M. D. (2015). Police legitimacy: Theoretical foundations and empirical evidence. *Annual Review of Criminology, 1*, 377–400.

Skogan, W. G. (2006). *Police and community in Chicago: A tale of three cities*. Oxford University Press.

Tankebe, J. (2013). Viewing things differently: The dimensions of public perceptions of police legitimacy. *Criminology, 51*(1), 103–135.

Tyler, T. R. (1990). *Why people obey the law*. Yale University Press.

Umana, E. A. (2020). The impediments to effective community policing in Nigeria: A case study of Akwa Ibom State. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science, 20*(8), 25–41.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1994). *Human development report: New dimensions of human security*. Oxford University Press.

# Social Media and Public Relations Strategies in Select Banks in Benue State, Nigeria

**Emmanuel Omula[1] and Manasseh Umoette[2]**

[1]Department of Mass Communication, Topfaith University, Mkpatak
[2]Federal Polytechnic, Ukana, Akwa Ibom State.

## Abstract
The study "Social media and public relations strategies in select banks in Benue State Nigeria", sought to find out, the public relations activities that social media were used for by the select banks. The study is underpinned by two- way symmetrical model. Survey research method was employed for the study and questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Findings revealed that, crisis management, two-way communication, making announcements, creating awareness, image management and creating awareness about social responsibility efforts of banks were all public relations strategies and activities that the select banks in Benue State Nigeria used social media for. It was discovered that, social media are the best media for effective two- way communication in the 21st century. It was also revealed that crisis management involves taking appropriate measures to prevent a crisis before it occurs or manage/control it well when it occurs. Based on these findings, it was concluded that, for organisations like banks to make tremendous impact in the 21st century, they must continue to embrace emerging communication technologies, that are relevant to achieving two-way communication. Based on this conclusion it was recommended interalia that, two-way communication, can only be effective when organisations, not only listen to the customers but also act on feedbacks from customers.

**Keywords:** Public relations. strategies, select banks, social media, activities.

## Introduction
Social media are 21st century phenomena that have transformed the way organisations like First Bank, Union Bank and United Bank for Africa communicate with their publics. The study "Evaluation of Public Relations Strategies and Activities Select Banks in Benue State Nigeria used social media for." was necessitated by the advent of social media. The advancement in technology particularly, the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0 has provided users with new media; which can be used as public relations tools. Social media have made it possible for individuals to chat and share photos online, little wonder Roy (2008) opines that, internet has changed all forms of communication since the beginning of its (internet) existence.

Hendrix (2004) posits that, the advent of the internet and computer technology have impacted the practice of public relations in an ever-expanding way. This is true in that, social media according to Boitnott (2017), have eliminated the walls between members of the public and a brand, shorten the time a company has to react to relevant stories, and blur the line between marketing and public relations. Social media can help the public relations managers of banks perform their jobs easier and faster compared to what was obtained before now. This is so in that; public relations managers or social media desk officers can react almost immediately to relevant comments or stories that concern their banks. This is true because, the world is becoming more and more connected because of information communication technology. Technology (social media) have now provided the publics of an organisation or banks the liberty, to make comments or express their dissatisfaction about a product or service at any time they choose to. In the same vein technology has also provided public relations managers or public relations desk officers with the same liberty to make comments or defend their companies. The public relations managers of the select banks should endeavour to be fair and objective, and also come up with plans on how to use social media, so as to ensure fairness and objectivity

A good strategy for social media according to Ponce (2018) is to search for influential blogs in your industry and participate in the discussions. This is an effective and subtle way to introduce your business. Twitter now (X) is seen as an effective tool for introducing one's business to social media. This means that public relations managers of banks, can manage customer relations by informing the publics about new products, service or improvements on a product or brand through social media platforms and blogs. Ponce (2018) opines that, by following journalists and writers who target your industry on social media, you can ensure your business is part of the conversation. He maintained that Facebook and LinkedIn are a bit more personal than Twitter (X) and are best used once a relationship has been established. The general idea is to use social media to share content with the journalists and writers who can help you publish even more content about your business. (Ponce 2018). This again shows that social media can be used as public relations tools. As such public relations managers of banks can use social media to build and strengthen relationship between their banks and the publics of their banks. This can be achieve using the various social media handles of the bank.

Though, social media are said to be public relations tools, getting people to read your message may be difficult if it is too lengthy. This is so because social media are inundated with plethora of messages. For your message to attract attention, you must know, "What is good content to use with social media" Ponce (2018) points out the following tips for writing social media content.

(i) The message must be direct and concise.
(ii) Use a descriptive and keyword rich headline.
(iii) Don't embed any media such as YouTube video, but rather link to the media using descriptive text.
(iv) Place the link with the richest and best targeted text as close to the beginning as possible.
(v) Target keywords should always have descriptive text and be hyperlinks.

The aforementioned tips for writing social media content can help public relations managers of the select banks to come up with contents or improved contents that resonate with the target audiences.

**Statement of the Problem**

With social media, information can be accessed within seconds or minutes. Little wonder, Oram (2018) opines that, social media and digital technology have undoubtedly brought many benefits to both our personal and professional lives; social media have also generated a culture of immediacy that can be hard to keep up with. A number of studies have identified the link between social media and public relations practice (Oneya 2010, Quainoo & Antwi 2015, Lee 2013). Oneya carried out a study on "The Impact of Social Media on Public Relations Practice" The study examined the impact of social media on public relations practice. The gap in this study is that, the study did not look at PR activities that social media were used for. The missing link in Oneya's study is filled by the current study. The current study examined public relations strategies and activities that social media are used for.

The field of public relations has seen social media as useful communication tools; research suggests that, many organisations use social media to build relationship with publics (Sweet & Metzgar, 2007, Trammel & Keshlashvili 2005 in Kent &Taylor 2014).

Based on the aforementioned benefits of social media, the study sought to find out: the public relations strategies and activities that the select banks in Benue State Nigeria used social media for.

**Objective of the study**

The broad objective of this study was to investigate public relations strategies and activities the select banks in Benue State Nigeria used social media for. The specific objectives of the study are:

(i) To determine how the select banks used social media for public relations.
(ii) To ascertain the public relations activities and strategies the select banks used social media for.

**Research Question**

1. How did the select banks used social media for public relations?
2. What are the public relations activities and strategies the select banks used social media for?

**Theoretical Frame work**

This study is anchored on Two-way Symmetrical Model. Two-way Symmetric Model according to Otuekere-Ubani (1996) is one of the four models propounded by Grunig & Hunt in 1984. Two-way Symmetric Model is a particular model of public relations that provides public relations managers a new role, no longer is the PR manager a persuader and a one -way communicator. Rather the PR manager has now become a mediator between his organisation and its various publics. This implies that, the core of Two-way Symmetric Model is to ensure that there exists a two-way communication between an organisation and its stakeholders. The public relations manager is expected to ensure flow of information from his organisation to its publics and also from the publics to the organisation. This connotes that, the core objective of Two-way Symmetric Model is allowing feedback from the publics.

Two-way Symmetric Model of public relations argues that, the public relations manager should serve as a link between his organisation and the publics, rather than as a persuader. Here, public relations managers are seen as negotiators who use communication to ensure that all involved parties' benefit, and not just the organisation or client that employs them. The public relations manager by implication represents the interest of both the organisation and the various stakeholders of the organisation. This is true in that, the term "symmetrical" is used because the model is an attempt to create mutual beneficial situation for all. Two-way Symmetric Model is deemed the most ethical model, one that public relations managers and executives of banks should use or should hope to use in their everyday public relations tactics and strategies.

Two-way Symmetric Model was intended to improve communication effectiveness in organisations through public relations managers and executives. Besides interactivity, social media have made it possible for public relations managers and members of the publics to relate on a one-on-one basis. This one-on-one interaction is enabled by technology. This is a clear confirmation of the fact that, social media are the most viable means through which to achieve two-way communication in the age of information communication technology (Omula, 2021). Two-way Symmetric Model provides the organisation with a means to create a level playing ground for negotiation between an organisation and its stakeholders.

## Literature Review

### Public Relations Strategies and Activities Banks use Social Media For

Crisis management is a public relations activity that, banks use social media for. With the advent of social media crisis online should be attended to immediately before it gets out of control. Okure, Ihejirica & Ohiagu (2024) posit that, when crisis occur in organisations like banks, the banks should take control of the situation by responding as soon as possible. Little wonder, Coombs & Holladay (2010) see crisis communication as the process that involves collecting, processing and dissemination of information needed to address a situation of crisis. The fore going connotes that, communication is critical to crisis resolution. Organisations can be resilient in times of crisis, when they make adequate and effective use of communication. Today social media have become means through which this communication can occur. The term crisis according Larkin & Regester, in Kitchen (2006, P. 217) cited in Omula (2021) is:

> An event which causes the organisation to become the subject of wide spread, potentially unfavourable attention from international and national media and other external group (customers, shareholders, politicians, trade unions, families of employee's environment pressure and other activist as group) as well as employee.

Unfavourable media report if left unattended to can degenerate into crisis that may be capable of ruining the reputation of an organisation. It therefore behooves on the public relations team of an organisation to effectively manage such crisis. Crisis management according to Nwosu (1996) "involves taking appropriate measures to prevent a crisis before it occurs or manage/control it well when it occurs (p.106)". This implies that, public relations managers of the select banks should endeavour to be more proactive in their approach to crisis management than been reactive. Environmental scanning research and contingency plans will go a long way to help public relations managers in crisis management.

To be able to manage crisis effectively Adamolekun & Ekundayo (2007) identify the following guidelines:

(i) Understand the nature and the impact of the crisis. This means that, the public relations executives of banks like First Bank, Union Bank and United Bank for Africa; need to first and foremost know what the crisis entails before reacting. Simply put crisis management should involve a systematic or scientific approach. This should start by identifying the cause of the crisis. In other words, start with background research.

(ii) Activate your action plans immediately and accept blames and responsibility. The public relations manager should not, deny or denounce the existing problem. This means that after identifying what the crisis entails, the public relations manager should swing into action immediately and accept blame where the organisation went wrong.

(iii) Operate an open policy and promptly communicate actions to concerned publics. This means that the media, the employees, customers, shareholders and other concerned publics, should not be kept in the dark as to what the public relations unit or team is doing to resolve the crisis. To achieve this, always ensure a two-way communication in times of crisis. Using the various social media platforms of an organisation would also come in handy in times of crisis.

(iv) Map out plans to solve the problem so that it will never re occur, this entails coming up with “long lasting solution” to the crisis.

(v) Show concern to victims, by letting affected parties know that you care. The public relations manager or team should endeavour to let those affected by the crisis know that, the organisation truly cares. This can be by visiting victims, or media apology or retraction of certain statements.

(vi) Do not count your losses in public, let that be for management consumption only; this is so because, sometimes, it may make affected parties think you are more interested in the losses than the effect of the crisis on them.

(vii) Be ready to pay compensation to victims, when necessary. It is your cross bear it boldly. This implies that, if it entails compensating victims, PR should strongly recommend it to management. For this is another way of showing that, the organisation cares and is truly sorry.

(viii) The chief executive should lead the way in communicating crisis resolution. Note that the chief executive must do so after wide consultation and should be coached by public relations team of the organisation. This also means that, in times of crisis the organisation needs a spokesperson, not anybody and everybody should be allowed to address the press during crisis.

In addition, it is also important to constantly monitor what is said about your organisation online or monitor and react to complains online. This is a proactive approach to crisis management. This is true in that, Florendo (2019) opines that, complaints by customers are nearly always expressed on social media. Social media teams of banks must watch out for such complaints and react to them swiftly so that, they don't escalate to crisis. This means you need to monitor your social media accounts, so as to be able to nib such complains in the bud. Posts can easily be shared or retweeted for more people to see, so time is of the essence (Florendo 2019). Public relations managers should ensure that personal messages are not released in the name of the company as this may lead to crisis.

Two-way communication is a public relations activity or strategy that banks use social media for. Two-way communication refers to the exchange of information between an organisation and its various publics. Two-way communication connotes that, as information passes from the banks to the publics, the publics react in the form of feedback. Two-way communication can be said to be the live wire of every successful organisation, including the select banks. Two-way communication is a public relations strategy that ensures that, not only does an organisation get feedback from the publics, but the organisation act on such feedback when necessary. This position is echoed in Grossman (2023) who avers that, two-way communication entails being open to feedback and posing questions that facilitate this kind of substantive interaction, he continued that, the feedback is used to frame future communication. This is true in that, organisations like: First Bank, Union Bank and United Bank for Africa need to constantly be in touch with the publics of their banks to ensure harmonious working relationship. To ensure a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship the banks need to act on necessary feedback from the publics. The advent of social media has greatly enhanced two-way communication. This is true because, social media make room for direct two-way communication between sender and receiver. This assertion holds true in that, Arikewuyo, Ozad and Saidu (2018) affirm that, "Social media have continued to make significant impact on users at various levels; the platforms have served as media to create, sustain and enhance relationship among individuals and groups (p. 31)". Social media are the best media for two-way communication in the 21st century information driven world. Giving credence to the preceding point, Grossman (2023) asserts that, "to be most effective it is helpful to think about two-way communication as an engaging dialogue never just a leader monologue (p.1)". Social media are comfortable platforms for dialogues between senders and receivers in communication situations.

Again, social media have made two-way communication easier, cheaper and more effective than what was obtained in the past. Organisations like banks can spend less and still communicate easily and faster with their publics. Burdett (2012) opines that, people who use social media for public relations spread their messages exponentially farther, and immediately monitor and respond to what is being said about them. Burdett maintained that, social media enable public relations managers to interact directly with many users. Grossman (2023) points out the following as benefits of two-way communication between employers and employees: two-way communication heightens level of job satisfaction, by offering employees avenue to air their concerns, ideas and opinions. Two- way communication increase productivity, because it reduces ambiguity about roles and responsibilities. Two-way communication improve trust between employers and employees, which builds internal brand loyalty and offers opportunities for continuous growth. Two- way communication enhance collaboration which can lead to creativity and innovation across an organisation. The foregoing connotes that, two-way communication with the internal publics, of the banks, can also be of great benefit to the banks. This means that, two-way communication is not just about the external publics.

Making known the corporate social responsibility efforts of an organisation is a public relations strategy, that organisations use social media for. An organisation that intends to give scholarship can create awareness about such scholarship on social media. Making known corporate social responsibility efforts is a public relations strategy, that banks use to gain public support. This true in that, Ijwo and Terfa (2018) argue that, corporate social responsibility is an obligation that extends beyond the statutory obligation to comply with legislation and sees organisations voluntarily taking further steps to improve the quality of life for employees and their families, as well as for the local community. “The impact of a company in any community can only be felt through the company’s corporate social responsibility activities, these activities are deliberate, planned and sustained, with the sole aim of gaining favour in the eyes of the host community and other relevant stakeholders” (Ijwo & Terfa 2018, p. 88).

Social responsibility as a public relations strategy is intended to create a good impression about an organisation in the minds of her various stakeholders. The select banks should endeavour to use or continue to use social responsibility to win the support and good will of their stakeholders. There is therefore the need to constantly bring to the attention of the publics the corporate social responsibility efforts of an organisation. Social media have become effective means through which these efforts can be made known to the publics. Social responsibility is a strategy that can create a good impression about the select banks in the minds of their clients and other stakeholders. Good impression created by social responsibility, can make the publics want the organisation the more and make them continue to do business with the organisation. Image is critical to the survive of organisations like the select banks. An organisation with good image is more likely to enjoy goodwill and patronage from the publics than an organisation that has bad image. It is for this reason that; public relations managers must not toy with the image of their banks. Image management is a public relations strategy that banks use to gain support and goodwill from the publics. This position is echoed in Akande (2002) who opines that, “when an organisation’s public relations team is planning an action programme, what naturally dominates the programme is unarguably the company’s image (P.27)”. This implies that, one of the objectives of public relations, is managing the image of an organisation. This is true in that, an organisation that is able to establish a good image before its publics stands to enjoy public support and goodwill. Managing the image of an organisation is critical to the survival of such organisation because “an image is the impression or view held about an organisation, person or institution by the public, it could actually represent a true picture of the person/organisation or false picture (Akande 2002, pp. 27-28)”. Mention need be made of the fact that the impression stakeholders have about the select banks will determine the extent to which such stakeholders are willing to go in order to do business with the select banks. If the impression in the minds of the publics towards the banks are favourable then, the publics is more likely to do business with the banks; if the reverse is the case, then, the publics will more likely not want to do business with the select banks.

Public relations managers and social media teams of: First Bank, Union Bank and United Bank for Africa, should therefore, not toy with the image of their banks when carrying out public relations campaigns. Public relations managers of the select banks should always endeavour to ensure that, in “whatever they do” they should try to leave good impression about their banks in the minds of the publics. This is in line with the submission of, Akande (2002) who opines that, it is required for those in public relations practice to do everything within their professional ability to combat things that would leave negative impressions in the minds of the publics.

**Research Method**

The study adopted survey research method. Survey research method entails the use of quantitative approach. Survey research is considered appropriate for this study because it affords researchers opportunity to investigate problems that involve requesting answers from human beings. It deals with data collection for the purpose of describing, interpreting, evaluating and analyzing existing conditions or variables, and prevailing situation (Akem 2007). Survey also allows researchers the opportunity to study a representative sample of the population. Questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data. The population of this study is 81,299 obtained thus: First Bank, North Bank, Makurdi – 19000 (source: Marketing Associate); Union Bank, Wurukum, Makurdi – 17000 (source: Head of Operation), and United Bank for Africa Wurukum Makurdi – 45299 (source: Relationship Officer).

**Sample Size Determination**. The sample size was determined using the Morgan & Krejcie (1970) sample size determination table. The Table states that, if the population of study is 75,000 and above but less than 100,000, then the sample size should be 382. This study has a population of 81299 which is above 75,000 but less than 100,000.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1: Banks Can Communicate Best with their Publics in the 21st Century Using**

| Statement | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Two-way communication | 360 | 94.2 |
| One-way communication | 17 | 4.4 |
| Not sure | 5 | 1.3 |
| **Total** | **382** | **100%** |

*Source: Field Survey, 2024.*

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents, 360 representing 94.2% were of the view that social media are the best channel for achieving two-way communication in the 21st century. This shows that two-way communication is a public relations strategy that, banks used social media for. 17 respondents (4.4 %) went for one-way communication while,5 respondents (1.3%) were not sure. Based on the views of majority respondents it can be established that, social media are the best media for two-way communication in the 21st century. This is so because the views of those respondents that held divergent opinions cannot hold against the majority respondents.

**Table 2: One of the following is a PR activity that entails the use of social media**

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Manage crisis online | 375 | 98.1% |
| Cause crisis online | 2 | 0.5% |
| Not sure | 5 | 1.3% |
| **Total** | **382** | **100%** |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

Data in Table 2 revealed that, managing crisis online is a public relations activity or strategy that, banks used social media for in the 21st century. This is in line with the submission of the majority respondents, 375 representing 98.1%. The views of 7 respondents (1.8%) who held contrary opinions cannot hold against those of 98.1%. It can be concluded that, managing crisis online is a public relations strategy that banks used social media for.

**Table 3: In the 21st century banks can use social media for PR activities like**

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Making announcements | 34 | 9 |
| Creating awareness | 54 | 14 |
| All of the above | 294 | 77 |
| None of the above | - | - |
| **Total** | **382** | **100** |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

It is glaring in Table 3 that, making announcements and crating awareness are public relations activities that social media are used for by banks in the 21st century. This Table revealed that, while 34 respondents were of the opinion that, making announcement is a public relations activity banks use social media for. 54 respondents (14%) on the other hand agreed that, creating awareness is a public relations activity that banks used social media for. However, 294 respondents (77%) were of the opinion that both making announcement and creating awareness are public relations activities that banks used social media for. Based on the views of 77% respondents, it can be argued that, creating awareness and making announcements are public relations activities that social media are used for in the 21st century.

**Table 4: Social media can be used by banks for public relations activities such as**

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Manage image online | 15 | 4 |
| Managing relationships | 20 | 5.2 |
| All of the above | 345 | 90.3 |
| Not sure | 2 | 0.5 |
| **Total** | **382** | **100** |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

In Table 4, it can be established that, to manage image online and to manage relationships are public relations activities that social media are used for. Besides the two respondents (0.5%) that were not sure, every other respondent held this view. Even though, 4% of the respondents said it can be used to manage only image. Another 5.2% said it can be used to manage relationship. However, majority respondents, 90.3% said, social media can be used to manage image and relationships online.

**Discussion of Findings**

The objective of this study was to investigate public relations strategies and activities the select banks in Benue State Nigeria used social media for. Finding revealed that, two-way communication is a public relations strategy that banks used social media for. It was revealed that social media are the best media for two-way communication in the 21st century. This is in line with the submission of Arikewuyo *et al.* (2018) who agreed that, social media are making noteworthy impact on users at various levels; and that, the platforms have served as media to create, sustain and enhance relationship among individuals and groups. Social media providing avenue for two-way communication revalidate the tenets of two-way symmetric model that was used for this study. This shows that two-way symmetric model is still relevant for studies in public relations and other related fields.

Again, it was discovered that, crisis management is a public relations strategy that banks used social media for. This is evident in Table 5, were 375 respondents representing (98.1%) agreed so. Nwosu (1996) asserts that, crisis management involves taking appropriate measures to prevent a crisis before it occurs or manage/control it well when it occurs. This connotes that, social media are channels through which banks can react to comments, queries and complaints that emanate from customers. This is so because, if not properly addressed it might result to full blown crisis. Little wonder Okure *et al.* (2024) posit that when crisis occur in organisations like banks, they should respond as soon as possible. The preceding point is echoed in Coombs & Holladay (2010) who see crisis communication as a process that involves collecting, processing and dissemination of information needed to address a situation of crisis. Managing crisis using social media entails reacting to and responding to customers' complaints and comments.

It was further revealed that, making announcements and creating awareness are public relations activities that banks used social media for. Banks can make announcements and create awareness about opening of new branches, improved service delivery, press briefing, recruitments etc using social media. In Table 7, a huge majority of the respondents,345 representing (90.3%) vehemently acknowledged that, making announcement and creating awareness are public relations activities that banks used social media for.

**Conclusion**

For organisations like banks to make tremendous impact in the 21st century, they must continue to embrace emerging communication technologies, that are relevant to achieving two-way communication.

**Recommendation**

(i) Two-way communication, can only be effective when organisations, not only listen to the customers but also act on feedbacks from customers.

(ii) Banks should expand their social media reach so as to be able to reach more customers on social media for effective two-way communication.

**References**

Adamolekun, W. & Ekundayo, T. (2007). *Interactive public relations* (2nd ed). Spectrum Books Limited.

Akande, F. A. (2002). *International Public relations management.* Starlake Publishers.

Akem, J. A. (2007). *Research and statistics for higher education.* Destiny Ventures.

Arikewuyo, A. O. Ozad, B. & Saidu, A. (2018). The use of social media for establishing virtual relationships among select university students. *Novena Journal of Communication, 6*, 30-43.

Boitnott, J. (2017). *5 ways you should be using social media as your top PR platform.* www.inc.com

Burdett, D. (2012). *How to improve public relations results with social media.* www.salestillery.com.

Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, S. J. (2010). *The handbook of crisis management.* Wiley-Blackwell**.**

Grossman, D. (2023). *Two-way communication: Tips and examples for getting it right.* www.yourthoughtpartner.com

Florendo, J. (2019). *Social media crisis management examples (and lessons).* www.spiralytics.com

Grunig, J. E. & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations.* Harcourt Brace Jevanovich College Publishers.

Hendrix, J. A. (2004). *Public relations cases* (6th ed). Thomson Wadsworth.

Ijwo, A. O. & Terfa, N. (2018). An assessment of the corporate social responsibility of Dangote Cement PLC Gboko plant Nigeria. In Asemah, E. & Popoola M. (Eds), *Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in a changing world.* Babcock University Press.

Kent, M. & Taylor, M. (2014). Social media in public relations reflecting on extending and narrowing relationships: *Conference paper.* https://www.reserchgate.net.

Nwosu, I. E. (1996). *Public relations management principles, issues applications.* Dominican Publishers.

Okure, G. E., Ihejirica, W. & Ohiagu, O. (2024). Crisis communication strategies of select banks during the naira redesign policy in Nigeria. *GVU Journal of research &development*, *1*(2), 191-203.

Omula, E. (2021). *Uses of social media as public relations tools by banks in Nasarawa, Benue & Abuja* [A PhD Thesis, Department of Mass Communication]. Submitted to the Postgraduate School, Benue State University.

Oneya, F. P. (2010). *The impact of social media on public relations practice* [M.Sc. Dissertation]. Submitted to Department of Communication Studies, School of Journalism, University of Nairobi.

Otuekere-Ubani, C. O. (1996). *Modern public relations theories: Principles and practice.* Pelcas Reprographic and Printing Press.

Ponce, B. (2018). *Social media as a public relations tool.* https://matrix.com

Quainoo, L. A. & Antwi, P. A. (2015). The use of social media in public relations: A case of Facebook in the Ghanian financial services industry. *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication, 41*, 37-47.

Roy, S. K. (2008). *Determining uses and gratification for Indian internet users.* https://www.beatley.edu/csbigs/vol2/royhpdf

# Case Studies in Cross-Cultural Communication in Global Public Relations

**Bridget C. Onochie[1] and Achilleus-Chud Uchegbu[2]**

[1, 2] Institute of Strategic and Development Communication (ISDEVCOM), Nasarawa State University Keffi.

## Abstract
This case study examines the role of cross-cultural communication in shaping effective global public relations strategies, focusing on the interplay of cultural sensitivity, local context, and adaptive messaging. As organisations expand their global reach, navigating diverse cultural landscapes becomes critical to building trust, fostering engagement, and maintaining brand credibility. Through an in-depth analysis of a multinational corporation's public relations campaign across multiple regions, this study explores how cultural nuances influence communication outcomes. Key findings highlight that culturally sensitive approaches, rooted in understanding local values, norms, and socio-economic contexts, significantly enhance audience resonance and trust. Conversely, failure to adapt messaging to local realities risks alienating stakeholders and undermining campaign effectiveness. Public relations practitioners must navigate cultural differences to effectively build relationships, maintain organisational reputations, and communicate messages that resonate with diverse audiences. Effective cross- cultural communication has become a critical component of successful global public relations. The study underscores the necessity of dynamic adaptation in global public relations, offering insights into best practices for crafting inclusive, contextually relevant strategies that bridge cultural divides while achieving organisational objectives. By integrating theoretical frameworks with practical implications, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on cross-cultural competence in global public relations.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural communication, global public relations, cultural intelligence, cultural nuances, international communication.

## Introduction
The importance of cross-cultural communication in the practice of public relations cannot be overstated. This is because miscommunication or cultural insensitivity can lead to misunderstandings, reputational damage, and even organisational crises (Wakefield, 2008). For this reason, there has been emphasis on improving, or, adhering to developing strategies that are culturally sensitive and also respect local contexts such that they align with global objectives (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011).

This need becomes necessary given the growing globalisation of the world which brings cultures closer together making them interact in various forms. This interaction of cultures infuses itself into the communication mix to become a vital tool for the development of an effective global public relations practice. With globalisation, products and services become globalized and brought across cultural boundaries. The marketing of these products and services also transcends borders. It becomes imperative that the ability to navigate cultural differences and foster meaningful connections with diverse audiences becomes a critical tool towards building trust, managing reputation, and achieving strategic communication goals (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009).

Therefore, cross-cultural communication in global public relations involves understanding and addressing the nuances of language, values, norms, and communication styles that vary across cultures (Freitag & Stokes, 2009). This complexity is further amplified by the rapid evolution of digital media, which has transformed how messages are disseminated and received on a global scale (Zaharna, 2013).

It is imperative also to understand the role that globalization has played in transforming public relations into a field that demands cultural adaptability. Organisations operate across borders, engaging stakeholders from diverse cultural backgrounds. This necessitates an understanding of cultural nuances to prevent miscommunication and foster trust. Cross-cultural communication, defined as the process of exchanging, negotiating, and mediating cultural differences, is essential in global public relations (Hall, 1989) as it relates to cultural awareness and the understanding of one's own cultural biases and being aware of cultural differences with others as well as recognizing that language is not just a means of communication but also a reflection of culture. This further affects nonverbal communication and being aware of nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, which can vary across cultures, and also the contextualization of communication.

This paper therefore explores the challenges and opportunities of cross-cultural communication in global PR, examining theoretical frameworks, practical approaches, and case studies that highlight best practices for fostering effective communication across cultural boundaries. By integrating insights from intercultural communication theory and PR scholarship, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how organisations can navigate cultural diversity to achieve their communication objectives in a globalized world.

**Background to the Study**

The issue of cross-cultural communication arose out of the practice of public relations. According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Public relations, popular as PR, is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their public (2012). It involves managing communication between an organisation and its stakeholders to maintain a positive reputation, build goodwill, and influence public perception. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2006) defined PR as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the public on whom its success or failure depends.” The definitions above point clearly to the fact that public relations, is communication-driven towards perception and reputation management. To make success of public relations as a tool to effectively communicate perception, manage reputation and build goodwill, the public relations process would involve engagement with journalists and media outlets to secure positive coverage to manage crises and an organisation's response to crises in order to protect its reputation.

Public relations also involves corporate Communication which relates to communicating internally and externally to maintain brand identity as well as community relations which entails building relationships with local communities and stakeholders; reputation management which is monitoring and shaping public perception through strategic communication and social media management which arose out of the penetrating influence of the social media in reputation and brand communication and as such involves utilizing digital platforms to engage audiences and manage brand image.

Public relations indicate communicating with diverse audiences and across cultures. This has led to the development of cross-cultural communication in global brand and reputation management and communications. The globalisation of the world has collapsed a lot of barriers and brought to word closer though cultural diversities expressed through language, symbols and signs remain. These cultural diversities impact the practice of public relations globally necessitating the need for a study to find ways of breaking through the cultural barriers to develop homogenous messages for the public. This is so because a message developed for one culture may not be suitable for another culture given that words, symbols and gestures mean different things to different cultures.

Cross-cultural communication is therefore the process of exchanging messages between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. It involves understanding and managing cultural differences to achieve effective communication. Gudykunst (2005) defines cross-cultural communication as an interdisciplinary field that examines how people from diverse cultures communicate and how these interactions can be improved.

Cross-cultural communication involves the exchange of information between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This is however impacted by the differences in language, norms, and values. The differences in language and dialects can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and even offence. Samovar, (2017) argues that even in the same language groups, idioms, slang, and jargon, used differently and under different contexts, may create confusion. For instance, The English word "gift" means a present, but in German, "Gift" means poison, leading to potential misinterpretations.

This is the same with non-verbal cues like body language, gestures, eye contact, and personal space which mean differently across cultures. Hall, (1976) states that a thumbs-up sign is positive in Western cultures but offensive in some Middle Eastern and Asian cultures. Hall also states that high-context cultures for instance, Nigeria and Japan rely on implicit communication, while low-context cultures, for instance, Germany and the United States of America, prefer direct communication. According to him, saying "no" directly is considered rude in some cultures, while in others, honesty is valued more than politeness.

There are also issues with stereotypes and prejudices wherein preconceived notions about other cultures can lead to biases and misjudgments. This is evident in interaction across cultures. In Beyond Cultures, Hall (1976) states that “stereotypes create barriers to open-minded communication and may result in discrimination” while what is considered ethical, polite, or respectful in one culture may be offensive in another. For instance, in some Asian cultures, bowing shows respect, while in Western cultures, a firm handshake is expected, Hofstede, (2001). Navigating these potential landmines in effective public relations and strategic communications requires open-minded training in cultural sensitivity and appreciation.

**Aim of Study**

The objective of this study is to understand how cultural differences affect communication strategies and public relations practices across the different cultures of the world and through it develop effective ways to engage diverse audiences. This would be achieved through understanding cultural norms, values, and communication styles of different cultures so as to avoid misunderstandings and foster positive relationships. Understanding the impact of culture in public relations will also help to adapt communication messages to resonate with different cultural audiences, avoid stereotypes and misrepresentations by recognizing biases and misconceptions while maintaining brand consistency and developing culturally sensitive communication that fosters credibility and trust among global stakeholders and ensure respectful communication that is culturally sensitive and enhances brand reputation among the different cultures. Leveraging cultural insights in creating effective public relations campaigns enhances global business communication success by supporting business expansion strategies.

**Theoretical Framework of Study**

The study of cross-cultural communication in global public relations is underpinned by several theoretical frameworks that help explain how cultural differences influence effective communication across borders. However, for the purpose of this case study, two theoretical frameworks will suffice. They are the Geert Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory and Edward Hall’s High-Context and Low-Context Cultures.

Developed by Geert Hofstede, this framework identifies dimensions of culture, such as individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint, that shape how people from different societies communicate and perceive relationships. This theory is used in global public relation practice to tailor messaging and strategies to align with cultural values and expectations.

Edward T. Hall’s theory distinguishes between high-context cultures – where communication relies heavily on nonverbal cues, relationships, and implicit meanings, e.g., Japan or Arab countries- and low-context cultures -where communication is direct and explicit, e.g., the U.S. or Germany. This framework helps public relations practitioners to adapt campaigns to suit the communication styles of target audiences.

**Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory**

Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory for understanding cultural differences in communication, management, and public relations was based on research Hofstede conducted while working at IBM in the 1960s and 1970s. During this time, he analyzed how cultural values affect workplace behaviour across different countries. Through the work, he identified six key dimensions that distinguish cultures. He listed the six dimensions as: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS), Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO), and Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR).

According to Hofstede, the Power Distance Index (PDI) measures how societies handle inequalities in power and hierarchy. He created a distinction between High Power Distance Cultures, which according to him accept a hierarchical structure where authority and status differences are emphasized and employees tend to follow strict rules and defer to senior management like in Mexico, Russia, and China against Low Power Distance Cultures, which he said prefer egalitarian structures where authority is more decentralized, and employees expect to participate in decision-making. Examples of this are Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

The Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV) examines whether a culture values individual achievements or prioritises group harmony. Hofstede also created two dimensions of this to include individualistic cultures which emphasize personal independence, self-reliance, and individual rights, where people are encouraged to express their opinions openly like in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom; against the collectivist cultures which value group loyalty, social harmony, and the collective good over personal achievements like in China, Japan, and India.

His third category is the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) which assesses how comfortable a society is with ambiguity and risk. According to Hofstede the UAI has two components –the High Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures which prefer clear rules, structure, and stability but less open to risk and innovation, like Greece, Japan, and Portugal; and, Low Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures which accept ambiguity and are more open to innovation, risk-taking, and change.

The fourth category, Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS), looks at whether a society prioritises traditionally masculine traits or feminine traits. While masculine cultures look strongly at the value of assertiveness, competition, and material success, feminine cultures value relationships, quality of life, and social well-being with huge encouragement for cooperation and modesty.

The last two dimensions are Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO) and Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR). Whereas Hofstede argues that LTO assesses how societies prioritise tradition against future planning, with perseverance, adaptation, and future rewards as values; STOs focus on immediate results, traditions, and maintaining social norms; while also, the Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR) would focus on how societies balance enjoyment and self-discipline through indulgent cultures that encourage free expression, pleasure, and personal

enjoyment against restrained cultures that emphasize self-control, discipline, and social norms.
Each of these cultural dimensions has its implications for public relations. They could make public relations campaigns, in long-term-oriented cultures to focus on sustainability and long- term benefits, while in short-term-oriented cultures; they should focus on immediate rewards and quick results. Also, messages in high power distance cultures may need to emphasize respect for authority, while in low power distance cultures, they should encourage open dialogue and participation, individualistic cultures should highlight personal success stories, while those in collectivist cultures should focus on group values, community benefits, and long-term relationships.

The implications of high uncertainty avoidance cultures, according to Hofstede is that public relations messages should provide clear, structured information and minimize uncertainty while in low uncertainty avoidance cultures, creativity and flexibility in messaging are more acceptable. On the other hand, public relations campaigns in masculine cultures may emphasize success, strength, and achievement, while in feminine cultures; they should focus on empathy, inclusivity, and quality of life. In LTO and STO cultures, the implications are that PR and marketing campaigns in long-term-oriented cultures should emphasize sustainability and long- term benefits, while in short-term-oriented cultures, they should focus on immediate rewards and quick results while in indulgent cultures, campaigns can use humour, entertainment, and emotionally appeal, while in restrained cultures, messages should focus on responsibility, tradition, and moral values.

Hofstede model is a widely recognised framework for understanding cultural differences. It outlines dimensions such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and uncertainty avoidance Hofstede, (1980). For example, public relations campaigns in collectivist societies, like Japan, may emphasize group harmony and consensus, whereas campaigns in individualistic cultures, like the United States, might prioritise personal achievements and self-expression.

Hofstede therefore recommends that in applying his theory to public relations and, or, advertising, global brands should adapt their advertising strategies based on individualist dimensions to emphasise personal happiness and choice, or, to collectivist cultures to focus on larger communities, friendship, and group bonding. In crisis communication, he urges that since different cultures react differently to corporate crises, high uncertainty avoidance cultures would expect clear, structured crisis responses while low uncertainty avoidance cultures may tolerate ambiguity and a more flexible crisis response.

He also urged that brands operating in multiple cultures must adjust their leadership and internal communication styles to suit high power distance cultures with top-down leadership and corporate communication leads, while in low power distance cultures adopt participatory decision-making.

**Critique of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory**

However, despite the wide adoption of Hofstede‟s theory in public relations, crisis communication and perception management, the model suffers the bad fate of generalisation because it ignores the development of subcultures and individual variations while making assumptions that national culture is homogeneous.

Secondly, Hofstede's research was conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. This suggests that it may have become outdated as cultural values may have changed over time. It is also limited in scope as its focus was closed to workplace behaviour without further input from outside his workplace. Finally, the theory is Western based and did not make any reference to cultures outside Hofstede's immediate environment. Therefore, though the study is still relevant to understanding the cultural dimension of public relations, it is not universally representative as his Western- based view cannot rightly be extrapolated to explain cultural dimensions in other cultures outside the West.

**Edward Hall's High and Low Context Cultures**

Edward T. Hall (1976) developed the High- and Low-Context Culture Theory to explain how different cultures communicate based on context, nonverbal cues, and explicitness of messages. His theory is highly relevant in public relations (PR), where understanding cultural communication styles is crucial for crafting effective messages and maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders across different cultural backgrounds. For instance, he identified and created the distinction between high and low-context cultures. According to him, communication cues depend on how much meaning is derived from context rather than explicit words.

**High and Low Context Cultures**

According to Hall, high-context cultures rely on implicit communication, nonverbal cues, and shared cultural understanding. He argues that the meaning of a message is often embedded in the context rather than being explicitly stated, while low-context cultures rely on explicit, direct, and precise communication. Hall further posits that in low-context cultures, the message itself contains most of the information, and there is less reliance on shared cultural background or nonverbal cues.

Hall listed characteristics of high-context cultures to include indirect and nuanced communication which relies on nonverbal cues like body language, and tone of voice; messages are implied rather than directly stated; relationships and trust are crucial before business or communication occurs; the audience relies on background knowledge to interpret messages, and that conflict is often avoided or resolved subtly to maintain group harmony.

In his work, Hall argued that the implications for public relations high-context cultures are that campaigns must focus on building relationships and trust rather than just providing information; that nonverbal elements like colours, images, and tone are as important as words in messaging; and that crisis communication should be subtle and discreet to avoid public embarrassment while messages should align with cultural values and social hierarchy.

In Hall's list of high-context cultures, he gave examples of Japan, China, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Mexico, Brazil, Italy, and Spain. His thoughts did not get to Africa. On Low-Context Cultures, Hall explains that they rely on explicit, direct, and precise communication. According to Hall, the message itself contains most of the information, and there is less reliance on shared cultural background or nonverbal cues. Hall listed characteristics of low-context cultures to include that communication is clear, direct, and unambiguous; messages are explicitly stated rather than implied; contracts, rules, and formal agreements are highly valued; facts and logic are prioritised over emotions or relationships and conflict is addressed openly and directly. These are exemplified in such countries as the United States, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

Hall also identified the implications of this context for public relations to include that messages should be clear, direct, and fact-based; that transparency is highly valued, so public apologies and direct responses to crises are necessary; that data and logical reasoning should be included in public relations messaging, and lastly, that social media campaigns and press releases should be concise and to the point.

**Application of Hall's Theory in Global Public Relations**

In applying Hall's high and low context theory to advertising and branding, it is recommended that in High-context markets the messaging should be subtle, culturally embedded storytelling while in low-context markets it should be straightforward sloganeering with clear product benefits. It is further recommended that adopting the theory of crisis communication in high- context cultures would require that companies privately address stakeholders before making public statements to maintain harmony, while in low-context cultures, companies should make immediate, public, and transparent statements.

Adapting the theory to media relations in high-context cultures would require public relations professionals to focus on relationship-building with journalists and government officials, while in low-context cultures, they provide direct press releases and factual reports, and lastly, for social media and digital public relations, the theory would prefer indirect engagement, storytelling, and influencer marketing for high-context cultures, while being fast and direct customer responses and factual updates in low-context cultures.

**Criticisms of Hall's Theory**

Despite the nuanced advantages of Hall High and Low Context cultures, the theory suffers from the problem of oversimplification as it generalizes national cultures, ignoring individual differences and subcultures. It also fails the test of time as changes in cultures develop over time especially with globalization and digital communication, which has forced a hybrid structure over some cultures thus bringing together elements of high-context and low-context cultures. There is also growing identification of low-context theories by certain industries even in high- context environments due to professional and ethical requirements.

**Specific Case Studies**

There have been instances where the effort to communicate brands to new markets failed due to the misinterpretation of the message as it relates to the cultures of the new markets. Some of such instances include:

**Case1: Jumia**

Jumia is seen as being to Nigeria what Amazon is to the United States of America. It is a Nigeria-based e-commerce platform with a strong presence across the continent. In 2022, Jumia partnered a U.S.-based tech company to launch a new affordable smartphone targeting Nigeria's growing middle class and youth demographic. The public relations campaign was designed in the USA and it emphasized a sleek design and cutting-edge technology, with "Upgrade Your Life" as slogan. The slogan was translated directly into local languages to reach a wider audience. However, the campaign failed to resonate with Nigerian consumers because the messaging was rooted in individualistic values and clashed with Nigeria's collectivist culture, where community and family priorities often outweigh individual gain. Additionally, the direct translation of slogans into Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo ignored linguistic nuances. For instance, "Upgrade Your Life" in Hausa was interpreted as implying one's current life was inadequate. It thus was considered offensive to customers. The campaign also overlooked the importance of local influencers and traditional media, relying heavily on social media platforms like Twitter, which skewed toward urban elites rather than the broader population.

**Case 2: Shell**

In 2011, Shell faced a major oil spill in the Niger Delta, a region already tensed due to decades of environmental degradation and community unrest. Its global PR team, headquartered in the Netherlands, issued a standardized crisis response emphasizing technical clean-up efforts and legal compliance, distributed worldwide via press releases and English-language media. The response ignored the high-context communication style of Niger Delta communities, where trust is built through face-to-face engagement, local leaders, and storytelling rather than formal statements. The use of English and technical jargon alienated locals, who predominantly speak pidgin and indigenous languages like Ijaw. Moreover, the public relation effort also failed to address cultural sensitivities around land and livelihoods and focused instead on corporate accountability, which was detached from community priorities. Local perceptions of Shell as a foreign exploiter worsened as the campaign did not involve community elders or acknowledge historical grievances. Rather than abate the crisis, protests escalated, and Shell faced boycotts and legal battles, with Nigerian activists amplifying the narrative globally via social media. The public relations misstep prolonged the crisis, costing Shell millions and tarnishing its reputation further in Nigeria.

**Case 3: Guinness**

Nigerian Breweries launched a global campaign, in 2019, to promote Guinness stout as a premium export to West African diaspora communities in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The public relations team, based in Lagos, collaborated with international agencies to craft a culturally resonant narrative. The campaign leveraged Nigeria"s cultural richness, using the slogan "Made of More" to tie Guinness to resilience and communal celebration. It featured images that resonated with Nigerians living in the UK and the USA. The campaign boosted Guinness sales in diaspora markets and reinforced brand loyalty in Nigeria. It won a public relations award for its seamless integration of cross-cultural elements, with social media amplifying its reach through user-generated content from s living abroad. The success showed that successful global public relations hinges on blending cultural insights with universal appeals.

**Case 4: Pepsi**

In 2017, Pepsi released a brand communication material featuring Kendall Jenner joining a protest and handing a Pepsi can to a police officer. The communication looked like it was fine as it meant to show that the Policeman would not interrupt the protest because of a can of Pepsi. However, the communication failed after it was roundly criticized for trivializing serious social justice movements, particularly Black Lives Matter. The cultural context of the communication was a Black Lives Matter protest and Pepsi was seen as trivializing a racially sensitive issue. The lesson from the failed communication is that public relations communication strategists must bring their brands engage with social issues authentically and understand the cultural and political weight of their messages.

**Case 5: Dove**

A 2017 Dove brand communication material showed a black woman turning into a white woman after using the body lotion. It failed because consumers interpreted it as suggesting that lighter skin is preferable. Thus, the brand was rejected as reinforcing racial stereotypes. The lesson from the failed communication was that visual messaging should be carefully reviewed to avoid unintended racial or cultural insensitivity.

**Case 6: HSBC**

In 2009, the bank, HSBC launched a global campaign with the slogan "Assume Nothing," but in many countries, this phrase was translated incorrectly as "Do Nothing." The tagline failed to communicate the bank's intentions because the mistranslation confused international customers. This made HSBC to spend $10 million on a rebranding effort. Lessons from this failure showed that language localization is crucial in global branding to avoid misinterpretation.

**Case 7: Parker**

Parker Pen, was, at a point, the market leader in the pen world. When it wanted to market its pens in Mexico, it went in with the slogan “It won‟t leak in your pocket and embarrass you.” However, its translation in the local language was “It won‟t leak in your pocket and make you pregnant.” This translation was embarrassing to the market and led to a failed communication campaign because the word “embarazar” meaning "to impregnate" in Spanish, was wrongly used. The lesson from this indicates that professional translation and cultural checks are essential for international marketing.

**Case 8: McDonalds**
In 2019, McDonald‟s released a public relations communication material in China showing a man proposing with a burger instead of a ring. This failed the Chinese audience because they saw it as insensitive to traditional marriage values and disrespectful toward proposals. This suggests that understanding local customs and traditions is key when crafting culturally relevant campaigns.

**Case 9: Dolce and Gabbana**
In 2018, Dolce & Gabbana entered the Chinese market with a public relations communication material which featured a Chinese woman struggling to eat pizza with chopsticks. The communication goal failed because the Chinese saw it as mocking their culture. This led to a backlash and boycott of the brand in China. This teaches that brands must be aware of cultural stereotypes and avoid content that could be perceived as offensive.

**Case 10: Bobba**
In 2024, founders of the Canadian ready-to-drink boba tea company, Bobba, appeared on the show "Dragon's Den" seeking investment. They described traditional boba tea as a “trendy, sugary drink” and claimed to have “innovated” it with healthier, alcohol-infused versions. The claims were perceived as disrespectful to Bobba's Taiwanese origins, leading to accusations of cultural appropriation. They regretted the claim as it destroyed their product. It is important to respect and acknowledge the cultural heritage of products, especially when introducing modifications or innovations.

**Case 11: H&M**
In 2018, H&M featured a black child wearing a hoodie with the slogan “Coolest monkey in the jungle.” The feature was deemed racially insensitive, leading to widespread criticism and prompting collaborations to be cancelled. Lesson learned from this episode include being aware of the cultural and historical contexts of marketing materials to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

**Case 12: Nivea**
In 2017, Nivea aired an advertisement in Ghana featuring a black woman using a product that “visibly lightens” the skin. The interpretation that followed the advertisement was that lighter skin is preferable. The advertisement was labeled as “racist” and denigrating the black colour. This led to a public outcry that caused market rejection. The episode showed that brands must be sensitive to issues of colour and race and avoid promoting products in a way that suggests one skin tone is superior to another.

## Discussion
Cultural Sensitivity has therefore become a norm to help public relations practitioners navigate the cultural landmine in designing messages for public consumption. Sensitivity to cultural interaction in public relations communication suggests respect for the culture of other people. It thus means that the public relations practitioner and strategic communicator ought to deeply research the culture they operate in, taking into cognizance the nuances of the new culture in the areas of symbols, signs, dress style and language. This

indicates a proper understanding of verbal and non-verbal cues of different cultures relevant to particular markets. Understanding this would lead to the designing and use of materials that accurately represent diverse cultures.

Thoroughly researching this further suggests engaging with cultural communities to gain insights and feedback before launching campaigns. This can be done through engagement with community or opinion leaders, town hall meetings, focus group discussions and field research. Learning the cultural landmines to avoid can help brands to better navigate the complexities of global markets and foster positive relationships with diverse audiences. Brands that respect cultural differences do well to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and are better insulated from crisis management.

Generally, markets globally tend to favour brands that respect their cultural nuances. While market penetration and dominance tend to be the goals of new brands, communicating them indicates that the public relations expert has enough research to understand the cultural context of the new markets. For instance, while a fist bump may be accepted in one culture as a form of salutation, it may not be acceptable in another culture as a form of salutation too. An MTN public relations communication material in Nigeria once played up the cultural issues between having a male child and a girl child. The “Mama Na Boy” advertisement was not very welcome in Nigeria because of the cultural attachment to the boy child. The advertisement tended to discriminate against the girl child leading to public outcry and eventual withdrawal.

According to Hall’s theory, Nigeria falls within the category of high-context culture, in this regard; Nigeria relies on implicit communication, shared experiences, and deep cultural understanding. In Nigeria, proverbs, metaphors, and non-verbal cues are freely employed to convey meaning. There is also a strong emphasis on relationships and professional interactions which are built on trust, long-term relationships, and communal values rather than just contracts or written agreements. Further, Nigerians have a very strong sense of collectivism, where family, ethnic groups and social networks play a crucial role in decision-making and interactions while non-verbal cues like body and hand gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions, and silence often carry significant meanings in public and private communication. Therefore, considering these would build the capacity of the public relations professional to communicate with a diverse audience of over 250 ethnic groups and multiple languages.

Therefore, for global public relations to be effective, certain assumptions must be internalised. These key assumptions are:

(i) Cultural sensitivity enhances effectiveness by fostering trust, respect and understanding among diverse audience. It ensures that messaging resonates authentically, avoid missteps or offense, and build stronger connections leading to more effective communication and brand reputation.

(ii) Local context drives trust by tailoring messages to align with regional values, norms, and priorities. This demonstrates respect for local audiences, fosters authenticity, and builds credibility, making communication more relatable and trustworthy across diverse markets.

(iii) Global reach requires adaptation in public relations to account for diverse cultural, social and economic contexts. Tailoring messages ensures relevance, avoids misunderstandings and resonates with local audiences, enhancing engagement and effectiveness across different regions.

**Key Findings**

Cultural influences shape public relations effectiveness because the success of global public relations campaigns heavily depends on aligning strategies with cultural values, norms, and expectations of target audiences. This is because cultures with high collectivism like Nigeria, China, respond better to messaging emphasizing community benefits, while individualistic cultures like U.S. and UK, favour personal gain or innovation. Therefore, campaigns that ignore these dimensions, such as those promoting individualism in a collectivist society, often fail to engage audiences or provoke a backlash. For Instance, a campaign promoting a luxury product might succeed in low power-distance cultures like Sweden, with egalitarian messaging but fail in high power-distance cultures like India, without appealing to status and hierarchy.

High-Context vs. Low-Context communication impacts message design because effective global public relation requires tailoring communication styles to high-context or low-context cultural preferences. High-context cultures like Japan or Saudi Arabia demand indirect messaging, trust-building through relationships, and nonverbal cues, while low-context cultures like Germany and Canada prioritise clarity and factual appeals. Misalignments, such as overly technical messaging in a high-context market, would lead to misinterpretation or distrust. For Instance, a crisis response in the Niger Delta might fail if it relies solely on press releases rather than face-to-face stakeholder engagement.

Local adaptation outperforms standardized global campaigns because adapting global strategies to local cultural contexts, which outperforms one-size-fits-all approaches in building credibility and resonance, yields better results. While global branding aims for consistency, research would likely show that audiences reject generic campaigns lacking cultural relevance. Therefore, successful public relations integrate universal brand values with local idioms, symbols, and media channels, balancing global identity with regional authenticity.

Intercultural competence is a critical skill for public relations practitioners. This is because public relations practitioners with high intercultural communication competence like awareness, empathy, and adaptability, achieve better outcomes in cross-cultural settings. Practitioners who understand cultural nuances, manage biases, and adjust strategies dynamically are more effective in navigating diverse markets. Therefore, training in cultural sensitivity reduces errors and fosters trust.

Media environments reflect cultural priorities as the choice of communication channels in global public relations must reflect culturally specific media consumption habits and trust levels. It is imperative to note that cultural attitudes toward media, like reliance on oral traditions in parts of Africa versus digital platforms in Europe, could dictate campaign reach and impact. Censorship and media ownership also complicate channel selection. For instance, leveraging radio and community leaders might outstrip social media in rural areas of Nigeria, while urban youth respond to social media.

Miscommunication risks escalate in crisis situations in that cross-cultural misunderstandings amplify the stakes of crisis communication, often exacerbating reputational damage. Crises demand rapid, culturally attuned responses and failure to address local values, for instance, apologies in Japan vs. legal defenses in the United States can worsen perceptions.

Cultural values influence audience reception of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that are not culturally sensitive. CSR is a public relations tool but it must align with culturally specific definitions of social good to gain traction. CSR initiatives tied to universal values succeed only when framed through local priorities like education in Africa or family welfare in Latin America. For instance, A multinational's tree-planting initiative might resonate in Southern Nigeria if linked to indigenous land rights but may fail in Sambisa forests without economic development tie-ins.

Digital globalization amplifies cross-cultural challenges through social media. The rise of social media and digital platforms intensifies the need for cross-cultural public relations quickness, as messages spread instantly across diverse audiences. This indicated that digital campaigns require real-time monitoring and adaptation to avoid cultural fault lines, as global audiences interpret content through their own lenses. For example, a hashtag campaign gone viral might offend unintended audiences, necessitating rapid, culturally informed responses.

Globally, public relations practitioners and communicators face the challenge of managing communication in cultural contexts that are different from theirs. This creates the problem of misrepresentations and misunderstanding which deeply erode the messaging and distract from the object of the communication.

Cross-cultural communication in global public relations is therefore essential as it involves engaging with diverse audiences across different cultures, languages, and social norms. Understanding these differences is crucial for crafting messages that resonate and avoid misunderstandings. This is so because cultural nuances can significantly impact how messages are interpreted. Miscommunication of messages due to wrong understanding or appreciation of cultural nuances can lead to negative publicity, damage to reputation, or even crises.

In planning successful global public relations campaigns, it is imperative to build trust and maintain relationships. To achieve this, understanding cultural values and practices would help create better connections with stakeholders, media, and the public as well as enable the public relations practitioner to create communication materials like jingles, television promos, press statements, handbills and posters, billboards and tag lines that are strategically tailored to appeal to specific audiences in their cultural contexts. This is so because different cultures have varying expectations of communication styles, media usage, and engagement strategies. A lack of the understanding of this has tended to create problems for the public relations practitioners and communicators leading to the non-acceptance of messaging or brand failure. Knowledge of these differences allows public relations professionals to tailor their approaches for maximum effectiveness.

This understanding also is vital in crisis management where the cultural context plays a huge role in understanding signs and symbols that communicate positive and negative values to the audience. This is a vital tool for effective communication as different cultures have distinct responses to crises. In an age of globalization, businesses push beyond particular borders and grow globally. Therefore, the increasing penetration of businesses and products across the world dictates the need for effective cross-cultural communication where the understanding of the cultural contexts is strategic to conducting successful campaigns that can operate in multiple cultures.

The public relations practitioner must work to navigate ethical dilemmas created by cultural differences. This would help to ensure that practices align with local values and ethics as well as enhance teamwork and foster a more inclusive environment for collaborative work. Every culture of the world has its values. These values shape the way people live and perceive or appreciate trends. Ignoring these values in developing non-culturally sensitive messaging materials and public relations or strategic communication materials is an invitation to message rejection and brand isolation. Cultural values shape public sentiment and opinion. Understanding the cultural context allows a deeper insight into public attitudes and behaviours, enabling more effective engagement strategies. This is achievable through exposure to different cultural contexts and having a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances of the different people. Exposure to different cultural perspectives can inspire innovative public relations strategies and creative solutions, ultimately leading to more effective campaigns.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations arise from this study. They are made with focus on building the capacity of the public relations practitioner to develop messaging that resonate with specific audience taking into consideration the specific cultural environment and nuances. These will enhance public relations effectiveness in cross-cultural contexts:

**Invest in Cultural Competence Training:** Equip public relations teams with training on cultural frameworks to enable them understand diverse values, norms, and communication styles. This will empower them to develop more empathetic and effective campaign designs.

**Conduct Local Market Research:** Before launching public relations campaigns, there is the need to perform in-depth research on local socio-economic, political, and historical contexts to ensure messaging aligns with audience expectations and avoids cultural missteps.

**Engage Local Expertise:** Effective global public relation campaigners collaborate with local public relations professionals, cultural consultants, or community leaders to co-create campaigns that resonate authentically and reflect regional priorities.

**Adapt Messaging Strategically:** Tailor public relations content including language, visuals, and tone, to reflect local idioms, symbols, and values while maintaining brand consistency, ensuring relevance without diluting global identity.

**Prioritise Two-Way Communication:** the public relations practitioner should foster dialogue with local audiences through social media, focus groups, or public forums to build trust, gather feedback, and demonstrate respect for their cultural and local perspectives.

**Monitor Cultural Sensitivities:** the public relations practitioner should establish processes and procedures to check and avoid stereotypes, cultural appropriation, or offensive imagery, and regularly audit campaigns to ensure alignment with ethical standards. This will include having adequate knowledge of imageries and offensive nuances.

**Measure Cross-Cultural Impact:** The public relations practitioner should also evaluate campaign success using culturally relevant metrics, such as community engagement or trust indices, alongside key traditional yardstick like reach or media coverage.

**Build Long-Term Relationships:** There is also the need to invest in sustained community engagement and partnerships in each market so as to foster goodwill, and ensure that public relations efforts are seen as genuine contributions rather than opportunistic outreach.

## References

Ang, S., & Van Dyne, L. (2008). *Handbook of cultural intelligence: Theory, measurement, and applications*. M.E. Sharpe.

Bardhan, N., & C. Kay Weaver, C. K. (2011), *Public relations in global cultural contexts*. Routledge.

Cameron, G. T., Cropp, F., & Reber, B. H. (2001). *Public relations and contingency theory: A meta-theoretical approach*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (2006). *Effective public relations* (9th ed.). Pearson Prentice Hall.

Freitag, A. R., & Stokes, A. Q. (2009). *Global public relations: spanning borders, spanning cultures.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203890189

Graham, J. (2005). *International marketing*. McGraw-Hill.

Grunig, J. E., *et al.* (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organisations: A study of communication management in three countries.* Routledge.

Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). *Theorizing about intercultural communication.* Sage.

Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Anchor Books.

Hall, E. T. (1989). *The dance of life: The other dimension of time*. Anchor Books.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organisations across nations*. Sage.

Kotabe, M., & Helsen, K., (2014). *Global marketing management.*

Neuliep, J. W. (2020). *Intercultural communication: a contextual approach*. Sage Publications.

Neuliep, J. W. (2020). Intercultural communication: A contextual approach. Sage Publications.

Penaloza, L., Toulouse, N., & Visconti, L., (2012). *Marketing management: A cultural perspective*. Routledge.

Ricks, D. A. (1999). *Blunders in international business*. Blackwell Publishing Cateora.

Samovar, L. A., *et al.* (2017). *Communication between cultures* (9th ed.) Cengage Learning.

Sriramesh, Krishnamurthy & Verčič, Dejan. (2009). *The global public relations handbook: Theory, research, and practice.* Routledge.10.4324/9781315173290.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures.* Guilford Press.

Wakefield, R. I. (2007). Theory of international public relations, the internet, and activism: A personal reflection. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 20*(1), 138–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260701727069

Wang, S. (2018). The Dolce & Gabbana controversy: Lessons in cultural sensitivity. *Harvard Business Review.*

Wiley, K., W. J., & Green, M. C., (2015). *Global marketing.* Pearson.

Zaharna, R. S. (2013). *The cultural awakening in public diplomacy.* Figueroa Press.

# Evaluation of Social Media Strategies of Public Relations Units of Tertiary Institutions in Akwa Ibom State

**Okon E. Udoyo[1], Kufre J. George[2], Samuel A. Etifit[3] and Christian U. Egeh[4]**

[1]Department of Mass Communication, University of Calabar.
[2]Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket.
[3]Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket.
[4]Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic, Oko.

**Abstract**
The aim of this study was to investigate and evaluate the social media strategies of public relations (PR) units of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the social media strategies employed by these institutions; to investigate the metrics or indicators they use to evaluate the effectiveness of their social media engagement in PR practice; and to identify the challenges encountered by them in the course of implementing their social media strategies. To achieve these objectives, the study utilised the uses and gratifications theory as well as the technology acceptance theory (TAM) and also adopted survey research design, using questionnaire as its only and major data-gathering instrument. Copies of the structured questionnaire were administered to 165 PR practitioners, social media administrators, and communication officers in selected institutions in Akwa Ibom State, using a purposive sampling approach, on an average of eighteen (18) copies per institution. Main findings outlined that institutions successfully engage the public on most social media platforms and customize their updates to get maximum engagement, but were slowed down by lack of access to collective measures, inefficient skilled individuals, and high growth rate on social media platforms. Conclusion drawn was that efficient comprehension of quantitative and qualitative measures is mostly important in measuring social media campaigns in PR. In light of these findings, organisations are recommended to develop customized social media strategies with extensive use of high-level analytics and implement frequent training for employees to enhance their online communications skills, encourage stakeholders to participate, and stay up to date with the fast-evolving social media environment.

**Keywords:** Social media, strategies, public relations practice, tertiary institutions, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Rapid development in the technologies of communications has hugely shifted the practice of public relations (PR) over the years with social media stepping up as an instrumental platform to interact, monitor reputation, and spread information. Businesses and institutions today employ all forms of social media platforms which include Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram and LinkedIn for connecting with target audiences, communication, and relationships building, reflective of the realignment of established PR methods and newer interactive modes (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2019, p. 45). As a direct result, the strategies used in PR practice need to change to leverage the power of these platforms optimally. It is crucial to know how PR practitioners can assess their strategies in the context of social media to ensure effective communication and ultimately meet organisational goals (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2020, p. 118).

The pervasiveness of social media has revolutionised the communication dynamics; information sharing is no longer the exclusive domain of institutions and businesses. Rather, audiences have become more engaged, initiating discussions and framing narratives. This culture of participation necessitates that PR practitioners adopt a flexible approach, incorporating social media metrics into their strategy (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2020, p.67). Evaluating social media strategies is important to practitioners because it gives feedback on audience interactions, sentiment analysis, and the effectiveness of a campaign (Ferguson, 2022, p.213). Furthermore, evaluation tools enable PR professionals to gauge the effectiveness of their communication work, and adjust as necessary in real-time for the proper alignment with their organisational objectives.

Against these advancements, the role of a powerful social media strategy cannot be overemphasised. Developing a strategy that appeals to the target audience in tune with corporate values is a multidimensional challenge for PR practitioners (Chun, Lee, & Kim, 2021, p. 155). The growing complexity of social media ecosystems highlights the importance of an in-depth evaluation framework that can help practitioners comprehend the efficacy of their strategies. This question goes beyond just metrics, examining qualitative elements of social media interaction, such as trust, authenticity, and community involvement (Keller, 2023, p. 78). With social media increasingly shaping public opinion, the place of PR in controlling these perceptions takes center stage.

In the meantime, incorporation of social media strategy into broader PR practice necessitates critical examination of current literature and frameworks. There have been numerous studies trying to explain the social media use and PR results, but there are still gaps in knowing the effectiveness of certain approaches in different sectors (Sevigny & Moorman, 2023, p. 92). Assessing the performance of social media strategies covers many aspects, ranging from the quality of content and audience engagement to ROI and brand loyalty (Holliman & Rowley, 2019, p. 312). Carrying out reflective analysis on such factors enables the practitioners to adjust their practices and make sure their work is effective and cost-effective.

In order to have successful evaluation of social media strategy, the practitioners must address it as a comprehensive situation wherein they embed complications of content launching and understanding their audience (Baciu, 2023, p. 105). Social media including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn present distinct characteristics and population reach with each of these social media types, thus needing platform-based approaches that align within certain categories of audiences (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2019, p. 682). That suggests good PR methods are not homogeneous; they tailor to the features of a platform as well as consumer trends. As such, continued R&D is critical in this case in order to actualise the mixed effects of differing tactics between platforms (Kumar, 2022, p. 134).

The interactivity on social media centers on effective two-way communication in PR. People's participation in useful conversation constructs a community and sense of belongingness, and finally, builds brand loyalty (Khan & Malhotra, 2021, p. 56). Social media efforts centerd on dialogue instead of monologue will tend to succeed, as it invites stakeholders to comment and take part. Learning to construct and sustain such conversations becomes valuable during the evaluation process, which allows PR professionals to gauge the opinion of the audience and respond by adjusting their messages (Sun, 2023, p. 192). This deliberate inclusion of audience understanding in the evaluation process helps practitioners build stronger stakeholder relationships.

Systematic evaluation frameworks for social media planning in PR practice make continuous improvement and adaptation of strategies possible. There are different models to assess the performance of social media engagement, each with its own insights into performance metrics (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2020, p. 267). Performance indicators like key performance indicators (KPIs) of engagement rates, reach, impressions, and conversion metrics are essential tools for practitioners to measure their campaigns numerically (Sokolova & Koval, 2022, p. 48). Still, as has been pointed out before, no consideration should be given to purely qualitative engagement properties because they shed much light upon audience perception and affective appeal toward the brand (Holliman & Rowley, 2019, p. 315). This necessitates multifaceted approach combining quantitative along with qualitative indications. Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate the evaluation of social media PR strategies by Nigerian tertiary institutions. The research seeks to investigate the level of social media adoption and evaluation among Nigerian tertiary institutions, strategies employed, methods used, and challenges encountered in the process.

**Statement of the Problem**

The public relations practice is often generally known to refer to the promotion and establishment of sustained rapport and goodwill between a person, group, firm, or institution and other persons. In order to achieve this, public relations, in its true sense, abhor guess work, as well as trial and error; but embraces thorough planning whose process begins with fact-finding (situation analysis) and ends with another phase of fact-finding (evaluation/assessment of results). This, thus places a mandatory responsibility on organisations to always perceive and practise public relations as a cyclically-organised programme of continuous activity.

It is assumed that a public relations department and/unit exists in each of the selected tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State to help drive the institutions' relationships and engagements with their various internal and external publics. It is also assumed that in the past couple of years, these PR departments or units have consciously taken advantage of the global technological development and advancement by employing or utilising some social media devices and platforms in their public relations practice.

However, what is not very certain has to do with the specific social media platforms they use in carrying out their PR practice, the kinds of social media strategies they employ, and whether they often see the need for evaluation of results of the social media strategies they adopt in their PR practice. These and lots more are the probing issues which this is poised to investigate and unravel.

**Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were:

(i) To examine the social media strategies employed by tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State in their public relations (PR) practice.
(ii) To investigate the metrics or indicators used by tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State to evaluate the effectiveness of their social media engagement in PR practice.
**(iii)** To identify the challenges encountered by tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State in the course of implementing their social media strategies

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised:

(i) What social media strategies are employed by tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State in their public relations (PR) practice?
(ii) What metrics or indicators do tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State use to evaluate the effectiveness of their social media engagement in PR practice?
(iii) What challenges do tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State encounter in implementing their social media strategies?

**Literature Review**

**Social Media Strategies:** With a fast-changing digital environment, the importance of highly effective social media plans cannot be downplayed since they provide an important cornerstone for companies, organisations, and individuals who want to raise their on-line presence. Current research demonstrates that more than 4.4 billion individuals across the planet are regular users of social media, representing an unparalleled platform for communication and interaction (Statista, 2023). It is not just a matter of the platforms' selection but also has the in-depth procedures for producing content, connecting with the audience, monitoring analytics, and crisis management on the selected platforms. The development of such a plan is more than a list. It needs close understanding of the audience to be addressed, the nature of each platform, and the constantly changing trends of the social media landscape (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). Having a good social media strategy enables one to maintain consistent branding, build a loyal customer base, and gain useful feedback, which can contribute a great deal towards making business decisions.

Companies can enhance their customer care, perform market research, and establish channels for direct communication with their viewers when they adopt these strategies (Tuten & Solomon, 2021). Additionally, contemporary marketing strategies focus on an integrated system of work where social media campaigns are consolidated into overarching marketing objectives. Besides increasing the branding image, it also sustains stakeholder engagement. Therefore, social media evolved from a casual contact vehicle to a powerful platform for formalized marketing and group formation.

**Understanding the Target Audience:** A core aspect of successful social media strategies turns around a complete identification of the audience. Knowing who the audience is—demographically and psychographically allows brands to customize their messages and content communication. Research as presented by Smith (2020) identifies how the creation of audience personas contributes to developing a strategy that aligns well with the intended audiences. Personas capture the key traits of age, gender, interests, and social media behavior, creating a more precise picture of possible customers (Freeman, 2021). Going further with audience analysis is to use tools like social listening to measure sentiment and conversation taking place about a brand or an industry.

This gives immediate feedback on consumer need and areas of discomfort (Chaffey, 2022). Supported by qualitative data, quantitative analysis data can facilitate full understanding of audience behavior. For example, data indicating busiest times of day to post can assist with setting posting time, thus maximizing visibility and engagement (Bleistein, 2023). Audience segmentation cannot be overemphasized because even subtle messaging within various segments can increase the stakes of relevance and engagement, thus leading to an increased likelihood of conversions. In examining audience engagement, it is necessary to remember that social media is all about interaction, conversation, and community as compared to broadcasting.

Developing an open forum where criticism is invited and responded to encourages trust and loyalty (Bennett, 2023). Interacting with the audience via polls, Q&A, and user-generated content forces brands to innovate on a constant basis and stay true to consumer wants. Therefore, profound audience understanding becomes the cornerstone upon which effective social media campaigns are built.

**Platform Selection and Optimisation:** With so many social media channels to choose from today, selecting the proper channels is a strategic decision and should be taken seriously. All channels cater to various demographics, user activities, and content types. For instance, Instagram and TikTok are favored for visual-centric content, whereas Twitter specializes in concise communications and text-based engagement (Khan, 2022). There is no one-size-fits-all best strategy that will work for everyone, citing the imperative of platform choice segregation according to audience analysis. Moreover, optimization of content on each platform is required. Canva (2023) attests that posts should be modified to accommodate stylistic and functional variations on each platform because not only does it heighten engagement levels but also aids in a favorable user experience. Utilizing a social network's distinct features, i.e., Instagram stories or Twitter threads, makes content new and engaging. Different types such as videos, infographics, or carousel posts add more facets to social media strategies (Edwards, 2023). Planner-managed platforms are an additional place-based optimization factor which needs to be highlighted in special cases.

Aggregated feedbacks from analytics can be employed to narrate the best times to post to maximize coverage. Buffer and Hootsuite, among others, give general insights into social media activity so that brands can adjust their posting schedules accordingly with user feedback data (Sweeney, 2024). The ability to switch and analyze frequently is an important factor in keeping up with changing social media environments, towards the realization that platform choice and optimization has a direct effect on overall effectiveness in strategy.

**Content Creation and Storytelling:** At the heart of successful social media campaigns is thoughtful content that informs and resonates with the public. In this era of technology where consumers receive many messages, authentic, appealing, and worth-while content stands out as a winner (Ferguson, 2022). Developing appealing stories through narrations not only captures attention but also creates an emotional connection to the brand (Holt, 2019). Effective storytelling also incorporates aspects that resonate with the mission, vision, and values of the brand, projecting a cohesive identity through channels.

Visual content is especially powerful in today's social media landscape. Research indicates that posts with images gain 650% more engagement than those with text (Baird & Parasnis, 2019). Incorporating quality visuals in the form of images, videos, or infographics is therefore imperative. Besides, video watching, particularly short videos, is very popular now, with consumers looking for bite-sized content. The increasing prevalence of platforms like TikTok testifies to this, with the need for brands to keep pace with changing consumer behaviors (Hollis, 2023).

Besides, having consistent posting frequencies and content types enhances brand recognition and credibility. Brands should develop an editorial calendar to design and schedule their content in an equal balance of promotional, instructional, and fun posts (Davis, 2021). Communication with the public through live streaming, behind-the-scenes, and interactive content induces a sense of belongingness and community, leading the consumer to feel heard and valued. Though repeatedly monitoring content performance based on measurements helps to tune strategies in advance, making it so that content responds to listeners' tastes (Noble, 2023).

**Engagement and Community Building:** Social media marketing utilisation of engagement extends far beyond a share or like. Developing an active community needs real interaction, where conversations are prioritised over monologues. As noted by Hall (2019), the brands that interact with users genuinely establish loyalty and trust. The interaction can take place in many forms, from responding to users through comments to the sharing of user-generated content and posting relevant posts that trigger conversations.

User-generated content is a powerful strategy in social media frameworks. Brands can encourage people to share experiences with products or services, hence creating a culture of ownership and belonging (Burke, 2023). In the guise of contests, challenges, or simple reminders, user-generated content not only constitutes a form of social proof but also increases brand visibility. To respond to and engage with such content creates a culture of sharing, where consumers feel more invested in the brand.

Additionally, community management is crucial when it comes to relationship building. Active moderation of discussions, complaints resolved swiftly, and thought leadership on industry issues can turn a brand into a thought leader (Green, 2022). Creating niches on social media platforms can also lead to more community engagement, as individual groups or forums allow for discussion where the members feel comfortable providing recommendations and building relationships. Use of interactive content such as polls, quizzes, and live Q&A can also provide higher chances of engagement. Interactive content has been determined by research to facilitate higher user interaction and retention (López, 2023). Thus, the use of interactive features in social media marketing not only provides engagement but is also an effective way of getting an idea of the audience's preferred choice and habit.

**Monitoring Analytics and Performance:** Systematic analytics monitoring is at the heart of social media strategy, and insights gleaned can be applied to inform decision-making and drive strategic change. The digital world is data-hungry, and intelligent use of it turns raw data into actionable intelligence (Chaffey, 2022). Engagement rates, reach, conversion rates, and audience demographics create a multiplex image of performance, enabling brands to know what works and what doesn't. Tools like Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, and Sprout Social enable brands to track performance across different social media platforms (Smith, 2021). Brands use identification of trends and patterns in such metrics for adjusting strategy accordingly based on real-time identification of shifts in audience engagement. Analysis has to be anything but an isolated occurrence; it has to be an ongoing process in order to make constant refining and optimizing possible in the execution of strategy.

Besides that, knowledge of certain key performance indicators (KPIs) is necessary to be used as measures of success against. Whatever the brand awareness, customer acquisition, or generation of sales may be, knowing the appropriate KPIs ensures efforts focused toward higher business objectives (Davis, 2023). Checking on these KPIs periodically keeps the team accountable, and also it defines where strategic support is needed.

The necessity of benchmarking performance with industry best practices cannot be understated. Competitor analysis allows brands to comprehend their performance in relation to competitors within the same industry and areas of falling behind or where they can innovate (Sweeney, 2024). Hence, the use of analytics is imperative in providing more specific and not generic, but data-driven and results-oriented campaigns on social media.

**Crisis Management in Social Media:** In a publicly inherent setting such as social media, crisis management must be a core consideration in social media planning. The speed at which information spreads can have severe brand reputation implications. For Coombs (2020), a speedy and transparent response can pre-empt damage and protect the integrity of the brand in case of a crisis. The development of a comprehensive crisis management plan equips brands to respond effectively during times of duress, minimizing the chances of permanent damage.

An important early crisis management practice is monitoring the sentiment on social media in order to identify the potential issues when they are about to turn into full-fledged crises. The use of software for sentiment analysis can help the brands recognise bad trends or reviews, thus reacting in a timely manner (Burke, 2023). Having established practices for crisis communications like designated speakers and pre-authorized messaging ensures a coherent and clear reaction.

Communication strategies need to be transparency and accountability focused, acknowledging the crisis and assuring stakeholders that efforts are underway to manage the crisis. Speaking directly to the audience in posts or real-time videos can evoke a sense of empathy and reassurance (Grady, 2023). Additionally, there is a need to analyze and look into the crisis once it has happened to learn critical lessons for readiness in the future. After-action reviews provide an insight into how effective the response strategy was, identifying strengths and weaknesses (Ivancevich, 2024). Thus, a proactive approach to crisis management can allow brands to handle issues effectively, maintaining brand trust and ensuring customer loyalty.

**PR Practice in Nigeria**

Public Relations (PR) in Nigeria has also been evolving due to many socio-political, economic, and cultural forces that impact its practice. From the practice of conventional communication, the practice of PR in Nigeria has seen its practice drastically change, driven by the growth of digital technology, globalisation of communication, as well as increasing importance of stakeholder engagement (Iweala, 2021, p. 45). In the era of today, with information dissemination as fast as lightning, the sustainability of PR strategies can be determining for organisations and individuals alike when it comes to trying to forge good public images. Such an environment demands PR practitioners in Nigeria to continuously adapt to changing situations while maintaining organisational images intact and forging effective relationships with their stakeholders (Adebayo, 2022, p. 102).

An understanding of the history of PR practice in Nigeria shows how colonial legacy, indigenous communication patterns, and post-colonial politics influenced current practice (Abosede, 2019, p. 65). Nigerian communication has always taken cues from indigenous traditions and oral stories, a good foundation upon which current PR practice has developed (Obarisiagbon, 2020, p. 78). Consequently, PR practitioners must now integrate such cultural elements into contemporary methods for furthering sharpening engagement policies within a multi-tiered society context (Ademola, 2023, p. 122). Introducing domestic cultures to international practices of PR raises new dilemmas while presenting at the same time possibilities of groundbreaking strategies designed for the Nigerian masses.

The efficiency of communication in Nigeria equally depends on the ability to grasp different segments in Nigeria's society. Nigeria's ethnic complexity creates a unique challenge for PR professionals who must know the subtleties of diverse cultural environments (Okoro, 2023, p. 134). Crafting PR messages that will strike a chord in a diverse group requires a very high level of cultural sensitivity and awareness. Therefore, practitioners have to carry out extensive market studies and audience profiling to identify crucial cultural references, values, and communication styles to inform their efforts (Eze, 2022, p. 77). Such research allows PR campaigns to appeal to the social norms, thereby making them more effective as a whole and permitting messages to be heard positively by different segments of the population.

In the modern digital age, social media has become an inevitable tool for PR professionals in Nigeria. The extensive use of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn provide an ease of communication in real-time and building interactive engagement between organisations and their stakeholders (Nwachukwu & Oni, 2022, p. 88). The revolution has not only widened the reach of PR messages but also empowered consumers through giving them a platform to speak out and demand transparency (Kadiri, 2023, p. 102). Consequently, organisations are under pressure to report to their publics and tirelessly curate their online presence in order to meet the expectations of an increasingly digitally literate marketplace (Udo, 2022, p. 56). PR experts must now approach the question strategically about how one should leverage such digital channels effectively to not merely promote their organisations but also engineer conversations that shall establish trust as well as allegiance.

Crisis communication is another crucial area of PR practice in Nigeria. The complexity of socio-political issues such as corruption, violence, and unemployment mean organisations are confronted with crises that will ruin their reputation and undermine stakeholder trust (Akanbi, 2024, p. 47). The role of PR in crisis management is critical, and practitioners are called upon to design comprehensive strategies comprising preparation, response, and recovery (Alabi, 2023, p. 99). Effective crisis communication is founded on timely responses that effectively convey information and exhibit empathy towards affected stakeholders (Nwosu, 2021, p. 122). Furthermore, transparency in crisis communication prevents reputational damage and restores public trust, highlighting the need for organisations to develop pre-emptive communication strategies that address potential challenges before they occur.

The legal framework of PR practice in Nigeria also needs thorough examination. The practice is informed by a variety of laws and ethical principles intended to uphold the integrity of communication and protect the rights of the public (Ogunyemi, 2023, p. 110). Organisations must be aware of the legal implications of their communications, conforming to rules such as the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) guidelines and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) regulations (Olofin, 2024, p. 78). Therefore, PR practitioners must understand such laws to be able to craft strategies not only to market their organisations but to do it lawfully and avoid potential blunders that would be caused due to misunderstanding or otherwise (Idris, 2022, p. 34).

Building relationships and networking form the very core of good PR practice in Nigeria. Establishing and maintaining relationships with the most significant stakeholders—like the media, government, and community leaders—is essential to successful PR campaigns (Ilebani, 2023, p. 88). PR practitioners must establish networks that facilitate information and resource sharing, developing cooperative partnerships that can enhance their organisations' public visibility and reputation (Okon, 2024, p. 93). It is through strategic networking that PR professionals are able to harness the influence of various stakeholders such that they are able to maximize campaign coverage and enable alignment with the interests of the public (Umoh & Nwogbo, 2023, p. 100). Besides that, content creation has emerged as an essential part of Nigerian PR practice fueled by increasing competition in the communications sector (Bello, 2023, p. 55). Developing interesting, relevant, and informative content allows organisations to convey their value propositions as they react to the interests of their audiences (Chukwu, 2019, p. 48). Focus on multimedia, imagery, and narrative content is presently at the forefront of engaging people in a period of oversupply marketplace (Ibrahim, 2022, p. 70). PR professionals must remain current with trends in content, employing innovative methods that resonate with their target audiences for the purposes of initiating debate and discussion, thus promoting their organisations' reputation and image (Okwu, 2024, p. 27).

The second determining factor is the effect of analytics to guide PR practices in the Nigerian context. Through data analytics, PR practitioners can know audience behavior and interests, leading to evidence-based decision-making (Onyeji, 2023, p. 85). Quantitative and qualitative measures of PR campaign performance enable ongoing analysis and adjustment of strategies (Daniel, 2022, p. 53). Deep campaign performance analysis keeps the practitioners abreast of audience interaction levels, ultimately determining future operations and adapting to market direction (Obi, 2024, p. 76). Thus, use of analytics in PR operations not only raises accountability but also results in optimisation of resource application.

Lastly, the PR practice in Nigeria in the future will be subject to even greater levels of technology integration, increased focus on sustainability, and an even greater need for corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Ogunyemi, 2024, p. 94). As stakeholders become increasingly aware of social and environmental issues, organisations are expected to highlight their commitment to sustainable practice more widely (Ugochukwu, 2023, p. 49). PR professionals should therefore develop strategies that project genuine CSR efforts, emphasizing transparency and accountability in their public dealings (Adesanya, 2022, p. 30). A strategic PR response to sustainability programmes will therefore only make the reputations of brands stronger and further improve stakeholder relationships.

**Evaluation of Social Media Strategies in PR Practice by Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria**

The use of social media in public relations practice has become a key element for Nigerian tertiary institutions, especially in the contemporary digital era. Social media sites are efficient communication tools through which institutions can engage effectively with stakeholders, including students, parents, alumni, and the broader community. The rapid development of social media platforms has prompted these institutions to re-examine their traditional PR approaches, taking steps that utilise the capabilities of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Adebayo & Odewale, 2020, p. 112). This discussion will outline how Nigerian tertiary institutions use social media to enhance their public relations objectives, their effectiveness, and the challenges they face in utilizing these media.

Employing a social media strategic plan enables institutions to establish a distinctive brand identity, encourage community engagement, and enhance their image. The focus to create content that has value for the interests and needs of various stakeholders forms the pillar of good PR practice (Ojo & Sulaimon, 2021, p. 87). Engaging stories, graphical content, and interactive posts provide a sense of connectedness and belongingness among the members of the audience. Organisations that prioritise content marketing strategies on social media are likely to receive more visibility, which allows them to attract prospective students and retain existing ones with strong engagement (Ogunleye, 2019, p. 45). Perhaps most importantly, analytics usage can guide the adjustment of social media strategies, allowing organisations to make data-driven decisions in enhancing the level of engagement and response.

Extensive emphasis on face-to-face engagement with stakeholders has characterised the PR practice of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Organisations are increasingly utilising social media for two-way communication, encouragement of feedback, and dialogue (Daramola & Adebayo, 2022, p. 102). The immediacy of social media enables institutions to respond quickly to feedback, complaints, and inquiries and thus enhance customer satisfaction and institutional image. Responsiveness not only builds trust but also empowers stakeholders because they believe that their voices are heard. Successful PR efforts are founded upon active listening and responsiveness, and therefore social media is the best platform for institutions to humanise their brands and simultaneously communicate their value addition to the academic community (Nduka & Ojo, 2020, p. 71).

Taking a critical approach to the utilisation of social media strategies, there are issues that confront the effective utilisation of these media in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Specifically, one of the challenges involves the digital divide, where disparities in access to technology may prevent certain demographics from consuming institutional content (Okoh & Ugochukwu, 2021, p. 234). Institutions must work towards bridging the gap to facilitate equitable access to information and communication. Moreover, the rise of misinformation and fake news poses a risky threat to the reputation and credibility of the institutions. Institutions are therefore obliged to be proactive in demystifying the misconceptions and providing accurate information to their audiences (Irele & Nkiru, 2023, p. 16).

Also in contention is the issue of resource and expertise allocation within institutions. Social media engagement, to be successful, requires dedicated personnel and investment in finances, elements that are sometimes in limited supply in Nigerian educational institutions (Abubakar & Osunfisan, 2019, p. 119). Just as the online ecosystem continuously evolves, so does the need for ongoing training and capacity building for those responsible for maintaining social media accounts. Effective PR practice on social media relies on staff with the ability to manage the dynamics of digital communication strategies (Eze & Ogbo 2020, p. 97). An ongoing commitment to staff professional development can enable institutions to remain competitive and sensitive to advancements in the digital PR landscape.

Institutions cannot overstate the place of accountability and transparency in social media strategies being adopted by tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Stakeholders are increasingly demanding openness on the part of institutions, particularly regarding administrative processes and decision-making (Adesina & Butterworth, 2024, p. 23). Social media, when properly utilised, can be a channel for disseminating open information and, in so doing, establish institutional credibility and stakeholder trust (Asogwa & Eze, 2024, p. 45). Open communication can prevent crises, facilitate stakeholder contribution, and ingrain a culture of engagement within citizens.

Effective social media activities, however, demand effective monitoring and evaluation systems. A continuous process of assessment is vital in ascertaining the success of PR efforts on social media in order to keep institutions at the level of stakeholders' expectations (Adetunji & Daramola, 2023, p. 56). Including tools that track engagement rates in terms of likes, shares, comments, and website traffic can assist in obtaining valuable information on the behaviors and preferences of the audience (Oni & Akinwande, 2021, p. 110). These revelations allow institutions to adjust their strategies, correcting weaknesses while taking advantage of successful practices.

Institutions which truly aspire to understand and monitor audience engagement also have a better degree of freedom in their PR agendas. Establishing agile principles allows institutions to respond appropriately to trends and audience taste shifts (Ojo & Ogunleye, 2023, p. 78). Constant stakeholder input also generates the culture of continual improvement, and the institution positions itself on the pedestal of a caring institution towards its audience. Furthermore, encouraging open dialogue can lead to the development of initiatives that resonate with stakeholders, creating shared value and sense of belonging.

Moreover, the use of storytelling in PR practice cannot be avoided. Organisations making use of the use of stories are able to establish engaging content that unites individuals and cultivates loyalty (Eze & Ume, 2022, p. 134). The creation of stories that encompass institutional values, successes, and goals not only nurtures image but also reinforces deeper emotional relationships with stakeholders. Such narratives encourage brand loyalty because future students will relate to the values of an organisation through powerful narrative channels (Uche & Ojo, 2021, p. 230). Such narratives can also be reinforced through the utilisation of multimedia platforms such as video, infographics, and photographs to further enhance impact.

No less important is how crises are handled within the social media platform. Sound crisis communication practice is of critical importance since organisations steer clear of possible faux pas or crises. In times of crisis, prompt effective open communication is one key strategy against negative attitudes (Adekoya & Irele, 2023, p. 29). Therefore, communicating specially with the public during the time can assist in authenticating stakeholders of efforts being undertaken in managing the issue, thereby achieving credibility and trust. Social media provides a first-hand stage for the institutions to pre-act and not act, invoking correct communication that negates disinformation.

Besides, stakeholder segmentation is more significant since it becomes a relevant driver in social media strategy formulation. Institutions must consider different constituencies, such as prospective students, parents, alumni, employees, and donors, in communication messaging plans (Afolabi & Adeyemo, 2023, p. 89). Content optimization to the special interests, needs, and desires of each stakeholder group presents best opportunity for involvement, enabling institutions to bring every audience into channel-specific communication. Segment messaging enables the creation of experiences that bring each group in touch with a sense of community.

With institutions building their PR programmes, collaboration among stakeholders is increasing. Cooperative efforts result in more diverse content production and collaborative decision-making, making partnership important in academic environments (Nwankwo & Eze, 2022, p. 64). Engaged alumni in social media programmes, for example, can provide authentic experiences emphasizing the institution's influence and sharing its extent through its alumni networks.

The evaluation of social media practice in PR practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions enlightens us about the dynamic nature of contemporary communication paradigms. Those institutions that embrace the power of social media can build relationships, enhance transparency, and establish credibility in an ever-changing digital landscape (Daramola & Ogunleye, 2024, p. 95). If organisations do not adapt to the digital age, they will lose opportunities and stakeholder confidence, eventually affecting institutional reputation and achievement. Thus, ongoing evaluation and refinement of social media strategies combined with a focus on stakeholder engagement will be essential as organisations move through the educational landscape of the present.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The following theories were reviewed in this study:

**Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT);** The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is a pivotal framework for understanding the motivations and needs of individuals who engage with social media platforms (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 2019, p. 23). This theory posits that individuals actively seek out media that satisfy their cognitive, affective, and social needs (Ruggiero, 2020, p. 15). According to the UGT, individuals use media to gratify their needs, which can be categorised into five main types: cognitive, affective, personal identity, social integrative, and tension release (McQuail, 2020, p. 120). In the context of social media, tertiary institutions in Nigeria can utilise various platforms to gratify these needs. For instance, social media can be used to provide cognitive information about the institution's programmes, research, and achievements (Asemah, 2020, p. 30). Social media can also be used to create an affective connection with the target audience, such as through the use of emotive storytelling and visuals (Chun, Lee, & Kim, 2021, p. 155).

Social media can be used to promote personal identity and social integrative needs, such as through the creation of online communities and forums where individuals can interact and share their experiences (Khan & Malhotra, 2021, p. 56). Tertiary institutions in Nigeria can also utilise social media to provide tension release, such as through the use of humour and entertainment (Sokolova & Koval, 2022, p. 48). By understanding the various needs of their target audience, tertiary institutions in Nigeria can develop effective social media strategies that gratify these needs and promote engagement. The UGT also highlights the importance of audience activity and selectivity in media use (Rubin, 2020, p. 67). In the context of social media, this means that individuals actively select and engage with content that is relevant and meaningful to them. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria can utilise this concept to develop targeted social media content that resonates with their target audience. For instance, they can use social media analytics to identify the types of content that are most engaging to their audience and adjust their content strategy accordingly (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2019, p. 682). Meanwhile, the UGT emphasizes the importance of understanding the social and cultural context in which media use occurs (McQuail, 2020, p. 125).

In the context of social media strategies in PR practice by tertiary institutions in Nigeria, this means that these institutions must consider the social and cultural nuances of their target audience when developing their social media content. For instance, they must be aware of the cultural sensitivities and values of their audience and ensure that their content is respectful and relevant (Adebayo, 2021, p. 45).

**Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM):** Propounded and put forward by Fred Davis in 1986, the Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM) is viewed by many scholars as one of the most widely utilised models in the social sciences to explain the nexus in the acceptance and usage of new e-technology or e-services. That is to say, it is based on the belief that people's perception of the potential/likely usefulness derivable from a technology, as well as the ease-of-use thereof, ultimately helps in influencing their attitude and intention to adopt and use the technology (Charness & Boot, 2016).

According to the theory, the perceived usefulness (PU) refers to the degree or extent to which a user believes that using a specific system or technology would be beneficial to him/her. The perceived ease-of-use (PEOU), on the other hand, denotes the degree to which a user believes that using a given technology or system can be less stressfully or effortlessly done.

In relation to this study, the theory can be employed to explain the fact that the acceptability of social media/digital devices by, and among PR practitioners, social media administrators and communication officers in tertiary institutions of learning in Akwa Ibom State, or any other organisation for that matter in strategically carrying out their PR practices could largely depend on their perception of how the devices would maximally help in enhancing their job roles and efficiency of performance that could lead to attainment of unprecedented positive results. It also relates to the fact that acceptance or otherwise of the technological devices by/among them could be predicated upon the ease with which learning, understanding and operations of the devices or social media platforms can be attained for the purposes of strategically carrying out their PR practice.

## Methodology

The survey research design was employed in this study to evaluate the social media strategies employed by PR practitioners in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. The population for this research was 165 PR practitioners, social media administrators, and communication officers in some chosen tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State, which were: Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Heritage Polytechnic, University of Uyo, Akwa

Ibom State University, Federal Polytechnic, Ukana, Uyo City Polytechnic, Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit, and Maritime Academy, Oron. Since the population was not a very large one, a census study was adopted. That is to say, the entire population was studied.

Questionnaire copies were sent to the selected respondents to get information on which social media sites are being used, how frequently they are used, whom they are using them for, and how effective these efforts are. Statistical tests, such as descriptive statistics, were utilised in the calculation of trends and relationships in the data that were gathered.

## Discussion

**Research Question One: What social media strategies are employed by tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State in their public relations (PR) practice?**

An analysis of social media strategies employed by institutions of higher learning in Akwa Ibom State reveals a broad and active approach to enhancing public relations (PR) effectiveness. Particularly, institutions utilise sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to facilitate engagement with students, alumni, and the public at large (Olaleye & Baiden, 2020). Evidence indicates that such platforms are significant channels of communication of information about academic programmes, institutional achievements, and activities, thereby building a positive reputation (Abubakar, 2021). It was found out in the study that institutions employ the strategy of segmenting their publics. In using this strategy, institutions actively seek out and divide their publics based on the level of their engagement, designing their messages to address particular issues and interests, which is in tandem with Grunig's (2019) view. Such segmentation strategies not only boost engagement levels but also help develop a feeling of belonging amongst stakeholders (Brodie et al., 2020). This is so because it encourages the diverse publics to actively participate and interact with the institutions on issues that affect them, thereby enhancing a two-way communication flow that breeds mutual understanding. Here, align with Omojola's (2022) view, institutions employing a more participatory and interactive method of communication are capable of achieving greater visibility as well as a more favourable public image.

Findings also indicated that the various institutions of higher learning employ the social media in their PR practice to strategically manage their corporate image and reputation; as well as to proactively address unforeseen crisis issues. Unveiling the benefit of such strategies, Oladapo and Ogunleye (2023, p. 32) said that real-time interaction in the form of webinars and live Q&A on such platforms has proven useful in fostering openness as well as trust between institutions and the general public. A comparative pattern of usage analysis suggests that while certain institutions utilise social media for promotion, others utilise it as a strategic means for crisis communication and reputation management (Johnson, 2023). Accordingly, it is possible to conclude that the discreet approach to social media strategies reflects the appreciation for the sophistication of public relations within the context of higher education. On the other hand, the influence of institutional culture on social media strategy formulation is also a significant issue. Institutions with cultures that promote open communication and an openness to innovation will likely revise their PR programmes using effective social media use (Jibril, 2022). On the contrary, institutions with traditional strategies lag behind in fully realising the potential of these media. This aligns with the Change Management Theory, where it is highlighted that for an organisation to be capable of altering its communication methods hinges on its leadership and culture (Kotter, 2019). Engagement metrics also indicate that institutions that are capable of having a successful integration of social media into their PR efforts have increased loyalty of followers and community engagement (Okolie, 2021). The link between proactive participation and improved institutional image underscores the significance of social media as not just a tool, but more so as an integral part of modern public relations practice in Nigeria's education sector. In assessing these results, it is clear that social media strategies used by Nigerian higher learning institutions in their PR practice demonstrate a holistic appreciation of communication processes in the digital era.

The process of evolution in online discussions requires institutions not only to employ such media for their communication but also to conduct continuous review and analysis of their strategy in an attempt to remain current (Abbas, 2023). Hence, with institutions continually adjusting their social media strategy, a cyclical process of learning with the incorporation of stakeholder feedback and newer trends becomes imperative (Daramola, 2022). Implications of such approaches extend beyond information dissemination to the broader set of objectives such as recruitment of students, mobilisation of stakeholders, and crisis management.

**Research Question Two: What metrics or indicators do tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State use to evaluate the effectiveness of their social media engagement in PR practice?**
Measuring social media effects in public relations (PR) is a significant challenge for Nigerian universities. Social media campaign indicators applied to measure their successes are sophisticated in nature, typically comprising a mix of qualitative and quantitative parameters (Keller, 2022). Some examples of such points of departure are the likes, shares, comments, and retweets, which serve as fundamental measurements. These measures give an idea about the audience receptivity and an overall sense of how posted content is received (Davis, 2019). A large volume of literature accentuates the relevance of such metrics in the digital age today, as user engagement remains a stand-in for message resonance and institutional prestige (Zhou, 2023). Furthermore, the prevalence of visual content on social media underscores the need for institutions to adjust their metrics to include view counts of video content and infographics, further underscoring the impact of visual engagement on PR activities (Smith, 2020).

Apart from engagement numbers, Nigerian institutions are likely to incorporate reach and impressions as key metrics. Reach refers to the number of unique users who view a post, while impressions refer to the overall visibility of posts on user feeds (Obi, 2021). These give a clearer indication of how many individuals a campaign could be impacting. Looking at these metrics not only shows the scope of message dissemination but also helps in formulating further strategies aimed at raising visibility (Ajayi, 2022). Academic literature in the field suggests that greater reach extends institutional voice and authority to create a larger brand narrative in the education sector (Alabi, 2023). Collectively, these indicators signal an astute perspective on social media effectiveness wherein the quantitative indicators appear essential to shaping strategic practice in PR.

Qualitative indicators, however, supplement the depth of social media effectiveness information through measures such as feedback from the audience and sentiment analysis, providing thick context to numeric data (Bassey, 2024). Institutions today, more than ever, use advanced tools for sentiment analysis to gauge public perception towards their brand stories and PR strategies. Positive emotions are typically related to greater stakeholder loyalty and institutional advocacy, which is why an institution needs to make a promise to manage their online reputation well (Ndukwe, 2023). In addition, qualitative comments gathered from the audience as well as analytical reports help institutions know the strengths and weaknesses of their communication plan so that they can real-time adjust their social media presence (Chukwu, 2021). Therefore, the use of both qualitative and quantitative measures is a comprehensive method of social media effectiveness measurement that closely aligns with theoretical models on social media analytics for PR practice.

In the long term, a combined approach employing both measures will enhance the capabilities of tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State, and by extension, Nigeria, to measure and optimise their social media PR strategies effectively. The need for an integrated method of evaluation is an indication of broader public relations trends towards accountability and performance measurement (Owusu-Antwi, 2022). This convergence of methods, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, is a reflection of contemporary public relations theory, which holds that measurement must adapt and be responsive to the evolving digital communication world (Michels, 2023). Institutions that are willing to make investments in measurement systems that demonstrate strength not only foster continued progress in their PR efforts, but also strengthen their relationships with important stakeholders across the educational community and far beyond.

**Research Question Three: What challenges do tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State encounter in implementing their social media strategies?**

Evaluation of social media strategies is extremely challenging for Nigerian institutions of higher learning, primarily because of a lack of comprehensive metrics and efficient data analytics models. The majority of institutions are currently confronted with traditional evaluation procedures that fail to capture the dynamism of social media interactions (Adeleke, 2021). Application of raw metrics, such as likes and sharing, has the potential to misrepresent the actual results of communication strategies (Okwuosa, 2023). Thus, such institutions may overlook the essential qualitative aspect of engagement, such as the mood of user responses or the level of interaction with their audience of interest (Nwankwo, 2022). Scholars contend that there must be a more profound approach that combines quantitative data with qualitative insight to provide a complete picture of the outcome of engagement (Ogunleye, 2024). Another critical challenge lies in the human resources and talent area. An absence of talented personnel who have expertise in social media analysis and electronic communication holds back effective evaluation of strategies (Ismail, 2022). The majority of institutions do not yet possess specialised departments in social media management, which results in assigning such responsibilities to ill-informed members of staff or a roster of rotating volunteers (Ebun, 2023). Therefore, the lack of long-term planning and monitoring exposes institutions to reputation damage and miscommunication (Akinyemi, 2023). Training and capacity building of existing employees would be a significant step towards the transformation of the quality of analysis conducted. Conducting professional development plans would allow PR teams to gain the analysis capacity and ensure that they are able to derive meaningful meanings from social media analytics (Odumu, 2024).

Simultaneously, the fast pace of social media platform development adds other levels of complexity to evaluation processes. Platforms are constantly evolving their algorithms and features, rendering old processes of evaluation irrelevant (Bola, 2022). As a result, institutions are most frequently in a retrospective position, having to act hastily rather than strategise ahead of time to potential interaction (Ojo, 2023). Constant tracking of platform development, along with anticipatory adaptation in the process of evaluation, will minimise the issue (Fayemi, 2024). Creating adaptive evaluation models that would adapt as platforms develop will keep institutions up-to-date in PR practice.

Last but not least, ethical dilemmas of user permission and data privacy are other barriers in the measurement of social media strategy (Ihuoma, 2021). Institutions must balance accessing user-generated information and protecting privacy rights, issues that are exacerbated by a climate of draconian data protection legislation like Nigeria's Data Protection Regulation (2023). To prevent such issues, institutions must invest in meaningful data governance policies that put a high value on ethical standards while still managing to enable effective strategy assessment (Okonkwo, 2024). A transparent approach to the use of data and ongoing education of stakeholders on privacy rights can help to foster trust and make way for more authentic user interaction with institutional material.

## Conclusion

This study sets the new-age role of social media in enabling communication and stakeholder interaction. The study concludes that Akwa Ibom State higher learning institutions have employed multi-dimensional social media strategies with the objective of enhancing public relations activities by interacting on various platforms to address students, alumni, and members of the wider public. Content creation, segmentation of audience, measures of engagement, and trust through openness and responsiveness are some of the practices embraced. However, the study also speaks of some of the biggest challenges to institutions in terms of restricted availability of trained personnel, reliance on crude metrics, and the need for solid assessment frameworks. Therefore, the research shows the degree to which effective social media strategies can create more permanent relationships and enhance institutional image, and that there needs to be continuous adaptation and collaborative evaluation procedures in order for there to be long-term success.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

(i) Institutions in Nigeria should make regular reviews of their social media strategy by incorporating advanced analytical tools. This will enable them to track engagement statistics more effectively and refine their delivery of content in order to suit the evolving requirements of their targeted audience.

(ii) Institutions must develop a complete assessment system that includes both quantitative and qualitative measures. This would enable them to understand audience opinion and interaction depth better, thus helping them measure social media effectiveness more effectively.

(iii) Institutions should spend on training and capacity building for the staff running social media websites. This would equip them to deal with data analysis and overcoming difficulties of electronic communication and evaluation processes.

## References

Abbas, Y. (2023). Social media strategies in higher education: Adaptations and advancements. *Journal of Digital Communication and Education*, *29*(2), 34-50.

Adebayo, A. (2021). Cultural sensitivities in public relations practice in Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication and Society*, *7*(1), 43-58.

Adebayo, A. & Odewale, S. (2020). The role of social media in enhancing public relations in Nigerian tertiary institutions. *Nigerian Journal of Public Relations*, *14*(4), 110-125.

Afolabi, R. & Adeyemo, D. (2023). Stakeholder engagement through social media in Nigerian universities: Strategies for success. *Education and Information Technologies*, *28*(1), 85-102.

Ajayi, O. (2022). Metrics of success: Evaluating public relations effectiveness in the digital age. *Journal of Marketing and Communication*, *24*(3), 185-202.

Akinyemi, A. (2023). The gap in social media expertise in higher education institutions in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Higher Education Research*, *30*(2), 71-84.

Alabi, M. (2023). Measuring reach and engagement on social media: A comprehensive guide. *Journal of Digital Marketing Policies*, *9*(2), 41-58.

Baird, C. & Parasnis, G. (2019). The power of visual communication in the digital age. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *45*(3), 873-887.

Bola, A. (2022). The implications of social media algorithm changes on public engagement strategies. *African Journal of Communication Studies*, *15*(2), 113-128.

Burke, J. (2023). User-generated content: The new frontier of digital engagement. *Journal of Social Media Studies*, *11*(2), 88-102.

Chaffey, D. (2022). Digital marketing metrics: Measuring success in the digital landscape. *Journal of Business Research*, *82*(5), 315-325.

Chukwu, M. (2019). Content creation and storytelling in PR: Strategies for engagement. *Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, *22*(1), 45-58.

Daramola, E. (2022). Engaging stakeholders: A look into social media strategies in education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *36*(3), 108-124.

Daramola, E. & Ogunleye, R. (2024). Building trust through transparency in educational communication. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *46*(1), 95-112.

Davis, S. (2019). Understanding social media metrics and their impact on public relations. *Public Relations Review*, *45*(3), 357-366.

Davis, S. (2023). Key performance indicators in digital marketing: A roadmap to success. *Journal of Marketing Strategy*, *29*(1), 67-84.

Eze, T. (2022). Cultural dynamics and public relations strategies in Nigeria. *Journal of African Communication Research*, *14*(2), 75-90.

Eze, T. & Ume, A. (2022). The narrative power of storytelling in higher education. *Journal of Educational Communication, 10*(1), 124-137.

Freeman, M. (2021). The importance of audience analysis in crafting social media strategies. *International Journal of Business Communication*, *26*(2), 82-97.

Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K. & Freberg, L. (2020). The role of social media in global public relations. *Global Journal of Business Research*, *14*(1), 65-80.

Grady, J. (2023). Transparent crisis communication: Building trust in volatile times. *Communication Research Reports*, *40*(1), 29-42.

Green, N. (2022). The significance of community management in digital marketing. *Journal of Marketing and Communication*, *33*(2), 156-170.

Hanna, R., Rohm, A. & Crittenden, V. (2019). We're all connected: The power of social media in shaping consumer behaviour. *Business Horizons*, *62*(3), 681-688.

Holt, D. (2019). Storytelling in marketing: How to engage consumers. *Journal of Business Strategy*, *30*(3), 75-85.

Ihuoma, E. (2021). Ethical considerations in social media engagement: A study of Nigerian institutions. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *23*(4), 45-58.

Irele, O. & Nkiru, A. (2023). Combating misinformation through effective communication in educational settings. *Journal of Communication Research*, *40*(1), 16-35.

Ibrahim, J. (2022). Multimedia in public relations: Strategies for success in the digital era. *Journal of Public Relations and New Media*, *25*(1), 70-85.

Jibril, L. (2022). The impact of institutional culture on communication strategies in education. *International Review of Education, 68*(1), 55-72.

Johnson, P. (2023). Crisis communication management in the age of social media. *Journal of Crisis Management*, *8*(2), 200-215.

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G. & Gurevitch, M. (2019). Uses and gratifications research. In Bryant, J. & Oliver, M. (Eds.) *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* pp. 23-38. Routledge.

Keller, K. L. (2022). Branding and social media: Exploring new dimensions of engagement. *Journal of Brand Management*, *22*(1),134-152.

Keller, K. (2023). The influence of social media on brand perception. *Journal of Business Research*, *140*(1), 78-89.

Khan, S. & Malhotra, N. (2021). Engaging consumers through dialogue in social media. *Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research*, *54*(1), 56-66.

Kotter, J. P. (2019). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. Harvard Business Review Press.

Kumar, R. (2022). The evolving landscape of social media strategies. *Journal of Digital Marketing*, *23*(2), 120-136.

Lovejoy, K. & Saxton, G. D. (2019). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organisations use social media. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *31*(1), 45-64.

López, C. (2023). Engaging consumers through interactive content. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *47*(1), 24-36.

McQuail, D. (2020). Mass Communication Theory: Approaches, Models, and Concepts. Sage Publications.

Michels, C. (2023). Metrics that matter: Evolving KPIs in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *35*(2), 170-185.

Nduka, S. & Ojo, B. (2020). The role of social media in higher education: A public relations perspective. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *58*(2), 69-82.

Noble, W. (2023). Content marketing analysis: Best practices for success in social media. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *54*(3), 310-322.

Nwachukwu, M. & Oni, S. (2022). Social media: A tool for effective communication in Nigerian education. *Journal of Educational Communication*, *15*(1), 87-102.

Obarisiagbon, K. (2020). The evolution of public relations in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Communication Studies*, *30*(1), 78-92.

Obi, C. (2024). The role of analytics in public relations strategies in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Relations Management, 12*(3), 76-89.

Okonkwo, E. (2024). Data governance and ethical issues in public relations. *Journal of Computing and Ethics*, *18*(3), 30-44.

Okorie, S. (2023). Engaging with the audience: The importance of two-way communication. *International Journal of Marketing Research*, *35*(1), 100-115.

Okunoren, O. & Ojo, A. (2022). Social media as a public relations tool for community engagement. *Journal of Community Development Studies*, *17*(2), 50-66.

Oladapo, F. & Ogunleye, R. (2023). Visibility and engagement: How social media enhances reputational capital in education. *Journal of Higher Education*, *15*(4), 30-47.

Onyeji, T. (2023). Social media analytics for public relations: Data-driven strategies. *Journal of Business Communication*, *14*(3), 30-50.

Oni, J. & Akinwande, O. (2021). Engagement metrics in educational marketing: Navigating the digital landscape. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *29*(6), 110-128.

Okwu, R. (2024). Storytelling in public relations: Crafting narratives for success. *Journal of Digital Communications*, *10*(1), 27-39.

Owusu-Antwi, K. (2022). Accountability and performance in public relations: A call for integrated measurement. *Journal of Public Relations Practice*, *31*(1), 5-18.

Sevigny, A. & Moorman, C. (2023). The effectiveness of social media strategies in public relations. *Journal of Communication Research*, *39*(2), 91-110.

Sokolova, K. & Koval, S. (2022). The impact of social media on branding: New perspectives and insights. *International Journal of Marketing*, *15*(2), 48-68.

Smith, A. (2020). Audience persona development in digital marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, *44*(2), 50-61.

Statista. (2023). Number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2027. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-users-of-social-networks-worldwide/

Sun, P. (2023). Understanding audience sentiment in social media engagements. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *51*(4), 192-207.

Sweeney, T. (2024). Effective content marketing strategies for social media. *Journal of Business and Social Media*, *18*(3), 50-64.

Tuten, T. & Solomon, M. (2021). *Social media marketing.* Sage Publications.

Udo, D. (2022). Digital literacy and social media engagement among Nigerian youth. *Nigerian Journal of Communication*, *12*(1), 56-72.

Ugochukwu, P. (2023). Communicating sustainability in education: Strategies for impact. *Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, *13*(2), 49-68.

Umoh, I. & Nwogbo, D. (2023). The role of networking in sustaining public relations effectiveness. *Journal of Public Relations*, *9*(1), 100-113.

Zhou, L. (2023). The significance of engagement metrics in public relations evaluation. *Journal of Digital Media Management*, *4*(2), 156-170.

# Reputation Management in the Public Sphere: Evaluating Media Narratives on the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan Saga

**Idongesit M. Ashameri**

Daily Independent Newspaper, and VirValCher Nig. Limited.

**Abstract**
This study investigates how the Nigerian mass media framed the sexual harassment allegations involving Senate President Godswill Akpabio and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, with a focus on the implications for public perception and national reputation. Anchored in framing theory and agenda-setting theory, the study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, examining how various media outlets employed specific narrative frames such as victimisation, political manipulation, gender dynamics, institutional accountability, and sensationalism. The findings reveal a deeply polarised media landscape, where framing choices not only influenced public opinion but also shaped discourse around governance, justice, and gender in the public sphere. Sensationalist and biased reporting were found to exacerbate political tensions and contribute to Nigeria's reputational vulnerabilities both domestically and internationally. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for ethical journalism, balanced reporting, and strategic communication by public officials to mitigate reputational damage and foster trust in democratic institutions.

**Keywords:** Reputation, reputation management, public sphere, media narratives, Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan's saga.

## Introduction

The media serves as a double-edged sword in shaping public perception and national identity. It functions as a crucial pillar of democracy by disseminating information, fostering public discourse, and holding those in power accountable (McQuail, 2010). However, the same media that informs and educates can also contribute to misinformation, sensationalism, and reputational crises, particularly when journalistic ethics are compromised. As Lippmann (1922) famously argued, media representation does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs it, influencing how individuals and institutions are perceived. In an era where mass media, both traditional and digital exerts significant influence on political narratives, reputation management has become an indispensable aspect of governance and public service.

In contemporary Nigeria, political actors are increasingly subject to media scrutiny, often finding themselves at the center of public controversies shaped by media narratives. The case of Senate President, Senator Godswill Obot Akpabio, CON and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's sexual harassment allegations exemplifies this dynamic, highlighting the complex interplay between media framing, public perception, and political reputation. The incident, widely reported and debated across multiple platforms, underscores how media outlets, driven by their editorial leanings and audience expectations, construct differing narratives that shape political discourse and national sentiment. As Entman (1993) posits in his framing theory, the media selectively emphasize certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others, thereby influencing how the public interprets events. Similarly, the agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) suggests that the prominence given to a particular issue by the media determines its perceived importance among audiences.

This study critically examines the framing of the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan controversy within Nigerian media and its broader implications for political reputation management and national image. By analyzing how different media outlets reported the allegations, the research seeks to understand the extent to which media framing influenced public opinion and political responses. Furthermore, it evaluates the crisis communication strategies deployed by both political figures, drawing insights from best practices in reputation management (Coombs, 2007). The study also situates this case within the broader context of Nigeria's image crisis, considering recent initiatives by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) to mitigate reputational challenges at the national level. Given Nigeria's ongoing struggle with international perception, often linked to issues of corruption, governance, and human rights (Ogwezzy, 2018)—the role of the media in either exacerbating or mitigating these challenges is of critical importance.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the discourse on media influence, political communication, and national reputation management. By bridging theoretical perspectives with empirical analysis, it provides a nuanced understanding of how media narratives shape political fortunes and national identity in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape.

**Statement of the Problem**

In contemporary Nigeria, political reputation management has become increasingly complex due to the pervasive influence of mass media in shaping public narratives. While the media plays a critical role in informing citizens and fostering democratic accountability, it also serves as a platform for framing political controversies in ways that can either protect or damage reputations. The framing of political figures in the media significantly impacts their public perception, electoral viability, and governance legitimacy. However, the extent to which media narratives influence political reputation and national image remains a subject of ongoing debate.

The case of Senate President Godswill Akpabio and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's sexual harassment allegations provides a compelling instance of how media framing affects political figures and the broader national image. ifferent media outlets presented divergent narratives, amplifying public reactions and shaping discourse in ways that reflected ideological biases, editorial policies, and audience interests. Such media coverage not only influenced individual reputations but also contributed to Nigeria's broader image crisis, reinforcing concerns about gender dynamics in politics, institutional credibility, and governance ethics.

Despite the growing body of research on media influence, limited scholarly attention has been given to the intersection of media framing, political crisis communication, and national reputation management in Nigeria. Moreover, while crisis communication strategies are widely studied in Western contexts, there is a dearth of research examining how Nigerian politicians and public relations institutions, such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), respond to reputational crises within the country's unique sociopolitical landscape.

This study seeks to address these gaps by critically analyzing how the mass media framed the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan controversy and evaluating the impact of such coverage on political reputation and national image. It also examines the crisis communication strategies employed by the key figures involved and the broader implications for Nigeria's reputation management efforts. By situating this analysis within the frameworks of agenda-setting and framing theories, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of media influence on political reputation and national identity in Nigeria.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study will be approached using the following objectives:

(i) To identify and analyse the framing patterns used by the Nigerian mass media in reporting the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan saga.
(ii) To determine the dominant media frames that shaped public perception of the controversy.
(iii) To evaluate the extent to which media reports adhered to journalistic ethics, including balance, objectivity, and factual accuracy
(iv) To analyse the implications of sensationalized media narratives on political stability and public trust in governance.
(v) To assess how media coverage of the controversy influenced Nigeria's national and international reputation.
(vi) To recommend responsible media practices that can mitigate reputational damage in politically sensitive cases.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study is anchored on the interrelated concepts of media narratives, reputation management, and the public sphere, particularly within the context of the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan saga. These concepts collectively form a lens for analyzing how media discourse influences political perception, manages public image, and affects national reputation.

**Reputation and Reputation Management**

Reputation refers to the collective perception or judgment of an individual, organisation, or nation based on past actions, public discourse, and social values (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). In politics, reputation plays a critical role in legitimizing authority and maintaining public trust.

Reputation management involves deliberate strategies employed to shape, maintain, or restore public perception, especially during periods of crisis or controversy (Argenti, 2007). Politicians often utilise a mix of crisis communication media engagement, and image restoration tactics (Benoit, 1997) to maintain credibility and manage damage from negative media portrayals.

In the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan case, reputation management unfolded through official statements, counter-narratives, and selective media engagement—demonstrating efforts to reframe the situation and protect political capital.

**Media Narratives and Framing Theory**

Media narratives are the constructed stories that emerge from journalistic choices in event selection, language, imagery, and emphasis. These narratives are shaped by media framing—the process by which media outlets organise and present information to guide audience interpretation (Entman, 1993).

The media plays a crucial role in defining the narrative surrounding political figures, often shaping public opinion through agenda-setting and priming techniques. In the case of Senate President Godswill Akpabio and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, different media outlets framed the sexual harassment allegations in varying ways, influencing how the public reacted to the controversy. Some media reports may have presented the issue as a politically motivated attack, while others framed it as a gender-based power struggle or a reflection of broader institutional failures. The framing of this controversy determined not only how the public perceived the individuals involved but also how the discourse around political ethics, gender equity, and governance evolved. Studies in political communication have established that media framing is a strategic tool used to shape political narratives.

The controversy between Akpabio and Akpoti-Uduaghan serves as a site where various media narratives competed to define public perception of the events, demonstrating the power of the press in shaping political realities.

In this study, particular attention is given to:
Framing patterns (episodic vs. thematic, conflict vs. morality frames)
Dominant frames used by different media outlets (e.g., political rivalry, gender discrimination, institutional failure).

**Public Sphere and Democratic Discourse**

The public sphere, as conceptualized by Habermas (1962) is a space where citizens engage in critical discussion about public affairs, ideally free from state and corporate control. The media acts as a gatekeeper and amplifier within this space, influencing which issues are debated and how.

In Nigeria, the public sphere is often fragmented by political partisanship, media ownership, and digital echo chambers. The Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan saga illustrates how narratives in the public sphere can either promote democratic engagement or deepen mistrust in governance, depending on how balanced or sensationalized the reporting is.

**National Image and Media's Global Impact**

National image refers to the global perception of a country's values, leadership, and institutions (Anholt, 2007). Media coverage of domestic controversies, especially involving gender and leadership ethics, affects how other nations and international stakeholders view Nigeria. Ogwezzy (2018) emphasises that negative political coverage, especially if widely disseminated, reinforces damaging stereotypes and may influence foreign investment, diplomatic relations, and national soft power.

Thus, political controversies framed through ethically charged or sensational narratives, as in the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan case, are not just internal crises, they become external challenges to Nigeria's national brand.

**Integrative Summary**

This study integrates the following theoretical lenses:

(i) Framing Theory: to decode how media constructed competing narratives
(ii) Reputation Management: to evaluate political responses and public relations strategies
(iii) Public Sphere Theory: to assess the broader societal engagement and discourse
(iv) Nation Branding/National Image: to understand the reputational impact on Nigeria's standing

These concepts jointly underpin the research inquiry: How do media narratives about the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan saga affect public perception, political reputation, and Nigeria's image in the global public sphere.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in framing theory (Entman, 1993) and agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Framing theory explains how media outlets emphasize certain aspects of a story while downplaying others, shaping audience perception and public discourse. The theory further posits that the way an issue is presented (e.g., as a moral failure, political witch-hunt, or gender-based injustice) influences how the audience processes and reacts to it. In the case of Akpabio and Akpoti-Uduaghan, media reports varied significantly, with some outlets portraying the incident as a gender-based power struggle, while others framed it as political manoeuvring.

**Agenda-Setting and Media Influence**

Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) posits that the media does not tell people what to think but rather what to think about. The prominence given to certain issues over others determines public attention and political discourse. By repeatedly highlighting or downplaying political scandals, the media influences how society prioritises issues and how political figures are perceived.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative framing analysis to examine how the Nigerian mass media constructed narratives around the sexual harassment allegations involving Senate President Godswill Akpabio and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. The analysis seeks to identify media frames, assess their dominance, and evaluate their implications for reputation management in the public sphere.

### Research Design

Framing analysis, a qualitative content analysis method is employed to interrogate how media outlets select, emphasize, and structure certain elements of the controversy. This design enables a critical look at symbolic representation and ideological framing across media narratives.

### Content Formats Analyzed

The study will analyze multiple content types for diversity of narrative expression:

(i) News reports (straight reporting)
(ii) Editorials (institutional opinions)
(iii) Features (in-depth narratives)
(iv) Opinion columns (commentary and analysis)
(v) Television segments (news analysis, talk shows)
(vi) Online/social media posts (Twitter/X, Facebook, blogs)

### Framing Categories

Six frame types will guide the analysis:

(i) Victimisation Frame – Depicts Akpoti-Uduaghan as a target of harassment and bias.
(ii) Political Manipulation Frame – Casts the allegations as political tools.
(iii) Institutional Accountability Frame – Focuses on institutional responses and failures.
(iv) Gender Frame – Interprets the case through gender dynamics in Nigerian politics.
(v) Power Dynamics Frame – Examines disparities in influence between the actors.
(vi) Sensationalism Frame – Highlights emotionally charged or speculative reporting.

### Media Outlets Studied

Media platforms selected for their national reach and political influence include:

(i) The Punch (Print/Online)
(ii) Premium Times (Online investigative journalism)
(iii) Channels TV (Television broadcast + online presence)
(iv) Vanguard Newspaper (Print/Online)
(v) Sahara Reporters (Digital/Activist media)
(vi) Twitter/X and Facebook public discourse (For public reaction and digital framing)

### Media Contents Analysed

For each medium, the following dimensions will be analyzed:

**Content formats:** Identifying whether the material is a news report, editorial, opinion, etc.
**Frame types:** Coding the frames used in each content type

**Dominant frames:** Determining which frame(s) appear most frequently or are emphasized across formats

**Data Collection & Sampling**
Using purposive sampling, media content between March 10–30, 2025 will be selected, covering the full span of heated public discourse on the issue.

**Data Analysis Steps**

(i) Frame Identification – Apply predefined frames using coding and tone/language cues.
(ii) Thematic Clustering – Group similar codes into thematic categories.
(iii) Comparative Framing – Contrast framing patterns across media types.
(iv) Dominance Assessment – Identify the most recurring and emphasized frames.

**Presentation of Select Media Reports on the Akpabio-Akpoti -Uduagha Saga and their Implications on National Reputation**

**Premium Times, March 11, 2025:** Framed the allegations as direct misconduct by Akpabio, raising concerns about media-led trial without due process.
**Impact:** risked undermining public trust in the legal system.

**Sahara Reporters, March 12, 2025:** Linked Akpabio's response to Nigeria's wider culture of political impunity.
**Impact:** Contributed to international perceptions of endemic corruption in Nigerian leadership.

**Daily Trust, March 13, 2025:** Focused on Senate divisions and internal disunity.
**Impact:** Reinforced the image of political instability, a red flag for foreign investors.

**The Nation,** March 14, 2025: Suggested the allegations were politically motivated, questioning their timing.
**Impact:** Risked portraying the media as biased and politically manipulated.

**City Voice News, March 15, 2025:** Covered the Senate's rejection of the petition, implying institutional bias.
**Impact:** Created an oversimplified narrative of legislative failure without full legal context.

**Daily Post, March 16, 2025:** Highlighted how social media was split between support and condemnation, reflecting echo chamber dynamics.
**Impact:** Showed how digital platforms amplified polarised views and misinformation.

**ThisDay, March 17, 2025:** Addressed the global reputational implications, especially regarding gender rights and governance.
**Impact:** Highlighted how media framing affects Nigeria's international image.

**Channels TV, March 12, 2025:** Shifted the focus to systemic issues, particularly the silence around sexual harassment in Nigerian politics.
**Impact:** Demonstrated responsible journalism by broadening public understanding.

**The Guardian Nigeria, March 18, 2025:** Covered growing public calls for Akpabio's resignation.
**Impact:** Contributed to accountability discourse but also risked framing the situation as a political crisis.

### Discussion of Findings

### 1. Framing the Akpabio-Akpoti-Uduaghan Saga: A Critical Analysis of Media Narratives and Reputational Implications

This section presents a qualitative analysis of media narratives surrounding the sexual harassment allegations involving Senate President Godswill Akpabio and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. The findings are categorized by media format, dominant frame types, and the implications of each frame on Nigeria's national reputation, public perception, and institutional credibility. The analysis draws from a sample of mainstream print media, online platforms, television broadcasts, and social media commentaries.

**Media Content Formats and Framing Patterns:** Media content analysed comprised a mix of news reports, editorials, features, opinion pieces, and broadcast bulletins. Each format employed distinct framing strategies, often influenced by editorial slants and institutional priorities.

News reports tended to emphasize factual recounts but often reflected underlying biases through source selection and headline framing.
Editorials and opinion pieces were more overtly framed, often advancing political interpretations of the scandal.
Features occasionally contextualised the allegations within systemic issues (e.g., gender and institutional accountability).
Social media and online comments amplified certain narratives, especially those with emotional or partisan appeal.

### 2. Frame Types Identified and Their Effects

#### a. Sensationalism Frame
**Media Examples:** Premium Times, Sahara Reporters, Daily Post
These outlets emphasized the explosive nature of the allegations, often using charged language and speculative tones.
**Effect:** This framing heightened public outrage but risked undermining due process. It amplified the perception of institutional dysfunction and promoted the idea that scandal defines Nigeria's political landscape.

**b. Victimisation Frame**

**Media Example:** Channels TV, The Guardian Nigeria

Framing Akpoti-Uduaghan as a symbolic figure battling systemic suppression of female voices.

**Effect:** Positively contributed to the discourse on gender equity but, when unbalanced, risked reducing a complex legal-political issue to a gendered binary, affecting perceptions of fairness in governance.

**c. Political Manipulation Frame**

**Media Example:** The Nation, City Voice News

Allegations were portrayed as politically motivated, aimed at discrediting Akpabio's leadership.

**Effect:** Undermined public trust in the authenticity of the claims and painted Nigerian politics as perpetually vindictive, reinforcing narratives of elite power struggles rather than principled leadership.

**d. Institutional Accountability Frame**

**Media Example:** ThisDay, Daily Trust

Framing focused on Senate processes, transparency, and ethical responsibility.

**Effect:** Reflected mature journalism but highlighted institutional inertia. Suggested the need for stronger checks and balances, indirectly affecting Nigeria's democratic image abroad.

**e. Gender Frame**

Seen in feature articles and op-eds across Guardian Nigeria and Premium Times.

Discussions on power, harassment, and the marginalization of women in Nigerian politics.

**Effect:** Raised awareness globally about gender disparities, but also flagged the country's slow institutional response to gender-related allegations.

**f. Power Dynamics Frame**

**Media Example:** Daily Trust, Sahara Reporters

Framing emphasized how elite privilege and hierarchical structures protect certain actors.

**Effect:** Deepened perceptions of inequality before the law and painted the Nigerian political system as closed and resistant to reform.

While some media demonstrated ethical awareness and issue-driven framing, others compromised reputational integrity by resorting to sensationalism, political bias, or shallow commentary.

**3: Implications for National Reputation**

The findings suggest that media narratives surrounding the saga have implications far beyond the immediate scandal. They influence:

(i) Public trust in journalism and political institutions
(ii) Nigeria's international image in areas of gender equity, legal transparency, and democratic governance
(iii) Investor confidence and foreign diplomatic engagement
(iv) Crisis communication standards within Nigeria's media and political elite

## Conclusion/Recommendations

The analysis highlights a fragmented media landscape where framing practices vary widely across platforms and content types. The case illustrates the urgent need for ethical, balanced reporting that respects journalistic integrity and supports reputational resilience. Effective reputation management, whether for individuals or the nation begins with how stories are told.

The study therefore recommends ethical media reporting and national reputation management. To mitigate the negative effects of unguarded media reports on Nigeria's national reputation, the following are proposed:

### Strengthening Ethical Journalism Practices

**The media to adopt Fact-Based Reporting:** Media houses should prioritise investigative journalism that adheres to factual accuracy, ensuring that allegations are thoroughly verified before publication.
**Enforcement of Journalistic Ethics:** The Nigerian Press Council (NPC) and Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) should impose stricter penalties on media outlets found engaged in biased, misleading, or sensational reporting.
**Mandatory Media Literacy Training:** Journalists should undergo regular training on responsible crisis reporting, particularly on politically sensitive issues. Organisations such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) should lead these efforts. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) to collaborate with the media in aligning reporting practices with Nigeria's global image goals. Press freedom must be protected, legal frameworks refined to checkmate defamation, misinformation, and character assassination in political reporting.

### Promote Balanced and Responsible Reporting

Media organisations should adopt neutral, non-inflammatory language in political reporting and ensure balanced coverage by granting fair representation to all parties involved. Equal airtime and space for both accusers and accused is essential in upholding journalistic integrity and minimizing public polarization.

### Strengthen Digital Media Oversight and Literacy

A coordinated framework involving government agencies, independent fact-checkers (e.g., Africa Check, Dubawa), and media houses should be established to combat misinformation. Simultaneously, national media literacy campaigns should be launched to educate citizens on identifying fake news and resisting disinformation.

### Institutionalize Strategic Crisis Communication

Government officials and political actors should undergo crisis communication training to ensure swift, fact-based, and transparent responses to reputational threats. Proactive image management and the establishment of a National Image Task Force under the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) are recommended. Nigerian embassies should also be empowered to engage international media through strategic messaging to counter negative narratives.

## References

Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Benoit, W. L. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review, 23*(2), 177–186.

Coombs, W. T. (2007). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding.* Sage Publications.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51–58.

Fombrun, C. (1996). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image.* Harvard Business School Press.

Fombrun, C. J., & van Riel, C. B. M. (2004). *Fame and Fortune: How Successful Companies Build Winning Reputations.*

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience*. Harvard University Press.

Habermas, J. (1962): *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.*

Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion: Harcourt, Brace and Company.*

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176-187.

McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ogwezzy, M. C. (2018). Nigeria's image crisis: An analysis of the role of the media in reputation management. *International Journal of Communication and Media Studies, 8*(1), 1-13.

Ogwezzy, A. (2018). Media representation and Nigeria's image crisis: The role of strategic communication. *Journal of African Media Studies, 10*(3), 215–233.

Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda-setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 9–20.

# Beyond Arms and Armaments: Resolving Nigeria's Insurgency Crisis through Strategic Public Relations

**Umoh J. Umoh[1], Idorenyin Ekanem[2], George N. Brown[3], Ifeanyi M. Nwokeocha[4]**

[1]Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo.
[2]Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo.
[3]Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket.
[4]Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Federal University, Otuoke.

**Abstract**
Since the first known manifestation of insurgency in Nigeria credited to a university student of Niger Delta extraction, Isaac Japer Adaka Boro in 1965, Nigeria's insurgency crisis has precariously grown in scope and sophistication. There seems to be an intensifying thirst for blood and a spiraling preference for violence as means of expressing pent-up frustration or anger either directed at the state or its people. The conflagration has taken a hefty toll on the soul of Nigeria. This study sought to: examine the nature and causes of Nigeria's insurgency, determine the ideological motivations fueling it, profile the perpetrators of the insurgency, and propose functional public relations strategies for resolving the crisis. The desktop research method was used to qualitatively analyse extant data and literature. Relying on Stakeholder theory and Invitational Rhetoric theory, the paper argues that the enduring solution to Nigeria's insurgency rests not in arms and armaments. It identifies lack of mutual trust, shared understanding and absence of a sense of corporate existence as fundamental to the crisis. The study theorises that there would be no need for a fight if Nigeria is administered using the strategic crisis communication template of a corporate organisation, where parts of the whole appreciate their roles and responsibilities and contribute according to rules towards attainment of pre-determined and consensually agreed goals. The study recommends the non-kinetic deployment of public relations strategies such as lobbying, dialogue, persuasive engagement, crisis communication, stake-holding, invitational rhetoric, in resolving Nigeria's protracted insurgency crisis, in the interest of all.

**Keywords:** Arms and armaments, terrorism, Nigeria's insurgency, crisis communication, strategic public relations.

## Introduction/Problem Statement

Nigeria today is one of the most terrorized countries on earth. Ranked only after nations like Bukina Faso, Israel, Mali, Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia; Nigeria is the country with the eight highest volume of terrorist attacks and activities, according to the 2024 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace and published by Statista Research Department. On the GTI scale of 50 countries ranked from 0 (no impact of terrorism) to 10 (highest impact of terrorism), Nigeria is placed eight, with an index as high as 7.58.

Terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria manifest through activities of groups such as Boko Haram in the North East, Pastoral Fulani extremists in North Central, assorted bandit groups in North West, Igbo secessionist movements and other bandit groups in South East, Niger Delta militant bodies in South South, and other ethnic and regular insurgence groups in South West. A report by Olaiya (2021) on Guardian Newspaper, June 18, 2021, indicates that while unrest increased in 2021 by 10% globally, it increased by more than 800% in Sub-Sahara Africa, with Nigeria recording the highest level of increase in civil unrest.

While terrorism is considered by most authors as the intentional striking of fear, anxiety and intimidation into a target population to achieve a political objective (Schmid & Jongman, 2017; Johnston, 2018), insurgency is considered an organised movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict (United States Department of the Army, 2014; Nagl, 2009; Johnston, 2018). Typically, insurgency integrates asymmetric warfare with a strategy of sustained political opposition. Insurgencies strategically seek to align their compelling drives with the public interest of the people they claim to represent, in order to garner popular support and build street credibility. Every insurgency aspires to expand in size and capacity while degrading the government it opposes to a point of defeat, even through conventional combat.

Nigeria's insurgency comes with a heavy cost on lives, properties and the economy. Boko Haram alone has affected an estimated 14.8 million men, women and children (Presidential Committee on North East Initiative, 2018). The blistering inferno of insurgency in Nigeria has so far consumed millions of lives, turned countless women to widows, rendered a massive mass of children orphans, displaced a huge count of Nigerians from their ancestral homes, and denigrated Nigeria's economy to a near stand-still.

The Government of Nigeria seems to have tried everything in the books, from all-force combat, to carrot and stick approach, to amnesty, to diplomacy; but the conflagration has defied extinguishment. Still in search for solution, there has been an advocacy for multi-stakeholder intervention to the security question, rather than a sole deployment of only military options (Open Society, 2012; Ujomu, 2021; Imhonopi & Urim, 2012; cited in Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013).

Public Relations is a management function that involves monitoring and evaluating public attitudes and maintaining mutual relations and understanding between an organisation and its publics (Hasan, 2013). It involves aligning the perception of targeted publics with the current realities and reasonable prospects of an organisation. The core business of Public Relations include: evaluation of public opinions and attitudes, formation and implementation of procedures regarding communication with the publics, coordination of engagements and communication activities, cultivation of goodwill with the publics, as well as promotion of healthy relationship between an organisation and its publics.

As a nation, Nigeria has battled insurgency for decades, with no sustainable positive outcome. Ahead of every election cycle, every politician seeking to become Nigeria's President would pledge to resolve the nation's insurgency. But once voted into office, the usual kinetic methodologies would be deployed, with little or no improvements to show. Could there be a non-kinetic approach to tackling the hydra-headed menace of insurgency in Nigeria? Given that insurgency primarily thrives against the backdrop of mistruth, mistrust, miscommunication, misinformation, propaganda, hatred for the state, and relationship breakdown, the concern of this paper is to explore the possibility or otherwise of deploying tested public relations strategies in resolving insurgency in Nigeria. Beyond the conventional use of arms, armaments, armories and ammunitions, how can strategic public relations help in resolving Nigeria's insurgency crisis?

**Objectives of the Study**

The primary objectives of the study were to:

(i) Theoretically profile the perpetrators of insurgency in Nigeria;
(ii) Examine the nature and causes of the insurgency crisis in Nigeria;
(iii) Determine the ideological motivations fueling insurgency in Nigeria;
(iv) Propose functional public relations strategies for resolving Nigeria's insurgency crisis.

**Perpetrators of Insurgency as Part of Nigeria's Publics: Contextualizing Stakeholder and Invitational Rhetoric Theories**

In the context of Public Relations, Nigeria can be understood as one large organisation which has a number of publics (internal and external). Jargon Watch (2021) defines an organisation as a collection of people, who are involved in pursuing defined objectives. It can be understood as a social system which comprises all formal human relationships. An organisation, simply put, is an entity, like a company, an institution, a government, comprising two or more people or group of people and having specific purpose(s).

In the context of Public Relations too, every organisation has its publics. Some may be primary or secondary publics; some may be internal or external publics. The publics of Nigeria as an organisation includes all Nigerians governed by the government, all states which are under the Federal Government structure, all groups and organisations within the Nigerian system, all ethnic nationalities, all religious and professional bodies, all pressure and advocacy groups, all political and sociocultural groupings, and even all agitating and insurgent groups. By implication, Boko Haram fighters, sponsors, sympathizers in North East Nigeria are all part of Nigeria's public. The herdsmen and the farmers they clash with in North Central are part of Nigeria's public. The bandits in North West are part of Nigeria's publics. IPOB, ESN and the whole of the Igbos in South East Nigeria are part of Nigeria's publics. Niger Delta militants and all inhabitants of South South Nigeria are part of Nigeria's publics. OPC, OLM and all of the people of South West Nigeria are part of Nigeria's publics.

In the light of the foregoing, it is crucial what the Nigerian organisation does to, for, with or against its publics, just as it is crucial what its publics do to, for, with and against the Nigerian organisation. This section contextualises two relevant theories of Public Relations in order to establish the theoretical dais upon which this discourse stands. They are:

(i) Stakeholder Theory
(ii) Invitational Rhetoric Theory.

**Stakeholder Theory:** Propounded in 1984 by Edward Freeman (Freeman & Movea, 2001), the Stakeholder Theory's primary postulation is that for any organisation to be successful, it must find a way to understand, account for and create value for all of its stakeholders. The theory argues that any organisation that wishes to succeed must prioritise the interests of its stakeholders (internal and external publics), even above the interests of its shareholders (financiers). The theory acknowledges that while the interests of an organisation's pubics may typically not be the same, there has to be a way for the interests to go together (Stakeholder-map, n.d.).

Contextualising the theory above, it must be understood that the leaders and managers of Nigeria have the critical role of first identifying all its stakeholders (publics), seeking to understand their peculiarities, needs, interests and aspirations, making efforts to address such needs, interests and aspirations, communicating effectively with its publics and receiving feedbacks, responding positively and sustainably, as well as building and managing quality relationships with its stakeholders (the publics). The leadership of Nigeria must seek to understand the diverse interests of its stakeholders (the peoples of Nigeria). The leadership of Nigeria must devise means to sustain inspiring relationships with its publics. The leadership has to practically demonstrate that it cares about the peoples of Nigeria. It must understand that it is possible to win over its publics including perpetuators of insurgencies, not always by use of might and brute force, but by seeking ways to add value to them, appreciate their diversities of interests, and designing effective strategies to communicate and relate healthily with them.

**Invitational Rhetoric Theory:** Developed by Sonja K. Foss and Cindy I. Griffin (Communication Monographs, 1995), Invitation Rhetoric theory is a theory of rhetoric and persuasive communication. Rooted in the three core elements of equality, imminent value and self-determination, the primary stance of the theory is that persuasive communication should not be seen as an effort for the communicator to demonstrate power over the audiences with the aim of manipulating or causing them to change in some ways. Rather, it should be an invitation to share power with the audiences as precursor to securing understanding, making a decision or solving a problem. Invitational Rhetoric is therefore an invitation to understanding as a means to creating a relationship. Unlike regular persuasive communication that seeks to persuade at all cost, invitational rhetoric seeks not to directly persuade the audience to jettison their opinions or attitudes for those of the persuaders. It rather seeks to share understanding of the perspectives of others.

Invitational Rhetoric, though first introduces by two feminism scholars as contributions to gender strives, is essentially relevant to Public Relations and particularly relates to the focus of this article. The wisdom from the theory is that if the leadership of Nigeria must win over its plenty publics including perpetuators of insurgency, it must learn not to act as one that seeks to correct another or as one whose positions are superior to those of its publics or as one whose ways have to be imposed on its publics. Rather, it must learn how to invite its publics on common ground of equality to a place of perception sharing, as a strategy to securing understanding and deepening relationship.

**Methodology**

The study utilised the desktop research method, alternatively christened secondary research method, to gather and analyse extant data and literature relevant to the research. The method was considered suitable owing to its accessibility, flexibility and functionality. The researchers sourced data from reputable databases, to gather academic articles with thematic relevance to the study.

To enhance objectivity, the researchers ensured the enquiry procedures were systematic and methodological. The researchers adhered to standard procedures of data collection, data review, data synthesis, thematic analysis, source evaluation, presentation of findings and proposition of current study, as stipulated in Shem, Umoh, George, Attang and Obong (2024).

**The Nature of Insurgency in Nigeria**

Insurgency is a form of violence and involves violent killing of persons and destruction of property. Violence is not new to humanity. The first case of violent killing in recorded history, according to the Bible account, involved two biological brothers, with the older, Cain, murdering the younger, Abel, out of jealousy that his brother's sacrifice, not his, was accepted (KJV Bible, Chapter 4). But that was just the beginning.

In Nigeria, what passes as the first case of insurgency began in 1965 with the rise of a university student of Niger Delta origin, Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro. The fight was against environmental degradation and for better life and increased access for his people to opportunities within the hydrocarbon ecosystem. Muzan (2014) recollects:

> The first known insurgency or terrorism attempt in Nigeria may be credited to the movement to liberate the Niger Delta people by Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro. Major Boro belonged to the Ijaw ethnic extraction in the Niger Delta region and, at the time of his rebellion, was a student of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His complaint was against the exploration of the oil and gas resources of the Niger Delta by both the Federal and regional governments, in total disregards of the citizens of the area. Boro formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), an armed military group composed of 150 of his kinsmen.

From that infantile start in 1965, insurgency in Nigeria has now expanded in size, might and sophistication, with the deadliest today being Boko Haram, officially known as *Ahlulsu nna wai'jama' ah hija* or "people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teaching and Jihad". Boko Haram, which means "Western Education is Sinful", is an Islamic sect and a terrorist group that believes Nigeria should not be led by "unbelievers". The sect is opposed to Western education, democracy, secular government, Westernization and uses violence, killings and bombings to pursue its goal of instituting an Islamic State of Nigeria. The Boko Haram sect believes that a secular government is wrong and that Westernization is against the teachings of Islam (Omego, 2015).

The Boko Haram insurgency is deeply rooted in religious ideologies and is largely difficult to contend since it cuts across the borders of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad. Members of the group, which numbers over 40,000, pay daily levies of One Hundred Naira each, totaling about N400,000 to their leaders. The daily levies, according to Aghedo (2013), provide Boko Haram's basic source of funding in addition to loots from attacks on banks, donations from sponsors including politicians, government officials and organisations, as well as funding support from foreign affiliates.

Aside the ravaging operations of Boko Haram majorly in North Eastern Nigeria, there has been frequent clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in North Central Nigeria. Though the conflict is complex and multifaced, it primarily centers around agricultural households and nomadic cattle-herder groups who come into conflicts over land access (Azad, Crowford & Kaila, 2018). With hike in population and the attendant miniaturization of available land for agriculture, farmers within the North Central belt of the country seem to have begun to cultivate indigenous lands which had hitherto served as grazing areas. Consequently, lands available for grazing seem to have significantly been reduced, either due to increasing agricultural activities or climatic changes or insecurity or other factor; situations which have compelled the herdsmen to expand their routes into other areas too. It is this strive for land fueled by some ethnic, political cum religious motivations which have prolonged the fight for multiple years.

In 2015, Nigeria's Fulani pastoral militants were named the fourth deadliest terror group in the world by the Global Terrorism Index. Only Boko Haram, ISIS and al-Shabab were deemed deadlier than the scantily known militant group operating principally in North Central Nigeria and in Central African Republic (CAR). In 2014 alone, the group recorded 847 deaths, with 92% of the attacks targeted at private citizens. This shows that the major grouse of this group is not against the Nigerian Government but against private land owners and the State Government who were unwilling to support the group's unending quest for land.

In North West Nigeria, there has been an escalation of insurgency perpetuated by a group the Government describes with the euphemism "Bandits". This genre of insurgency has killed, maimed and destroyed lots of lives in North Western States such as Kaduna, Kanu, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara and Jigawa. According to Ojewale (2021), in actuality, North West Nigeria has become the home of increasingly active terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jama' at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, a splinter of Boko Haram popularly known as Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Fulani Herdsmen of West Africa.

In South East Nigeria, Biafra secessionist groups, variedly christened, have remained the most vocal agitators and purveyors of insurgency. Decades after the Nigerian Civil War, agitations for self-determination in South East have continued to grow, principally due to what the agitators describe as marginalization by the national government. What started first with the peaceful establishment of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) has morphed into full insurgency. A more militant group called Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by a self-styled leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu now holds sway. The violent wing of IPOB is an assemblage of "fighters" known as Eastern Security

Network (ESN). Plenty of lives and properties have been destroyed by the group, with a partial shutdown of economic activities most Mondays across the region.

Furthermore, there has been increased belligerence in the Niger Delta region by various agitating groups. In recent times, this has manifested as attacks on hydrocarbon installations, kidnap of oil and gas workers, oil theft, sabotage, etc. For this and other factors, Nigeria's major source of revenue has significantly stayed on a low, compounding the problem of lack of funding for national development.

Apart from pockets of banditries, abductions, clashes between farmers and herders, there has been scanty insurgent activities championed by a wing of the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC), a Yoruba nationalist organisation formed in 1997. According to Muzan (2014), the founding head of the organisation was Dr. Fredrick Fasheun and its militant aspects were headed by Ganiyu Adams. A splinter group, Oodua Liberation Movement was later birthed and became more militant, with its primary agitation being against Nigeria's pseudo-Federalism.

**Causes of Insurgency in Nigeria**

Insurgency is never like a tree that suddenly springs up in the middle of nowhere. It emanates as a result of something – something outside of it. Corroborating Muzan (2014), this paper identifies some of the paramount causes of insurgency in Nigeria to include:

(i) Land ownership and use
(ii) Ethnic rivalry
(iii) Poverty
(iv) Unemployment
(v) Marginalization
(vi) Eroding social values
(vii) Religious differences
(viii) Failure of government.

**Land Ownership and Use:** This is a major source of insurgency in Nigeria. When contending parties seek to assert conflicting ownership and use rights, it leads to troubles. The primary cause of the herders versus farmers conflict in North Central Nigeria is the scramble for land. Herders feel hurt that ancient cattle routes are no longer available. Farmers feel even more pained that their ancestral farmlands and their growing crops are decimated by the invading herds of cattle.

**Ethnic Rivalry:** Ethno-religious conflicts have been identified as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013). Ethnic groups get on the toes of one another over who gets what and how powers, lands, resources and territories are distributed.

**Poverty:** Poverty is at the base of Nigeria's insurgency. Poverty has been weaponized in Nigeria, even by merchants of terror. The poor and hungry are more easily recruited and indoctrinated.

**Unemployment:** The high volume of unemployment in Nigeria makes the ground very viable and fertile for insurgency. Unemployed persons are very easily recruited into the ranks and files of insurgent groups like Boko Haram, IPOB, Niger Delta militants, etc.

**Marginalisation:** This is a major cause of insurgency in Nigeria. Each ethnic group considers itself unique and seeks to maintain its identity. Ethnic groups, especially the minorities tend to nurture the suspicion of marginalization by other groups considered better disposed in size, politics and economy. Agitators in South East and South South, for instance, typically allege marginalization of their ethnic nationalities by others.

**Eroding Social Values:** There seems to be a gradual erosion of the social and moral values operational today in Nigeria. Moral ideals such as integrity, hard work, respect, communalism, value for life, brotherhood and good neighborliness are gradually being replaced by today's pop culture that tends to celebrate wealth by all means, tends to euphemize stealing and corruption as misappropriation, and oppression as strength.

**Failure of Government:** The state of insecurity in Nigeria partly is a reflection of the state of governance in Nigeria. As Achumba, Ignomerho and Akpor-Robano (2013) note, the foundations of institutional or regulatory frameworks in Nigeria are shaky and have provoked a deterioration of state governance and democratic accountability, thus paralysing the existing formal and legitimate rules nested in the hierarchy of social order.

**Ideological Motivations Fueling Nigeria's Insurgency Crisis**

An ideology is a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and practice. An idea becomes an ideology once it is taken up as a political or religious or ethnic cause and functions in a process of political differentiation. An ideology can also be described as a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group or culture (Merrian-webster, 2022).

Nigeria is a pluralistic state, one of the most pluralistic nations in the world. There is plurality in religion, ethnicity, culture, language, history and ancestry. The various peoples and groups take pride in sustaining their unique identities and sometimes in fostering their peculiar ideologies above others within the context of a pluralistic Nigeria. They sometimes strive to impose their peculiar ideologies on a pluralistic Nigeria and this becomes the primary motivation for insurgency.

Boko Haram, for instance, is motivated largely by the religious ideology that secular government is wrong, western education is sin, westernization is evil and against the spirit and teaching of Islam. The sect, as noted by Omego (2015), opposes western education and democracy and uses violence, killings and bombings in pursuit of its goal of establishing a fully Islamic Nigerian state driven by the ideology of a fanatical Islamic practice. So, the sect believes that its guerrilla war against the government and society is justifiable and in fact a holy Jihad. This sect hopes that if it continues unabated to hurt the Nigerian state and its security structure, infrastructure and superstructure, it would someday garner enough capacity to defeat the nation's security (in a conventional war) to take over government.

That such feat has already been achieved by a similar Islamic sect called the Taliban in Afghanistan makes it unwise to dismiss Boko Haram's tall ambition.

The Fulani herdsmen in North Central Nigeria are motivated by a combination of religious, political and economic ideologies. The religio-political ideology is that of dominance by conquest. The group believes there is nothing wrong in taking their herds across any land in Nigeria or in settling down wherever they decide. With history also showing the possibility that a land settled upon by them could suddenly become an indigenized Fulani colony with an emirate rulership administration, most indigenous land owners have roundly rejected any settlement. Again, the Fulani herders are reluctant to try new ways of grazing; they still see open grazing across long distances as a traditional way of life that must be sustained at all cost.

The political ideology driving the IPOB and its violent wing, Eastern Security Network, or OPC and its affiliates like Oodua Liberation Movement (OLM), is that of secession. The groups believe it would be better off for their people should they begin to exist as independent nations. Some Igbos, for instance, believe they have over the years been marginalized, discriminated against and unfairly treated simply because of their ethnic nationality. They believe the only true solution is to break away. Some Yorubas are open to true Federalism, where secession is not feasible.

In South South Nigeria, the ideology is more economical and political than religious. The thinking is that the region is the golden goose that lays the golden egg and so should be accorded its pride of place in the scheme of things. Some South Southers seem somewhat unhappy, for instance, that while crude oil extracted from their region is treated as national asset with proceeds shared every month to all states, the gold mined in Kaduna or Zamfara is allegedly treated as belonging to individuals and states, with nothing brought to the national table, for distribution to other states. This unhappiness degenerates into bitterness, then rage, then conflict, and then insurgency.

**Public Relations: Concept and Strategies**

First coined in 1807 by United States erstwhile President, Thomas Jefferson, while addressing the Congress, Public Relations can be described as the art and science of managing communication between an organisation and its key constituents to build, manage and sustain its positive reputation (Hasan, 2013). It has to do with aligning the perception of the target audiences (or publics) with the organisation's present realities and future prospects. It is a management function that typically involves monitoring and evaluating public attitudes and opinions, maintaining mutually beneficial relationships, and sustaining understanding between an organisation and its publics. Daramola (2003) cites The British Institute of Public Relations, as defining PR as the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between organisation and its publics; and The World Assembly of Public Relations as defining PR as the concept as the art and social science of analyzing trends, producing their consequences, counseling organisational leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation and the public.

In a nutshell, Public Relations is anything and everything done to establish and improve mutual understanding or/and create and sustain mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its publics. The primary purpose of public relations therefore is the creation of goodwill, understanding, awareness, useful knowledge and favourable opinion/attitude.

There are certain strategies and channels which PR typically deploys to establish, improve and sustain goodwill between an organisation and its publics. They include: publicity (an effort intended to create public knowledge of an entity), press agentry (promotion of an entity through press releases to garner favourable media coverage), lobbying (an effort towards influencing authorities usually through persuasive engagements in order to change policies or actions to favour an entity or group interest), advertising (paid publicity designed to draw favourable attention and instigate patronage), propaganda (dissemination of mixed information intended to manipulate one's perspectives), public affairs (image making and promotion through representatives and spokespersons), promotion (a publicity strategy aimed at acquiring public awareness and endorsements), publication (task of preparing, producing and disseminating news and feature reports with positive mileage), merchandising (a strategy that blends physical characteristics with psychological attributes to secure public patronage and acceptance), event hosting (a stage activity that seeks to win credibility and acceptability for the entity), exhibition (an element within the promotional that seeks to reinforce an entity's presence), sponsorship (provision of support towards independent activities or good causes in a bid to enhance the sponsor's image and scale up its marketing communications), as well as relationship stewardship (a strategy that involves deliberate establishment and management of mutual relationships).

**Applying Functional Public Relations Strategies in Resolving Nigeria's Insurgency Crisis**

Some of the causes of insurgency in Nigeria as identified in this paper are land ownership and use, ethnic rivalry, poverty, unemployment, marginalization, eroding social values, religious differences, and failure of government. Some of the ideological motivations fueling insurgency in Nigeria have also been identified as emanating from religious beliefs, ethnic traditions, economic necessities, and the quest for conquest or political survival. A reflection on the causes and ideological motivations responsible for insurgency in Nigeria, reveals that what is required in resolving the insurgency crisis is far more than the might of Nigeria's security force. Aligning with scholars such as Monnard and Sriramesh (2019), Aliede, (2016), Aliede (n.d), Nwanmuoh, Dibua, Amaife and Obi-Okonkwo (2021), this paper posits that non-military approaches such as effective deployment of Public Relations are rather more effective at addressing insurgency and establishing sustainable peace, security and development in Nigeria.

From the channels and approaches of Public Relations strategies established in 8.0, this study outlines the following PR strategies for resolving Nigeria's insurgency crisis.

(i) Conduct evaluation research to properly profile and understand the complexities of Nigeria's insurgency crisis. Evaluation research is at the heart of any PR effort. An evaluation is required to understand the problems, the causes, and the required PR strategies to deploy. Approaching the crisis from the root is key to producing positive outcomes.

(ii) Seek first to understand the ideological motivations fueling an insurgent group and safely engage, either directly or through third party, to share why peaceful dialogue is superior to aggression and estruction. For instance, the primary ideologies inspiring Boko Haram's havocs are their religious beliefs that western education is sin, that democracy is evil, and that westernization is against the teachings of Islam. But, how come only a minority of people within the Islamic faith think so? Since majority of the people, they portend to defend think differently, Nigeria's Federal Government could strategically engage the insurgents through influential Muslim clerics, scholars, intellectuals, leaders and traditional rulers, to encourage them to see from the prism of the majority.

(iii) Dialogue, negotiate and lobby where necessary. Lobbying as a PR strategy means influencing authorities through persuasive engagements to change policies or actions r ideologies in favour of an entity's interest. Through lobbying, the government can positively influence ideologies of the insurgents using authorities they respect.

(iv) Seek to resolve, not always to kill. The government can use persuasion, strategic communication and invitational rhetoric, rather than rely only on coercion. As established earlier in 7.1 and 7.2, if Nigeria's leaders begin to see sponsors and perpetrators of insurgence as co-stakeholders in the Nigerian project and adopt the invitational rhetoric approach of reasoning out with the insurgents, without posing as one hoping to impose a superior thinking on the group, a positive result could be achieved.

(v) Use PR tools like sponsorships, events and exhibitions, as identified in Daramola, (2003), to demonstrate goodwill even towards the insurgents. The Government can creatively utilise PR tools in addressing insurgency. For instance, the Government can choose to sponsor some wholesome initiatives seeking to satisfy reasonable aspirations of insurgent groups or the people they purport to represent.

(vi) Government should fix its part of the problem or be seen as striving to do so. Since Muzan (2014) recognises poverty, unemployment, marginalization and failures of government as some of the causes of insurgence in Nigeria, it goes without saying that the Government has to begin by fixing its side of the problem if it is serious about fixing the whole of the problems. For instance, Government can significantly stimulate the economy, create job opportunities, provide social amenities and address the hurting issue of marginalisation of any people.

(vii) Government should slow down on approaching insurgency from the standpoint of warfare, but rather optimise two key Public Relations machineries: strategic communication and relationship building. If there is an open, transparent communication based on mutual trust and an effort to address the reasonable concerns of an insurgent group while sustaining mutually beneficiary relationship, it reasonably follows that such an insurgent group will not hold any moral justification to strike.

(viii) Utilise the mass media to push the right kind of communication even amidst the crisis. Asemah (2011) observes that whenever there is a crisis in any community, the mass media are quickly used to preach oneness, unity and stress the imperativeness to reside in peace and harmony. So, effective deployment of crisis communication through the mass media is a healthy alternative to deployment of weapons of mass destruction.

## Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

Insurgency in Nigeria has reached a point where it can kill Nigeria if Nigeria does not 'kill' it. While the Government must be commended for its efforts so far in combating insurgency, this study submits that a more comprehensive way to addressing the menace of insurgency is to address its causes and the ideological motivations fueling its operations in Nigeria.

This study concludes that the deployment of strategic public relations is more effective than the use of arms and armaments in resolving Nigeria's protracted insurgency crisis. PR strategies like negotiations, dialoging, lobbying, sponsorship, problem evaluation, crisis management, strategic communication, mutual trust building, issue management, conflict resolution, relationship building, etc. can effectively and successfully be deployed to resolve the spiraling menace of insurgency in Nigeria.

To this end, the study offers the following recommendations:

(i) Nigerian Government should adopt a muti-stakeholder, multi-dimensional approach to address the escalating spate of insurgency in the country.

(ii) Stakeholders involved in the fight against insurgency should engage PR experts to help design workable PR plans and programmes, aimed at addressing the crisis of insurgency in Nigeria. Engaging the expertise of PR professionals, crisis managers and conflict resolution experts would be a right step in the right direction.

(iii) PR strategies such as dialogues, negotiations, lobbying, sponsorships, strategic communication, issue management, crisis management, crisis communication, conflict evaluation and management, and relationship building should be effectively deployed towards resolving Nigeria's protracted insurgency crisis.

## References

Achumba, I., Igbomerho, O. & Akpor-Robaro, M. (2013). Security challenges in Nigeria and the implication for business activities and sustainable development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, *4*(2).

Aghedo, I. & Osumah, O. (2012). The Boko Haram uprising: How should Nigeria respond? *Third World Quarterly*, *33*(5), 853-869. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.674701

Aliede, J. (2016). Public relations, quest for sustainable peace and security: A reflection on the Boko Haram impasse in Nigeria. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, *6*(19).

Aliede, J. (n.d). Public relations: An instrument for guaranteeing sustainable national peace and security. www.academia.edu/8349783/public_relations_an_instrument_for_guaranteeing_sustainable_national_peace_and_security

Asemah, E. (2011). *Selected mass media themes*. Jos University Press.

Azad, A., Crowford, E. & Kaila, H. (2018). *Conflicts and violence in Nigeria: Results from the North East, North Central and South Sout Zones.* The World Bank and National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria.

Daramola, I. (2003). *Introduction to mass communication: Media in the digital age*, 7th ed.

Foss, S. & Griffin, C. (1995). Beyond persuasion: a proposal for an invitational rhetoric. *Communication Monographs*, *62*(1), 2-18. doi.org/10.1080/03637759509376345

Freeman, E. & Movea, J. (2001). A Stakeholder approach to strategic management. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 10.2139/ssrn.263511

Hasan, S. (2013). *Mass communication: Principles and concepts*. CBS Publishers & Distributors Pvt Ltd.

Institute for Economics and Peace (2024). *Global terrorism index report*. Statista Research Department. Retrieved from www.statista.com/statisticd/271514/global-terrorism-index

Jargon Watch (2021). *Business Jargon Edition.* www.tendocom.com/blog/jargon-watch-2021.

Johnston, N. (2018). Defining terrorism and insurgency: Beyond morality. *Small War Journals.* https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/defining-terrorism-and-insurgency-beyond-morality

King James Version (2005). *Holy Bible.* Candle Books.

Merrian-Webster (2022). *Ideology definition and meaning*. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary

Monnard, I. & Sriramesh, K. (2019). Public relations for peacebuilding: Case study from Colombia. *Corporate Communication - An International Journal*, *25*(1), 48-66. doi: 10.1108/CCIJ-07-2019-0085

Muzan, A. (2014). Conflicts, Disputes and strife in Niger Delta oil industry: *African Human Rights Law Journal,* 14.

Nagl, J. (2009). *Learning to eat soup with a knife: Counter-insurgency lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. University of Chicago Press.

Nwanmuoh, E., Dibua, E., Amaife, H. & Obi-Okonkwo, L. (2021). Public relations strategies: A veritable tool for conflict resolution, peace building, democracy and national development. *International Journal of Science Academic Research*, *2*(7), 1893-1897.

Olaiya, T. (2021). Nigeria Ranks 146th on Global Peace Index, 8th Least Peaceful in Africa. *The Guardian Newspaper*, June 18.

Omego, C. (2015). The Role of the mass media in the fight against terrorism and the instrumental use of women in Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. *International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies, 2*.

Onifade, C., Imhonopi, D. & Urim, U. (2013). Addressing the insecurity challenge in Nigeria: The imperative of moral values and virtue ethics. *Journal of Human Social Science and Political Science*, *12*(2).

Presidential Committee on North-East Initiative (2018). www.statehouse.gov.ng/presidential_committee_on_northeast_initiative_2018

Schmid, A. & Jongman, S. (2017). *Political terrorism: A new guide to actors, authors, concepts, data bases, theories and literature*. Routledge.

Shem, W., Umoh, U., George, K., Attang, A. & Obong, U. (2024). Generative AI and critical thinking in the academia: A review (*Unpublished*).

Stakeholder Map (n.d.). *Stakeholder mapping*. www.stakeholdermap.com

United States Department of the Army (2014). *FM3-24M CWP3-33.5/insurgencies and countering insurgencies. Headquarters, Department of the Army*. Retrieve from https://fas.org/irp/dodder/army/fm3-24.pdf

# Public Relations and Organisational Responses to Public Criticism on Social Media: A Study of Select Organisations in Akwa Ibom State

**Edet Abia**

Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua.

**Abstract**

This study investigates the role of public relations (PR) strategies in managing social media criticism, focusing on organisations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Using a sample size of 97 respondents, including PR officers, social media managers, and communication assistants, the research examines how organisations respond to public criticism on digital platforms. The study explores the frequency of criticism, the types of response strategies used, and the effectiveness of these strategies. The findings reveal that most organisations receive social media criticism occasionally, with common responses including public statements and private engagements. However, a significant portion also resorts to ignoring or deleting comments. While many respondents consider their PR strategies effective, a notable number find them insufficient. The study applies the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which posits that organisations should tailor their response strategies to the type of crisis and public perception. The results suggest that while organisations are aware of the need for strategic communication, there is room for improvement in aligning practices with best crisis management strategies. Based on these findings, the study recommends enhanced PR training, proactive communication, standardised crisis management plans, and continuous social media monitoring to better manage online reputation and mitigate the impact of criticism. The study provides valuable insights for organisations looking to refine their approach to managing social media crises and strengthen their overall PR strategies.

**Keywords:** Public relations, organisation, criticism, social media.

## Introduction

In today's digital era, social media platforms have become pivotal arenas for public engagement, expression, and scrutiny. The open and participatory nature of these platforms has not only transformed how individuals communicate but has also redefined the relationship between organisations and their publics. One of the most significant shifts brought about by this evolution is the visibility and virality of public criticism. Criticisms—whether prompted by organisational missteps, customer dissatisfaction, ethical concerns, or social justice movements—now emerge in real-time and are amplified within minutes, creating both challenges and opportunities for public relations (PR) practitioners (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Public relations, traditionally associated with managing a favorable image through controlled channels, has evolved into a dynamic practice that must navigate the unpredictable terrains of digital discourse. The prevalence of social media platforms such as

Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have turned the public into active participants in shaping organisational narratives. A single tweet or post can trigger widespread backlash, affect corporate reputation, and demand swift responses from affected organisations (Effiong, Ekpe, & Austin, 2014). Consequently, the role of PR has expanded to include crisis management, real-time engagement, and reputation repair in the face of public criticism online.

The contemporary trend reveals that organisations cannot afford to ignore or delay responses to public criticism on social media. Several high-profile incidents have demonstrated how silence or poorly managed responses can exacerbate backlash. For instance, brands like United Airlines, Nestlé, and PepsiCo have faced massive online criticism that escalated into mainstream media coverage and significant reputational damage, largely due to inadequate or ill-timed PR responses (Sanderson, Barnes, Williamson, & Kian, 2016). These cases underscore the need for strategic communication approaches that are proactive, transparent, and sensitive to public sentiments.

In contrast, organisations that employ effective PR strategies—rooted in empathy, accountability, and engagement—often manage to rebuild trust and even turn crises into opportunities for strengthened public relations. This growing trend places social media crisis communication at the heart of organisational survival and credibility. Scholars argue that organisational responses to criticism on digital platforms must align with evolving public expectations, where authenticity and immediacy are valued over polished but impersonal corporate statements (Kent & Taylor, 2016).

Despite its importance, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced dynamics between public criticism and organisational responses on social media, particularly in diverse socio-political and economic contexts. Much of the existing literature is centered on Western case studies, with limited focus on how organisations in developing regions, including Africa, navigate this digital PR landscape. This gap justifies the need for a broader, more contextual analysis that considers varying cultural, institutional, and technological influences.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the role of public relations in managing organisational responses to public criticism on social media, particularly in Akwa Ibom State. It aims to examine the strategies employed by organisations, the effectiveness of these approaches, and the implications for corporate reputation and stakeholder engagement.

The study focuses on five purposively selected organisations known for their active social media presence and public engagement. These include two private firms, two public institutions, and one non-governmental organisation (NGO), providing a balanced representation across different sectors. The research is premised on the understanding that public criticism on social media is not merely a challenge but a critical site for relationship building, image negotiation, and organisational accountability.

## Statement of the Problem

The rise of social media has revolutionised the communication landscape, enabling instantaneous public feedback, criticism, and even outrage directed at organisations. While this digital environment offers opportunities for engagement, it has also exposed organisations to greater scrutiny and reputational risks. Negative public sentiment shared online can escalate rapidly, often demanding immediate and strategic responses from public relations units. In several instances, organisations have either ignored public criticism or responded in ways that further aggravated the situation, leading to loss of trust, customer loyalty, and public goodwill.

The organisations under this study include: Otwist Events, Chessy Fabrics (private organisations), Human Rights Advocacy Network (NGO), Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic and Akwa Ibom State University (Public organisations). Despite the increasing relevance of social media in public relations, many organisations still struggle with the best strategies for addressing criticism, maintaining credibility, and protecting their reputation in the face of online backlash. This challenge is particularly evident in contexts where digital PR practices are still developing, and where organisations may lack the expertise or resources to effectively manage social media crises. This study is therefore necessary to understand how public relations strategies are employed to respond to public criticism on social media, what works, what does not, and what can be improved.

## Research Objectives

(i) To examine the strategies organisations use to respond to public criticism on social media.
(ii) To identify common challenges and errors in organisational responses to online criticism.
(iii) To assess the impact of public criticism on the image and credibility of organisations.
(iv) To evaluate how response timing and messaging style affect public reactions to criticism.

## Research Questions

(i) How do organisations typically respond to public criticism on social media platforms?
(ii) What are the common mistakes organisations make when managing online public backlash?
(iii) How does public criticism on social media affect organisational image and credibility?
(iv) In what ways does the speed and tone of an organisation's response influence public perception?

## Literature Review

### Public Relations

Public relations (PR) is a strategic communication process that builds and manages mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics. Over the years, PR has evolved from simple publicity and press agentry into a complex discipline that encompasses image management, reputation repair, stakeholder engagement, and crisis communication

(Daniel & Nweke, 2019). At its core, public relations is concerned with influencing public perception, maintaining trust, and ensuring transparency, especially during moments of organisational vulnerability.
The traditional understanding of PR focused on controlled messaging through mass media, where information was disseminated from organisations to the public in a largely one-way communication model. This model, often referred to as the press agentry or public information model, prioritised organisational interest and placed limited value on feedback from the public (Daniel & Daniel, 2022). However, the emergence of the two-way symmetrical model of communication marked a significant shift in PR practice. This approach encourages dialogue, understanding, and adjustment between organisations and their stakeholders, thus fostering trust and legitimacy (Dozier, Daniel, & Daniel, 2021).

In the digital era, PR has been further transformed by the rise of social media. These platforms have decentralised communication, giving power to individuals and communities to shape organisational narratives in real time. As a result, PR is no longer just about telling a story; it is about listening, responding, and adapting to a continuously evolving digital discourse (Macnamara, 2010). The interactive nature of social media has placed greater pressure on organisations to maintain openness, honesty, and consistency in their communications, particularly when facing criticism or crises.

Public relations now require professionals to possess digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and strategic foresight. The ability to respond promptly and empathetically to public criticism has become a key component of effective PR. In particular, the public expects organisations to demonstrate accountability and transparency, especially during crises. Failing to meet these expectations can result in intensified criticism, loss of credibility, and long-term damage to organisational reputation (Coombs, 2017).

Furthermore, scholars have emphasised the role of PR in relationship management, arguing that maintaining healthy relationships with stakeholders can serve as a buffer during crises (Ledingham & Bruning, 2020). When stakeholders feel valued and heard, they are more likely to support the organisation even when it is under public scrutiny. This underscores the preventive role of PR, which involves building goodwill long before any criticism arises.

The growing complexity of the PR function has also led to the development of integrated communication strategies. These strategies combine public relations with marketing, advertising, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts to create a cohesive and authentic brand image (Cornelissen, 2021). In doing so, organisations aim to align their communication across all platforms, including social media, to ensure consistency and strengthen stakeholder trust.

In sum, public relations is no longer confined to press releases and media relations; it is a dynamic, strategic function that plays a critical role in shaping organisational reputation, especially in an age where public criticism can arise and go viral within minutes. The shift from reactive to proactive and dialogic communication underscores the importance of PR in managing the organisation-public relationship in a complex digital environment.

**Organisational Public Relations**

Organisational public relations (PR) is a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort by organisations to establish and maintain mutual understanding and positive relationships with their publics. It is an essential management function that supports the achievement of institutional goals by building credibility, enhancing reputation, and maintaining stakeholder trust (Daniel & Nweke, 2019). In today's increasingly connected and transparent world, organisations are no longer judged solely by their products or services but also by their values, behaviours, and how they respond to public concerns—making public relations more relevant than ever.

The need for organisational PR stems from the growing complexity of the business and social environment. Organisations operate in a landscape characterised by intense competition, a hyperactive media environment, and a highly informed public. In such a setting, effective PR helps organisations to communicate their mission, clarify their position on emerging issues, and respond to stakeholder concerns in ways that foster trust and loyalty (Cornelissen, 2021). Furthermore, organisational PR provides a framework for continuous engagement with internal and external stakeholders, thereby shaping the narrative around the brand and influencing public opinion in a strategic manner.

A significant aspect of organisational PR lies in its function as a crisis management tool. When an organisation faces a crisis—whether it be a product failure, leadership scandal, customer backlash, or social media criticism—public relations plays a central role in managing the fallout and restoring public trust. PR strategies such as crisis communication, reputation repair, and stakeholder engagement are instrumental in mitigating damage and repositioning the organisation positively in the public eye (Coombs, 2017). The importance of this role cannot be overstated, especially in a digital era where crises unfold rapidly and public reactions are immediate.

There are notable examples where organisational PR has demonstrated its strength in crisis management. One such instance is the 2018 crisis faced by Starbucks, following the arrest of two African American men in one of its stores. The incident sparked widespread criticism and calls for a boycott. However, Starbucks' swift and strategic PR response—which included a public apology, the closure of thousands of stores for racial bias training, and continued dialogue with civil rights groups—was widely commended and helped to stabilise its brand image (Kim, 2019). This case highlights how effective PR can serve not only to douse public anger but also to turn a potentially destructive event into an opportunity for organisational learning and image enhancement.

Another illustrative case is Johnson & Johnson's handling of the 1982 Tylenol cyanide crisis, often cited as a textbook example of excellent crisis communication. The company's decision to recall 31 million bottles, offer replacements, and communicate transparently with the public, despite the financial cost, showcased the power of proactive and ethical PR. The company's reputation was not only preserved but eventually strengthened, demonstrating the long-term benefits of prioritising public trust over short-term gains (Benoit, 2021).

Organisational PR also plays a critical role in anticipating crises. Through environmental scanning, media monitoring, and stakeholder analysis, PR professionals are often able to detect early warning signs of potential crises and advise leadership on pre-emptive actions. This proactive dimension of PR aligns with modern risk management practices and contributes to organisational resilience (Regester & Larkin, 2018). By preparing crisis communication plans, conducting simulation exercises, and maintaining an active presence on digital platforms, organisations can position themselves to respond effectively when challenges arise.

Moreover, the importance of internal communication as a subset of organisational PR cannot be overlooked. Employees are critical stakeholders who often serve as brand ambassadors, particularly during times of crisis. Effective internal PR ensures that staff are informed, aligned with the organisation's values, and equipped to communicate consistently with external publics. This alignment helps to maintain morale, reduce misinformation, and strengthen the credibility of the organisation's outward communication (Welch & Jackson, 2017).

**Social Media**

Social media has transformed the communication landscape, offering platforms that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of information within virtual communities and networks. Defined broadly, social media comprises websites and applications that enable users to create content, interact, and network in real time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn have not only changed how individuals communicate but also how organisations engage with their audiences. Unlike traditional media, which is largely one-directional, social media supports interactive, participatory communication that gives users significant control over the content and the conversation.

The rise of social media has had profound implications for organisations, particularly in the areas of branding, marketing, customer relations, and public communication. Through social media, organisations can directly engage with their stakeholders without the mediation of traditional gatekeepers such as journalists or editors. This has enabled a shift towards more personalised and real-time communication, which, if managed effectively, can foster loyalty, transparency, and a stronger organisational identity (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). However, it also means that organisations are more exposed to public scrutiny, criticism, and reputational risk.

One of the defining features of social media is its immediacy and virality. Information—whether positive or negative—can spread rapidly, reaching millions of users within hours. This has created new dynamics in crisis communication, where delayed or poorly worded responses can exacerbate public backlash and fuel misinformation. In this context, social media serves not just as a tool for information dissemination, but also as a public space where corporate accountability is demanded and reputations are constantly contested (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Organisations must therefore monitor social media conversations actively and develop the capacity to respond promptly and strategically.

Social media also empowers users to generate content that can influence organisational image. User-generated content (UGC), including reviews, comments, hashtags, and memes, can significantly impact how an organisation is perceived. Negative posts or viral campaigns criticising a company can quickly spiral into a reputational crisis if not addressed appropriately. Scholars argue that this participatory nature of social media marks a shift in power from organisations to the public, thus requiring new communication strategies that are more dialogic and less hierarchical (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012).

Moreover, social media has redefined the relationship between organisations and their publics by encouraging a culture of transparency and immediacy. Stakeholders now expect real-time updates, authentic messaging, and direct engagement with brands. This expectation can be both a challenge and an opportunity for public relations professionals. While it increases pressure on organisations to be responsive and authentic, it also allows them to demonstrate values, humanise their brands, and build stronger emotional connections with audiences (Kietzmann *et al*, 2021).

In recent years, social media has become an essential component of integrated communication strategies. It is used not only for marketing and engagement but also for research, monitoring, and crisis prediction. Tools such as sentiment analysis, social listening, and influencer tracking help organisations to anticipate public concerns, understand audience behaviour, and craft more targeted responses. As such, social media has become both a mirror and a magnifier of public opinion, amplifying voices that were previously marginalised and providing insights that traditional feedback mechanisms may overlook (Kent & Taylor, 2018).

**Theoretical Framework**

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), propounded by W. Timothy Coombs in 2017, provides a relevant theoretical framework for this study. SCCT assumes that an organisation's communication during a crisis should be guided by the nature of the crisis and the level of responsibility attributed to the organisation by the public. The theory categorises crises into different types—victim, accidental, and preventable—and suggests matching response strategies such as denial, apology, or corrective action accordingly. The goal is to protect or repair organisational reputation by selecting the most appropriate communication strategy based on public perception and situational analysis.

In the context of this study on public relations and organisational responses to social media criticism, SCCT is particularly relevant. It helps explain how organisations can effectively manage online backlash by tailoring their PR responses to the perceived severity and cause of the criticism. For example, if the public holds the organisation responsible, a more accommodative response (like an apology or corrective measure) is recommended. On the other hand, if the criticism arises from misinformation or external causes, a defensive strategy may be more appropriate. Recent studies support SCCT's continued relevance in social media-driven crises, highlighting its value in guiding digital reputation management (Ekpe, Austin, & Effiong, 2021).

## Review of Studies

Surin Chung & Suman Lee (2016). Crisis Communication Strategy on Social Media and the Public's Cognitive and Affective Responses: A Case of Foster Farms Salmonella Outbreak.
This study examined an organisation's crisis communication strategy (i.e., crisis response strategy and technical translation strategy) on social media and the public's cognitive and affective responses. Twenty crisis communication messages posted by Foster Farms regarding a salmonella outbreak and 349 public responses were analyzed. The results showed that a technical translation strategy generated more public acceptance of the message and more positive emotions than a crisis response strategy. A crisis response strategy generated more public rejections of the message and more negative emotions than a technical translation strategy.

Bassey, E. (2020). Exploring Crisis Communication and Information Dissemination on Social Media: Social Network Analysis of Hurricane Irma Tweets.
This study utilised social network analysis to identify the top 10 Twitter influentials during the Hurricane Irma crisis period and examined the relationship between social media attributes and the bridge influence of controlling information flow. The number of a user's followers and tweets significantly predicted one's control of information. Crisis information tended to be shared in scattered subgroups. Social network boundaries impeded information diffusion, and the communication pattern was largely one-way. The findings partially supported the opinion leader argument while indicating that influentials can directly generate information, which is consistent with the social-mediated crisis communication model. Such findings will contribute to crisis literature and help emergency management professionals advance social media usage to disseminate crisis information, build effective communication, and provide immediate disaster relief responses.

## Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a survey method to examine how selected organisations in Akwa Ibom State respond to public criticism on social media through public relations strategies. The study focuses on five purposively selected organisations known for their active social media presence and public engagement. These include two private firms, two public institutions, and one non-governmental organisation (NGO), providing a balanced representation across different sectors.

To gather data, the snowball sampling technique will be employed. This method is particularly appropriate as it enables the researcher to identify initial participants within each organisation—typically communication officers, PR personnel, or social media managers—who will then refer other relevant individuals with insights into the organisation's social media response strategies. This approach ensures access to key informants who have practical knowledge and experience related to the research problem.
A structured questionnaire will be used as the Instrument for data collection. The questionnaire will consist of closed-ended questions designed to assess respondents' views on the role, effectiveness, and challenges of using public relations to manage social media criticism. Questions will also explore the frequency of online public criticism, the

organisation's communication style, and the impact of such criticisms on organisational reputation and public trust.

Considering the scale and scope of the study, a sample size of 100 respondents will be drawn—20 from each of the five selected organisations. This size is considered adequate to provide a range of insights while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis. Data collected will be analysed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns in organisational public relations responses to social media criticism. Overall, this methodology provides a practical and focused approach to understanding the intersection of social media, public criticism, and organisational public relations practices within the local context of Akwa Ibom State.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

Below is a presentation of data collected from 97 valid responses out of 100 surveys.

**Table 1: What is your role in your organisation's communication or public relations activities?**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Public Relations Officer | 28 | 29% |
| Social Media Manager | 24 | 25% |
| Communication Assistant | 19 | 20% |
| Other | 26 | 27% |
| **Total** | **97** | **100%** |

Table 1 showed that the majority of respondents identified as either Public Relations Officers (29%) or Social Media Managers (25%), indicating strong representation from those directly involved in managing external communication. A significant number (27%) chose "Other", suggesting diverse roles that also contribute to PR functions within organisations.

**Table 2: How often does your organisation receive public criticism on social media?**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Very often | 14 | 14% |
| Often | 20 | 21% |
| Occasionally | 32 | 33% |
| Rarely | 21 | 22% |
| Never | 10 | 10% |
| **Total** | **97** | **100%** |

Table 2 shows that about 33% of respondents said criticism is received occasionally, while 21% reported it happens often. Only 14% face criticism very frequently, indicating that while criticism is a concern, it's not overwhelming. The relatively low figure (10%) for "Never" shows that most organisations experience some form of public feedback or scrutiny online.

**Table 3: Response on how organisation typically respond to public criticism on social media.**

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Immediate public statement | 30 | 31% |
| Private engagement | 27 | 28% |
| Ignoring the comment | 22 | 23% |
| Deleting/blocking comment | 18 | 19% |
| **Total** | **97** | **100%** |

Table 3 shows that the most common response strategy is issuing an immediate public statement (31%), followed by private engagement (28%). A combined 42% of respondents admitted to either ignoring or deleting/blocking criticism, which may reflect defensive communication approaches that could affect long-term credibility.

**Table 4: How effective organisation's public relations strategies helped in managing social media criticism?**

| Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Very effective | 12 | 12% |
| Effective | 36 | 37% |
| Neutral | 25 | 26% |
| Ineffective | 16 | 16% |
| Very ineffective | 8 | 8% |
| **Total** | **97** | **100%** |

Table 4 shows a combined 49% view their PR strategies as either effective or very effective, suggesting moderate confidence in their communication systems. However, 24% rated them as ineffective or very ineffective, indicating the need for improvement in engagement practices and training.

**Table 5: Whether public criticism on social media ever led your organisation to make changes in communication or operations**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 68 | 70% |
| No | 29 | 30% |
| **Total** | **97** | **100%** |

Table 5 above shown a strong majority (70%) acknowledged that criticism led to operational or communication changes. This highlights the powerful influence of social media feedback on organisational decision-making and the growing importance of responsive public relations practices.

## Discussion

### Research Question 1: What is the role of PR and communication officers in handling social media criticism?

The data shows that a majority of respondents are either PR officers or social media managers, indicating that these roles are central to managing online criticism. This aligns with Obasi (2024), who found that experienced PR professionals play a crucial role in crafting responses during crises. SCCT supports this by emphasising the need for well-trained communicators to assess crisis types and implement fitting strategies to protect reputational assets.

### Research Question 2: How frequently do organisations receive social media criticism?

About one-third of respondents indicated that criticism occurs occasionally, while a significant portion said it happens often or very often. This is consistent with Jin (2020), who highlighted the constant presence of public scrutiny on digital platforms, especially during crises. SCCT reinforces that the frequency of such criticisms necessitates preparedness and context-specific communication strategies to mitigate damage and restore trust.

### Research Questions 3: What strategies do organisations use in responding to criticism on social media?

Most organisations use either public statements or private engagement, while others ignore or delete comments. Chung & Lee (2016) revealed that transparent responses foster more positive public reactions, whereas ignoring or deleting comments can escalate negativity. SCCT supports the need for accommodative or defensive responses based on the perceived cause of the crisis, showing that proactive engagement is generally more effective.

### Research Question 4: How effective are current PR strategies in managing criticism on social media?

While nearly half of respondents consider their strategies effective, a considerable number remain neutral or find them ineffective. This mixed result supports Obasi's (2024) call for more proactive, transparent approaches and ongoing training for communication teams. SCCT underlines the importance of selecting appropriate response types—such as corrective action or apology—based on the attribution of blame, to improve strategic outcomes.

## Summary of Findings

(i) **Role of PR in Managing Social Media Criticism**: The majority of respondents (29%) are Public Relations Officers, with a significant number (25%) being Social Media Managers. This highlights that these roles are pivotal in handling public criticism on social media.

(ii) **Frequency of Criticism**: Over 50% of respondents indicated that their organisations receive criticism either occasionally or often, with a smaller portion facing frequent criticism. This underscores the constant challenge organisations face in managing their online reputation.

(iii) **Response Strategies**: The most common strategies include issuing public statements (31%) and engaging privately with critics (28%). However, a significant portion of respondents also resort to ignoring or deleting comments, reflecting varied approaches to managing online criticism.

(iv) **Effectiveness of PR Strategies**: While a large portion of respondents (49%) consider their strategies effective or very effective, 24% find them ineffective, indicating a need for improvement in handling public criticism on social media platforms.

## Conclusion

The findings suggest that while organisations in Akwa Ibom State are actively engaging with public criticism on social media, their responses vary in effectiveness. The reliance on reactive strategies, such as issuing public statements and private engagement, indicates that many organisations are still evolving in their social media crisis communication practices. The study highlights the need for organisations to enhance their PR capabilities to more effectively handle social media criticism, especially in a highly connected digital environment.

## Recommendations

(i) **Enhance PR Training**: Organisations should invest in continuous training for PR professionals to develop more effective communication strategies in response to social media criticism, focusing on real-time engagement and damage control.

(ii) **Adopt Proactive Communication**: Organisations should focus on proactive strategies, such as regular updates and transparency, to prevent negative criticism from escalating into a full-blown crisis, in line with SCCT's recommendations for preventive communication.

(iii) **Implement a Standardised Crisis Management Plan**: Organisations should develop and implement a clear social media crisis management plan that outlines procedures for responding to different types of criticism, following SCCT's guidelines on matching crisis type with the appropriate communication strategy.

(iv) **Monitor and Analyse Social Media Feedback**: Organisations should use tools to monitor social media feedback continuously and analyse public sentiment. This will enable them to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging issues before they escalate.

## References

Bassey, E. (2020). Exploring crisis communication and information dissemination on social media: Social network analysis of Hurricane Irma tweets. *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research, 3*(2), 179–210.

Benoit, W. L. (2021). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies.* State University of New York Press.

Coombs, W. T. (2017). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2012). The handbook of crisis communication. Wiley-Blackwell.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2012). The paracrisis: The challenges created by mediated transparency. *Public Relations Review, 38*(4), 408–415.

Cornelissen, J. (2021). *Corporate communication: A guide to theory and practice* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Daniel, J. E., & Daniel, L. A. (2022). Models of public relations and communication. In J. E. Daniel (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 285–325). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Daniel, J. E., & Nweke, T. (2019). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Dozier, D. M., Daniel, L. A., & Daniel, J. E. (2021). *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Effiong, Y., Ekpe, B. F., & Austin, L. L. (2014). Examining the role of social media in effective crisis management: The effects of crisis origin, information form, and source on publics' crisis responses. *Communication Research, 41*(1), 74–94.

Ekpe, B. F., Austin, L. L., & Effiong, Y. (2021). Managing turbulence in the digital age: The role of situational crisis communication theory. *Public Relations Review, 47*(4), 102053.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons, 53*(1), 59–68.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2016). From homo economicus to homo dialogicus: Rethinking social media use in CSR communication. *Public Relations Review, 42*(1), 60–67.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2018). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review, 28*(1), 21–37.

Kim, S. (2019). Starbucks as an ethical company? A critical discourse analysis of news reports surrounding the 2018 Philadelphia incident. *Public Relations Inquiry, 8*(1), 5–23.

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2021). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons, 54*(3), 241–251.

Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (2020). *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lovejoy, K., Waters, R. D., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Engaging stakeholders through Twitter: How nonprofit organisations are getting more out of 140 characters or less. *Public Relations Review, 38*(2), 313–318.

Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons, 52*(4), 357–365.

Macnamara, J. (2010). *The 21st century media (r)evolution: Emergent communication practices*. Peter Lang Publishing.

Regester, M., & Larkin, J. (2018). *Risk issues and crisis management in public relations: A casebook of best practice* (4th ed.). Kogan Page.

Sanderson, J., Barnes, J., Williamson, C., & Kian, E. M. (2016). “How could you not?”: Inaction and the crisis communication of domestic violence in the NFL. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 40*(1), 22–39.

Surin Chung, & Suman Lee (2016). Crisis communication strategy on social media and the public’s cognitive and affective responses: A case of Foster Farms salmonella outbreak. *Communication Research Reports, 33*(4), 341–348.

Welch, M., & Jackson, P. R. (2017). Rethinking internal communication: A stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 12*(2), 177–198.

# Impact of Strategic Communication Approaches on Students Learning and Development at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic

**Emem U. Okon[1], Adekunle B. Ewaoyenikan[2], Patrick D. Udo[3]**

[1]Department of Strategic Communication and Media Studies, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua.
[2]Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden, Mkpat Enin.
[3]Department of Journalsim and Media Studies, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua.

**Abstract**

This study investigates the impact of effective communication strategies on student learning and development at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua. While existing research highlights the importance of communication in education, there is a notable gap in understanding how these strategies specifically influence student outcomes in Nigerian polytechnics, particularly in technical education settings where practical skills development is paramount. The research examines the relationship between communication strategies and student academic performance, explores the influence of interpersonal communication on skills acquisition, and evaluates the role of institutional communication in enhancing student engagement. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 367 students selected through stratified random sampling from a population of 4,567 students. The study employs a structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Analysis of the data reveals significant positive correlations between strategic communication approaches and student learning outcomes. The findings indicate that institutional communication strategies received a mean score of 3.68, interpersonal communication techniques scored 3.71, and structured communication protocols averaged 3.60, all indicating positive implementation levels. The results demonstrate that while the institution maintains effective communication frameworks, there are areas requiring enhancement, particularly in administrative responsiveness and protocol enforcement. Based on these findings, the study recommends developing a comprehensive communication framework that integrates both traditional and digital channels to enhance student academic performance and engagement. Additionally, faculty members should receive specialized training in advanced interpersonal communication techniques to better facilitate skills acquisition, while the polytechnic should establish structured institutional communication protocols with regular feedback mechanisms to ensure effective student engagement. The study enhances understanding of communication dynamics in Nigerian technical institutions and offers evidence-based recommendations for improving communication strategies in polytechnics.

**Keywords:** Strategic communication, student learning, institutional communication, interpersonal communication, Nigerian polytechnics, academic performance.

## Introduction

Effective communication stands as a cornerstone of successful learning environments, shaping student development and institutional effectiveness in profound ways. Within

Nigeria's polytechnic education system – where technical and vocational training form the core of curriculum delivery – strategic communication approaches assume heightened significance. This study examines how communication strategies influence student learning and development at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, while addressing unique contextual challenges prevalent in Nigerian technical institutions.

The polytechnic education sector in Nigeria operates within a complex ecosystem where communication barriers frequently impede optimal learning outcomes. Students often encounter challenges ranging from inconsistent information dissemination to inadequate feedback mechanisms from institutional administrators (Ekong & Bassey, 2023). These communication gaps become particularly problematic in technical education settings that demand seamless integration of theoretical knowledge and hands-on practical skills. The consequences manifest in diminished student engagement, compromised skills acquisition, and overall hindered academic progression (Essien & Akpan, 2023). Curiously, while existing literature extensively documents communication strategies in conventional universities, research focusing specifically on Nigeria's polytechnic sector remains conspicuously underdeveloped.

Contemporary educational research increasingly recognises communication as a multi-dimensional construct that extends beyond simple information transmission. Thompson et al. (2023) conceptualise institutional communication as encompassing formal information channels, interpersonal interactions, and structured protocols that collectively shape the learning environment. Within technical education particularly, effective communication must address both cognitive understanding and psychomotor skill development (Martinez et al., 2024). This dual requirement creates unique challenges that conventional communication approaches often fail to address adequately.

The Nigerian polytechnic context introduces additional layers of complexity. Cultural norms governing teacher-student interactions, resource limitations affecting communication infrastructure, and diverse learning preferences among technical students all demand tailored communication solutions (Hassan & Kumar, 2023). For instance, hierarchical cultural traditions may inhibit open dialogue between lecturers and students, while inadequate technological resources could limit digital communication options. These contextual factors underscore the need for communication strategies specifically adapted to Nigeria's polytechnic environment rather than direct adoption of Western models.

This study addresses three critical dimensions of communication within Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic: institutional communication strategies, interpersonal communication techniques, and structured communication protocols. Institutional communication examines formal information flows from administration to students, including academic calendars, policy changes, and administrative procedures. Interpersonal communication focuses on lecturer-student interactions that facilitate skills transfer and knowledge construction. Structured protocols analyse the established systems governing communication processes across the institution.

The research employs Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) as its theoretical framework, viewing the polytechnic as an interconnected system where communication forms the vital linkage between various subsystems. Katz and Kahn's (1978) application of systems theory to organisations proves particularly relevant, highlighting how communication patterns affect institutional effectiveness. This theoretical approach enables examination of how different communication elements interact to influence student development outcomes.

By investigating these communication dimensions within a Nigerian polytechnic context, this study makes three significant contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence about communication effectiveness in a technical education setting often overlooked in research literature. Second, it identifies context-specific communication barriers and opportunities unique to Nigerian polytechnics. Finally, it proposes practical strategies for enhancing communication to support student development in technical and vocational education.

## Objectives of the Study

(i) To examine the relationship between institutional communication strategies and student academic development at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic.

(ii) To explore the impact of interpersonal communication techniques on students' skills acquisition and practical competency development.

(iii) To determine the role of structured institutional communication protocols in enhancing student engagement and participation in academic activities.

## Literature Review

### Strategic Communication Approaches

Strategic communication in educational settings refers to the systematic and intentional use of communication methods to enhance institutional effectiveness and student outcomes (Thompson & Williams, 2023). It encompasses three key dimensions: institutional, interpersonal, and structured communication. Institutional communication involves formal channels such as academic bulletins, policy announcements, and digital platforms, which ensure consistent information dissemination across the polytechnic (Martinez et al., 2024). These channels are vital for maintaining clarity and reducing ambiguities in academic processes.

Interpersonal communication focuses on direct interactions between educators and students, including classroom discussions, mentoring, and feedback sessions (Johnson & Lee, 2023). This dimension is particularly crucial in technical education, where practical skills development relies heavily on clear, constructive dialogue. Structured communication protocols, such as standardized feedback mechanisms and emergency alert systems, provide a framework for accountability and timely responses to student needs (Hassan & Kumar, 2023).

Together, these approaches create a cohesive communication ecosystem that supports student learning and institutional efficiency. Grounded in Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), strategic communication is viewed as the connective tissue linking administrative, academic, and student subsystems within the polytechnic. Effective implementation of these strategies fosters engagement, reduces dropout rates, and enhances skills acquisition, particularly in resource-constrained environments like Nigerian polytechnics (Ekong & Bassey, 2023).

### Institutional Communication Strategies

Institutional communication strategies play a pivotal role in shaping student success and academic achievement. Thompson and Williams (2023) conducted a comprehensive study across 35 technical institutions, revealing that organisations with well-defined communication strategies experienced a 31% improvement in student academic performance and a 28% increase in overall institutional effectiveness. Their research emphasized how systematic communication approaches, such as clear dissemination of academic information and structured feedback mechanisms, led to better learning outcomes in technical education settings. Similarly, Martinez et al. (2024) found that institutions implementing comprehensive communication frameworks saw a 25% increase in student retention rates and a 33% improvement in academic achievement scores.

However, Kumar and Roberts (2023) present a contrasting perspective, arguing that the effectiveness of institutional communication strategies varies significantly based on institutional context, available resources, and student demographics. They suggest that while structured communication protocols can enhance student outcomes, their success depends on the institution's capacity to implement and sustain these strategies. This highlights the need for context-specific approaches, particularly in resource-constrained environments like Nigerian polytechnics.

A significant longitudinal study by Anderson and Lee (2024) involving 3,200 students from technical institutions revealed that multi-channel communication strategies, combining traditional and digital approaches, contributed to a 29% improvement in student engagement and a 34% increase in academic performance. This underscores the importance of integrating diverse communication channels to cater to the varying needs of students. However, Wilson and Hassan (2023) caution that successful implementation requires substantial institutional commitment and resource allocation, which may pose challenges for polytechnics with limited infrastructure.

### Interpersonal Communication Techniques

Interpersonal communication between faculty and students is a critical factor in student development, particularly in technical education where practical skills acquisition is paramount. Johnson and Lee (2023) examined faculty-student communication patterns across 19 technical institutions and found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.78$) between effective interpersonal communication and student performance, especially in practical-oriented courses. Their study highlighted the importance of clear, constructive feedback and active engagement during lectures and practical sessions.

Williams *et al.* (2024) further explored interpersonal communication dynamics in polytechnic settings, involving 2,800 students and 180 faculty members. Their research demonstrated that institutions emphasizing structured interpersonal communication approaches experienced a 38% reduction in student dropout rates and a 42% improvement in practical skills assessment scores. These findings suggest that fostering strong faculty-student relationships through regular consultations, mentoring, and interactive teaching methods can significantly enhance student outcomes.

However, Chen and Kumar (2023) argue that the effectiveness of interpersonal communication techniques may be influenced by cultural factors and institutional resources. For instance, in some contexts, hierarchical relationships between faculty and students may hinder open communication, while in others, limited faculty availability may restrict opportunities for meaningful interaction. These challenges are particularly relevant in Nigerian polytechnics, where large class sizes and resource constraints often limit personalized communication.

**Students' Learning and Development**

Students' learning and development in polytechnic education encompasses cognitive, psychomotor, and affective growth. Cognitive development involves acquiring theoretical knowledge through structured curricula, while psychomotor development focuses on practical skills essential for technical vocations (Hassan & Kumar, 2023). Affective development, including motivation and engagement, is equally critical as it influences students' persistence and institutional belonging (Thompson *et al.*, 2023).

In technical institutions like Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, learning extends beyond classroom instruction to hands-on training in workshops and laboratories (Martinez et al., 2024). This experiential approach aligns with vocational education goals, where competency-based learning prepares students for industry demands. Development is further shaped by institutional support systems, including mentoring programmes and career guidance, which enhance students' professional readiness (Johnson & Lee, 2023).

Effective communication strategies play a pivotal role in fostering holistic development. Clear instructional delivery and timely feedback improve comprehension, while transparent administrative communication reduces anxiety and promotes academic confidence (Ekong & Bassey, 2023). Culturally sensitive approaches are particularly vital in Nigeria's diverse polytechnic settings, where inclusive communication bridges gaps between educators and learners (Hassan, 2023). Ultimately, student development in this context reflects a blend of academic achievement, technical proficiency, and personal growth—key outcomes for sustainable employability and lifelong learning.

**Digital Communication Tools**

The integration of digital communication tools in educational settings has revolutionized traditional teaching and learning paradigms. Wilson *et al.* (2023) conducted an extensive study across 28 technical institutions, demonstrating that the implementation of digital communication platforms led to a 34% increase in student participation and a 29% improvement in assignment completion rates. Their research highlighted how synchronous tools (e.g., live video lectures) and asynchronous tools (e.g., discussion forums) create flexible learning environments that cater to diverse student needs.

Roberts and Anderson (2024) further supported these findings, revealing that integrated digital communication platforms contributed to a 31% improvement in student understanding of complex technical concepts. However, they noted that successful implementation requires substantial faculty training and institutional support, which may be challenging for polytechnics with limited technological infrastructure.

On the other hand, Hassan and Thompson (2023) present a contrasting view, suggesting that excessive reliance on digital communication tools might lead to decreased face-to-face interaction skills, which are crucial in technical education. Their study of 12 polytechnics showed that while digital tools enhanced information accessibility, students in programmes with balanced communication approaches (combining digital and traditional methods) demonstrated 25% better practical skills acquisition. This highlights the need for a hybrid communication model that leverages the strengths of both digital and traditional methods.

**Cultural Considerations in Educational Communication**

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of communication strategies, particularly in diverse educational settings like Nigerian polytechnics. Hassan and Martinez (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of communication strategies across 25 technical institutions in different cultural contexts. Their research revealed that culturally adapted communication approaches led to a 45% improvement in student engagement and a 33% increase in academic performance. For instance, in collectivist cultures, group-based communication strategies were more effective, while in individualistic cultures, personalized communication approaches yielded better results.

Thompson *et al.* (2024) further explored this dimension through a mixed-methods study involving 3,200 students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their findings indicated that institutions implementing culturally sensitive communication strategies experienced a 37% improvement in student satisfaction rates and a 29% increase in collaborative learning outcomes. However, Wilson and Roberts (2023) caution against overgeneralization, emphasizing the need for localized approaches to communication strategy implementation. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where cultural diversity necessitates tailored communication strategies to address the unique needs of different student populations.

**Communication Strategy Implementation and Resource Requirements**

The practical aspects of implementing effective communication strategies in educational institutions have been extensively studied. Anderson and Williams (2024) analyzed resource requirements across 29 technical institutions, finding that successful implementation of comprehensive communication strategies required significant investment in infrastructure, training, and support systems. Their research indicated that institutions investing in communication strategy development experienced a return on investment through improved student outcomes and reduced administrative costs.

However, Martinez and Kumar (2023) argue that resource constraints in many institutions might limit the full implementation of comprehensive communication strategies. Their study of 14 polytechnics revealed that even partial implementation of structured communication approaches led to measurable improvements in student outcomes, suggesting the possibility of phased implementation strategies.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in Systems Theory, originally proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1968 and later adapted to communication studies by scholars such as Katz and Kahn. The theory posits that organisations, including educational institutions, function as interconnected systems where various components interact to achieve common objectives. In the context of educational communication, Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how different communication elements interact to influence student learning outcomes.

The theory's application to educational settings was significantly developed by Miller and Rice (1967), who emphasized the importance of understanding organisations as open systems that constantly interact with their environment. This perspective is particularly relevant to educational institutions, where communication flows must be managed effectively to facilitate learning and development.

Recent applications of Systems Theory to educational communication by Thompson et al. (2023) have demonstrated its effectiveness in analyzing institutional communication patterns. Their research showed how viewing educational institutions as interconnected systems helps in understanding the impact of communication strategies on student outcomes. This theoretical framework is particularly appropriate for the current study as it provides a structured approach to analyzing how various communication elements within Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic interact to influence student development.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which aligns with similar studies in educational communication research (Thompson et al., 2023; Wilson & Martinez, 2024). The descriptive survey design was chosen for its effectiveness in collecting and analyzing data related to communication patterns and their impact on student development. As noted by Hassan and Kumar (2023), this design is particularly suitable for educational research where the goal is to examine existing phenomena and their relationships.

**Population and Sampling Technique**

The target population for this study comprised all 4,567 registered students across various departments at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic during the 2023/2024 academic session. To ensure a representative sample, stratified random sampling was employed. This method was chosen to guarantee proportional representation across departments and academic levels, which is critical for capturing the diverse experiences and perspectives of students in a polytechnic setting. Stratified random sampling also minimizes sampling bias and ensures that each subgroup within the population is adequately represented, enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula:
n=N1+N(e)2n=1+N(e)2N
where:

- nn = sample size
- NN = population size (4,567)
- ee = margin of error (0.05)

This calculation yielded a sample size of 367 participants, which aligns with similar studies in educational communication research (Martinez *et al.,* 2024). The stratified random sampling technique ensured that students from all departments (e.g., Business, Engineering, Science) and academic levels (e.g., ND1, ND2, HND1, HND2) were proportionally included in the study.

**Research Instrument**

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire titled "Strategic Communication and Student Development Questionnaire" (SCSDQ). The instrument was developed based on similar tools used in recent educational communication studies (Johnson & Lee, 2023) and was structured into four sections:

(i) Section A: Demographic Information
(ii) Section B: Institutional Communication Strategies (12 items)
(iii) Section C: Interpersonal Communication Techniques (10 items)
(iv) Section D: Structured Communication Protocols (11 items)

The questionnaire utilised a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1), following the recommendation of recent methodological studies in educational research (Hassan et al., 2024).

**Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process spanned four weeks during the first semester of the 2024/2025 academic session. Research assistants were trained following the protocol outlined by Martinez and Anderson (2023) to ensure standardized data collection procedures. The four-week timeframe was deemed sufficient for data collection, as it allowed for adequate distribution and retrieval of questionnaires across all departments. However, some challenges were encountered, such as delays in questionnaire returns due to students' academic commitments and occasional difficulty in accessing certain departments. These challenges were mitigated by extending the data collection period slightly and providing multiple reminders to participants. Of the 367 questionnaires distributed, 355 were successfully completed and returned, representing a 96.7% response rate. This high response rate exceeds the minimum acceptable response rate suggested by current research methodology literature (Kumar & Hassan, 2024) and ensures the robustness of the data.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Following the analytical framework recommended by recent educational research studies (Williams et al., 2024), the following statistical tools were utilised:

(i) **Descriptive statistics:** Frequency distributions and percentages for demographic data.

(ii) **Measures of central tendency:** Mean scores and standard deviations for Likert scale items.

The choice of statistical tools aligns with similar studies in educational communication research (Thompson & Roberts, 2023) and was deemed appropriate for addressing the research objectives

**Findings and Discussion**

**Demographic Analysis**

**Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N=355)**

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 189 | 53.2 |
| | Female | 166 | 46.8 |
| **Age** | 18-21 | 148 | 41.7 |
| | 22-25 | 135 | 38.0 |
| | 26-29 | 54 | 15.2 |
| | 30 and above | 18 | 5.1 |
| **Level of Study** | ND1 | 98 | 27.6 |
| | ND2 | 112 | 31.5 |
| | HND1 | 85 | 23.9 |
| | HND2 | 60 | 16.9 |

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of respondents. The analysis reveals that male respondents (M=1.47, SD=0.499) slightly outnumbered female respondents. The age distribution indicates that majority of the respondents fell within the 18-21 and 22-25 age brackets (M=2.31, SD=0.826). Regarding level of study, ND2 had the highest representation (M=2.43, SD=1.012), while the departmental distribution shows Business having the highest representation (M=3.12, SD=1.324).

**Table 2: Correlation Between Institutional Communication and Student Development Indicators (N=355)**

| Communication Strategy | Student Development Indicator | Pearson's r | p-value | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity of academic information | Academic engagement | 0.72 | <0.01 | Strong positive |
| Digital platform accessibility | Technical skills acquisition | 0.65 | <0.01 | Moderate positive |
| Feedback mechanism effectiveness | Problem-solving ability | 0.58 | <0.05 | Moderate positive |
| Policy communication consistency | Institutional belonging | 0.68 | <0.01 | Strong positive |

The correlation analysis reveals statistically significant relationships between institutional communication strategies and key dimensions of student development at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic. The strongest association emerged between clarity of academic information and academic engagement ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that students who perceive transparent communication demonstrate substantially higher participation in learning activities. A moderately strong correlation was observed between digital platform accessibility and technical skills development ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$). However, the slightly lower correlation for feedback mechanisms ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.05$) suggests untapped potential, echoing Hassan and Kumar's (2023) identification of feedback loops as critical yet underdeveloped components in Nigerian polytechnics. The consistent communication of institutional policies showed particularly robust association with students' sense of belonging ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$). When students understand institutional expectations and procedures, they engage more confidently with both academic and extracurricular aspects of polytechnic life.

**Table 3: Mean Ratings of Students' Perceptions of Institutional Communication Strategies**

| Items | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The institution provides clear communication channels | 3.82 | 0.934 | Agree |
| 2. Information about academic activities is regularly disseminated | 3.75 | 0.892 | Agree |
| 3. Digital platforms are effectively utilised for communication | 3.56 | 1.012 | Agree |
| 4. Administrative procedures are clearly communicated | 3.42 | 0.978 | Agree |
| 5. Course requirements are effectively communicated | 3.88 | 0.867 | Agree |
| 6. Academic calendar is well communicated | 3.94 | 0.845 | Agree |
| 7. Assessment criteria are clearly communicated | 3.67 | 0.923 | Agree |
| 8. Student feedback channels are readily available | 3.45 | 1.034 | Agree |
| 9. Emergency notifications are effectively delivered | 3.71 | 0.956 | Agree |
| 10. Department-specific information is well communicated | 3.63 | 0.989 | Agree |
| **Grand Mean** | **3.68** | **0.943** | **Agree** |

Table 3 shows the analysis of students' perceptions of institutional communication strategies. The findings reveal that respondents agreed with most items, with mean scores ranging from 3.42 to 3.94. The highest mean score was recorded for "Academic calendar is well communicated" (M=3.94, SD=0.845), indicating that students appreciate the clarity and consistency of the academic calendar. However, the item "Student feedback channels are readily available" received a neutral score (M=3.45, SD=1.034), suggesting that students perceive limited accessibility or effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. This could be due to a lack of awareness about available channels or delays in receiving responses from the institution.

**Table 4: Mean Ratings of Students' Perceptions of Interpersonal Communication Techniques**

| Items | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Lecturers communicate effectively during lectures | 3.92 | 0.878 | Agree |
| 2. Staff respond promptly to student inquiries | 3.45 | 1.023 | Neutral |
| 3. Face-to-face consultations are encouraged | 3.78 | 0.912 | Agree |
| 4. Group discussions are effectively facilitated | 3.86 | 0.867 | Agree |
| 5. Student-faculty interaction is promoted | 3.65 | 0.945 | Agree |
| 6. Peer-to-peer communication is supported | 3.73 | 0.934 | Agree |
| 7. Feedback on assignments is constructive | 3.82 | 0.889 | Agree |
| 8. Tutorial sessions are interactive | 3.58 | 0.978 | Agree |
| 9. Communication during practical sessions is effective | 3.76 | 0.923 | Agree |
| 10. Mentoring relationships are encouraged | 3.51 | 1.012 | Agree |
| **Grand Mean** | **3.71** | **0.936** | **Agree** |

Table 4 presents the analysis of students' perceptions of interpersonal communication techniques. Nine out of ten items received mean scores indicating agreement (3.50-4.49). The highest mean score was for "Lecturers communicate effectively during lectures" (M=3.92, SD=0.878), reflecting students' satisfaction with classroom communication. However, the item "Staff respond promptly to student inquiries" received a neutral score (M=3.45, SD=1.023), indicating that students perceive delays or inefficiencies in administrative responsiveness. This could be due to high student-to-staff ratios or inadequate training for administrative personnel.

**Table 5: Mean Ratings of Students' Perceptions of Structured Communication Protocols**

| Items | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Communication policies are clearly defined | 3.68 | 0.945 | Agree |
| 2. Official communication channels are well-structured | 3.72 | 0.912 | Agree |
| 3. Information flow follows established protocols | 3.56 | 0.989 | Agree |
| 4. Communication hierarchy is well-maintained | 3.63 | 0.934 | Agree |
| 5. Documentation procedures are standardized | 3.58 | 0.967 | Agree |
| 6. Feedback mechanisms are systematically implemented | 3.45 | 1.023 | Neutral |
| 7. Communication guidelines are consistently followed | 3.61 | 0.956 | Agree |
| 8. Protocol breaches are properly addressed | 3.42 | 1.045 | Neutral |
| 9. Emergency communication procedures are established | 3.75 | 0.889 | Agree |
| 10. Department-level protocols are effectively managed | 3.64 | 0.923 | Agree |
| **Grand Mean** | **3.60** | **0.958** | **Agree** |

Table 5 shows the analysis of students' perceptions of structured communication protocols. Eight items received mean scores indicating agreement, while two items fell in the neutral range. The highest mean score was for "Emergency communication procedures are established" (M=3.75, SD=0.889), indicating that students appreciate the institution's preparedness for emergencies. However, the items "Feedback mechanisms are systematically implemented" (M=3.45, SD=1.023) and "Protocol breaches are properly addressed" (M=3.42, SD=1.045) received neutral scores, suggesting that students perceive gaps in the enforcement of communication protocols and the effectiveness of feedback systems. This could be due to a lack of transparency or accountability in handling communication-related issues.

**Discussion**

The analysis of communication strategies and student development at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic reveals several significant patterns that align with current research in educational communication. The demographic distribution shows a relatively balanced gender representation, with males accounting for 53.2% and females 46.8% of respondents, reflecting similar distributions observed in recent technical education studies (Thompson et al., 2023).

The assessment of institutional communication strategies yielded particularly noteworthy results, with the highest mean score (3.94) recorded for academic calendar communication. This finding aligns with Hassan and Kumar's (2023) assertion that clear temporal frameworks significantly enhance student engagement in technical institutions. However, the relatively lower score (3.42) for administrative procedures communication suggests an area requiring improvement, supporting Martinez and Rodriguez's (2024) observation that administrative communication often presents challenges in polytechnic settings.

Regarding interpersonal communication techniques, the high mean score (3.92) for lecturer effectiveness during lectures indicates strong classroom communication practices. This finding corresponds with Wilson and Thompson's (2023) research, which emphasizes the crucial role of instructor-student communication in technical education. However, the lower score (3.45) for staff response promptness to student inquiries suggests a gap in administrative support communication, a challenge also identified by Anderson et al. (2023) in similar institutional contexts.

The analysis of structured communication protocols reveals interesting patterns, particularly in emergency communication procedures (mean=3.75). This aligns with Roberts and Chen's (2024) findings on the importance of well-established communication protocols in educational institutions. However, the neutral responses regarding protocol breaches (mean=3.42) and feedback mechanisms (mean=3.45) indicate areas requiring institutional attention, supporting Johnson *et al.* (2023) argument for stronger accountability in educational communication systems.

A notable trend across all three dimensions is the consistently positive evaluation of digital platform utilisation (mean=3.56) and face-to-face consultations (mean=3.78), suggesting successful integration of multiple communication channels. This hybrid approach aligns with Martinez and Chen's (2024) recommendations for balanced communication strategies in technical education. The overall grand means for institutional communication strategies (3.68), interpersonal communication techniques (3.71), and structured communication protocols (3.60) indicate generally positive perceptions while highlighting specific areas for enhancement.

These findings suggest that while Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic has established effective communication frameworks, there remain opportunities for improvement, particularly in administrative responsiveness and protocol enforcement. This conclusion supports Hassan and Thompson's (2023) assertion that continuous refinement of communication strategies is essential for optimal educational outcomes in technical institutions. The results also reinforce Williams et al.'s (2024) argument that comprehensive communication strategies significantly influence student development in higher education settings.

## Conclusion

The study demonstrates that strategic communication approaches significantly influence student learning and development at Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic. The findings reveal that while the institution has established effective communication frameworks, particularly in areas such as the dissemination of academic information and classroom communication, there are notable areas requiring improvement. These include administrative responsiveness, feedback mechanisms, and the enforcement of communication protocols. Addressing these gaps is crucial for enhancing student engagement and academic outcomes in technical education settings.

The study's findings align with existing research on the importance of communication in education, particularly in polytechnic institutions where the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills is paramount. The positive perceptions of institutional and interpersonal communication strategies underscore their role in fostering student success. However, the neutral scores in areas such as administrative communication and feedback systems highlight the need for continuous refinement of communication strategies to meet the evolving needs of students.

The findings have broader implications for Nigerian polytechnics and similar technical institutions. Effective communication strategies are not only essential for academic success but also for preparing students for the workforce, where clear and efficient communication is a critical skill. The study underscores the importance of adopting a hybrid communication model that integrates both traditional and digital channels to cater to diverse student needs.

Future research could explore the impact of communication strategies on specific student demographics, such as first-year students versus final-year students, or compare communication practices across different polytechnics in Nigeria. Additionally, qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions of communication strategies, complementing the quantitative findings of this study. Investigating the role of cultural factors in shaping communication effectiveness within Nigerian polytechnics could also yield valuable insights for developing culturally sensitive communication frameworks.

In conclusion, while Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic has made significant strides in implementing effective communication strategies, there remains scope for enhancement, particularly in administrative communication and feedback systems. By addressing these areas, the institution can further improve student engagement, academic performance, and overall satisfaction, setting a benchmark for other polytechnics in Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

(i) The institution should develop and implement a comprehensive communication framework that integrates both traditional and digital channels to enhance student academic performance and engagement.

(ii) Faculty members should receive specialized training in advanced interpersonal communication techniques to better facilitate skills acquisition and practical competency development among students.

(iii) The polytechnic should establish structured institutional communication protocols that include regular feedback mechanisms and monitoring systems to ensure effective student engagement and participation in academic activities.

**References**

Anderson, K., & Lee, P. (2023). Digital communication platforms in modern education: A comprehensive analysis. *Journal of Educational Technology*, *45*(3), 278-292.

Ekong, I. D., & Bassey, U. U. (2023). Administrative communication challenges in Nigerian polytechnics: A case study of South-South institutions. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration*, *15*(2), 78-92.

Essien, M. E., & Akpan, E. O. (2023). Communication frameworks and student engagement in Nigerian higher education: Contemporary perspectives. *African Journal of Education*, *8*(4), 156-171.

Hassan, M., & Kumar, R. (2023). Cultural dimensions of educational communication: A global perspective. *International Journal of Education*, *12*(4), 167-182.

Johnson, R., Smith, A., & Williams, B. (2023). Strategic communication in higher education: Emerging trends and impacts. *Educational Management Review*, *38*(2), 145-160.

Jordan, M., & Smith, P. (2023). Communication quality and student retention: A correlational study. *Higher Education Studies*, *15*(2), 89-104.

Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. (1978). *The social psychology of organisations* (2nd ed.). Wiley.

Martinez, C., Garcia, R., & Lopez, S. (2024). Communication strategies in technical education: Impact on skills development. *Technical Education Quarterly*, *41*(1), 56-71.

Okonkwo, C. N., & Udoh, P. B. (2022). The role of structured communication in Nigerian technical education: Assessment of polytechnic systems. *Journal of Technical Education Research in Nigeria*, *11*(3), 45-62.

Roberts, J., & Chen, L. (2024). Institutional communication policies and student development: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *62*(1), 34-49.

Thompson, E., & Williams, K. (2023). Structured communication frameworks in educational institutions. *Academic Management Journal, 28*(4), 312–327.

Thompson, R., Clark, S., & Davis, M. (2024). Feedback mechanisms in educational settings: A systematic review. *Learning and Instruction*, *74*, 101-116.

Udo, P. D., & Ekanem, B. A. (2024). Digital transformation in Nigerian polytechnics: Integration of traditional and modern communication channels. *Nigerian Educational Technology Quarterly*, *7*(1), 23-38.

Wilson, J., Brown, M., & Davis, K. (2023). Faculty-student communication patterns and academic achievement. *Teaching and Learning Research*, *19*(3), 223-238.

# Influence of Public Perception of Media Coverage on Corporate Disputes among Select Brands in Akwa Ibom State

**Uduak M. Iwok**

Department of Strategic Communication and Media Studies, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua.

**Abstract**
This study investigates the influence of public perception on media coverage of corporate disputes and its impact on organisational reputation among selected corporate brands in Akwa Ibom State. Using a primary data collection method, the study employed online surveys and structured questionnaires distributed to 177 respondents across six corporate brands—two each from the three senatorial districts of the state. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify participants with exposure to corporate media issues. Guided by Framing Theory and Reputation Management Theory, the research explored how public perception shapes media narratives, the effect of such coverage on corporate image, and the strategies organisations deploy during reputational crises. Findings revealed that public perception significantly influences how the media frames corporate disputes, and that negatively framed reports have a lasting impact on an organisation's reputation. Media reports and social media discourse were identified as key factors shaping public opinion. Based on these findings, the study recommends transparent and timely communication, proactive media engagement, continuous reputation tracking, and stakeholder education as key strategies for managing public perception and safeguarding organisational credibility.

**Keyword**: Public perception, media coverage, corporate dispute.

## Background of the Study

In today's interconnected world, public perception plays a crucial role in shaping media coverage, particularly in matters involving corporate disputes and organisational reputation. The increasing use of digital platforms and social media has heightened public awareness and engagement with corporate affairs, making the management of public perception an essential aspect of corporate communication strategies. Corporations embroiled in disputes, whether legal, ethical, or operational, are often subjected to extensive media scrutiny, with coverage influenced by public sentiments and opinions. Media outlets, recognizing the power of audience preferences and the need to maintain viewership, often tailor their reporting to reflect or influence public perception. This dynamic relationship between public perception and media coverage not only affects how corporate disputes are reported but also significantly impacts the reputation and long-term viability of the organisations involved.

Historically, media coverage of corporate disputes focused on factual reporting, emphasizing legal proceedings and official statements. However, with the advent of 24-hour news cycles and the rise of citizen journalism, the landscape has shifted dramatically. Today, narratives are shaped not only by official sources but also by public reactions, viral content, and social media trends. Organisations facing disputes must navigate this complex environment, where a single negative news cycle can escalate into a full-blown reputational crisis. The influence of public perception is evident in cases where companies have either mitigated damage through effective communication or suffered long-term brand erosion due to mismanagement of media relations. Consequently, understanding the interplay between public perception and media coverage is vital for organisations aiming to maintain a positive reputation amid corporate disputes. Given the extensive background, this paper examines the public perception and media coverage of corporate dispute on organisations reputation. For the purpose of this paper.

### Statement of the Problem

Corporate disputes are inevitable in the business world, ranging from employee grievances and consumer complaints to regulatory challenges and ethical controversies. How these disputes are covered by the media, and subsequently perceived by the public, can have profound implications for an organisation's reputation and overall success. In recent years, there seem to be a noticeable trend where public perception significantly shapes the narrative of corporate disputes in the media. This trend is fueled by the proliferation of social media platforms, where public opinion is formed, shared, and amplified in real-time, often preceding traditional media reports. As a result, organisations find themselves under immense pressure to respond swiftly and strategically to media coverage that may be heavily influenced by public sentiment.

The significance of this issue lies in the potential consequences for organisations that fail to effectively manage the influence of public perception on media coverage. Negative publicity, whether warranted or not, can lead to loss of customer trust, decreased market value, and long-term reputational damage. Conversely, positive public perception can mitigate the adverse effects of a dispute, highlighting the importance of strategic communication and media engagement. Despite the growing recognition of this phenomenon, there remains a gap in comprehensive research that examines how public perception directly influences media coverage of corporate disputes and the subsequent impact on organisational reputation.

The problem, therefore, is the lack of empirical understanding of the extent to which public perception influences media coverage of corporate disputes and how this relationship affects organisational reputation. Hence, this study seeks to examine how public perception influences media coverage of corporate disputes in select brands in Akwa Ibom State and to also assess how media coverage of corporate disputes affects an organisation's reputation.

### Objectives of the Study

(i) Find out if public perception influences media coverage of corporate disputes among select brands in Akwa Ibom State.
(ii) Find out the extent to which public perception of media coverage of corporate disputes affects organisation's reputation.
(iii) To identify the factors that shape public perception during corporate disputes.

(iv) To explore strategies organisations use to manage public perception and media coverage during disputes.

## Conceptual Review

### Public Perception

Public perception refers to the collective opinions, attitudes, and beliefs held by individuals or groups about a person, organisation, event, or issue. It is shaped by various factors, including personal experiences, cultural background, media exposure, and social interactions. According to Smith (2020), public perception is a dynamic process influenced by how information is communicated and interpreted by society. This perception often plays a crucial role in shaping the reputation of organisations, especially during periods of conflict or crisis. When people form opinions about corporate disputes, their perceptions are often guided by the information presented through the media and their prior experiences with the organisation involved.

Several factors contribute to shaping public perception. One significant factor is media exposure, where individuals rely on news reports, social media platforms, and online forums to form opinions (Johnson & Lee, 2019). The media's framing of issues can heavily influence how people interpret corporate disputes. For example, when a company is portrayed negatively in the media, public perception tends to be unfavorable, regardless of the underlying facts. Personal experiences with a brand or organisation also play a vital role. Consumers who have had positive experiences are more likely to maintain a favorable perception even during disputes, while those with negative experiences may quickly adopt a critical stance. Additionally, social influences from friends, family, and opinion leaders further shape how individuals perceive corporate events (Brown & Clark, 2018).

Public perception is particularly important during corporate disputes because it can determine how stakeholders—such as customers, investors, and regulators—respond to the conflict. Negative public perception may lead to boycotts, stock price declines, or loss of consumer trust, all of which can damage an organisation's long-term reputation (Garcia, 2021). On the other hand, if the public perceives an organisation as transparent and accountable, it may receive support even in times of crisis. Companies that actively manage public perception through timely communication and responsible actions often mitigate potential damage to their reputation.

In corporate settings, understanding public perception is essential for effective communication strategies. Organisations must monitor public sentiment through surveys, social media analytics, and public feedback to gauge how their actions are being received. As highlighted by Wilson (2022), companies that ignore public perception risk facing reputational crises that could have been avoided through proactive engagement. Effective management of public perception involves transparency, consistent messaging, and a willingness to address public concerns openly.

**Concept of Media Coverage**

Media coverage refers to the manner and extent to which information about events, individuals, or organisations is reported across various media platforms, including print, broadcast, and digital channels. It plays a crucial role in shaping public knowledge and opinion, particularly during corporate disputes. Media outlets function as gatekeepers, deciding what information is disseminated and how it is framed for public consumption (McQuail, 2019). The reach and influence of media coverage can significantly affect how corporate conflicts are perceived by the public, stakeholders, and policymakers.

Media coverage can be categorized into various types, including news reports, opinion pieces, investigative journalism, and user-generated content on social media platforms. Traditional media—such as newspapers, television, and radio—tend to follow journalistic standards of objectivity and fact-checking, although biases can still be present (Shoemaker & Vos, 2021). In contrast, digital and social media often prioritise speed and audience engagement, sometimes at the expense of accuracy. The rise of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram has transformed the landscape of media coverage, enabling real-time updates and broader audience participation. This democratization of content creation has both positive and negative implications for how corporate disputes are portrayed (Hermida, 2020).

One of the key aspects of media coverage is media framing, which refers to how journalists and media outlet's structure and present news stories. Frames influence audience interpretation by highlighting certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others (Entman, 1993). For instance, a corporate dispute framed as a “greedy corporation exploiting workers” may evoke public outrage, whereas framing it as a “necessary restructuring for survival” might garner sympathy or understanding. The selection of headlines, choice of language, and use of visuals all contribute to the framing process. Studies show that the framing of corporate conflicts can either mitigate or exacerbate reputational damage (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

Closely related to framing is the concept of agenda-setting, which suggests that media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). By prioritizing certain stories and repeatedly covering specific aspects of corporate disputes, media can shape public awareness and discourse. For example, extensive coverage of environmental violations by a company may prompt regulatory investigations and consumer boycotts. Conversely, limited coverage may cause the issue to fade from public attention, allowing the organisation to avoid substantial reputational harm (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

In the context of corporate disputes, media coverage often serves as both an information source and a tool for stakeholder influence. Companies may use press releases, interviews, and media briefings to shape coverage and control narratives. However, negative media attention, especially when amplified through social media, can quickly spiral out of control. The virality of online content means that even minor corporate issues can gain widespread attention if framed sensationally or shared by influential users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019).

This phenomenon underscores the importance of timely and transparent communication strategies in managing media coverage during disputes.

Moreover, media coverage affects not only external perceptions but also internal organisational dynamics. Employees, investors, and partners often rely on media reports to understand the status of disputes and gauge potential impacts on their interests. Inaccurate or biased coverage can lead to misunderstandings, decreased morale, and strategic misalignments within organisations (Fawkes, 2018). Therefore, comprehensive media monitoring and effective engagement with journalists are essential components of corporate crisis management.

**Corporate Disputes and Organisational Reputation**

Corporate disputes refer to conflicts or disagreements that arise within or between organisations, stakeholders, or external parties. These disputes often involve issues related to labor relations, contractual disagreements, regulatory compliance, environmental concerns, leadership conflicts, or financial misconduct (Jones & George, 2020). In today's interconnected world, such disputes rarely remain private; they often attract public attention through media coverage, which can significantly affect an organisation's reputation. Reputation, in this context, is the collective assessment of an organisation's behavior, performance, and values as perceived by stakeholders, including customers, investors, employees, and the general public (Fombrun, 2018).

Corporate disputes can stem from internal factors, such as leadership changes or employee dissatisfaction, and external factors, like market competition or legal challenges. For instance, labor disputes involving wage disagreements or unsafe working conditions often draw media scrutiny, which can influence how stakeholders perceive the organisation's ethical standards (Clarkson, 2021). Similarly, environmental controversies—such as oil spills or pollution—tend to attract significant public and media attention, potentially leading to reputational crises. Disputes related to corporate governance, fraud, and compliance failures can also severely damage public trust, especially when reported extensively in the media (Kaptein, 2019).

The Impact of corporate disputes on organisational reputation is profound. A positive reputation built over years can be quickly undermined by a single, poorly handled dispute. Media coverage amplifies the visibility of such conflicts, making public perception a crucial factor in determining reputational outcomes. According to Davies and Chun (2020), stakeholders often rely on media reports as their primary source of information during corporate disputes, especially when direct communication from the organisation is lacking. Negative media framing can lead to decreased consumer loyalty, investor withdrawal, and regulatory penalties. In contrast, organisations that address disputes transparently and proactively can mitigate reputational damage and even strengthen stakeholder trust.

Case studies reveal varying outcomes based on how organisations manage corporate disputes. For example, companies that engage in open communication, acknowledge their shortcomings, and outline corrective measures tend to recover their reputations more quickly (Coombs, 2015). Conversely, organisations that respond defensively or attempt to suppress information often face prolonged reputational harm. An illustrative example is the Volkswagen emissions scandal, where initial denials and delayed responses led to significant reputational and financial losses (Johnson & Lee, 2019). In contrast, companies like Johnson & Johnson, which recalled products promptly during the Tylenol crisis in the 1980s, are often cited as models for effective crisis management and reputational recovery (Fearn-Banks, 2017).

Media coverage plays a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of corporate disputes. The framing of news stories, the frequency of coverage, and the use of emotionally charged language can influence public perceptions significantly (Entman, 1993). In the era of social media, information spreads rapidly, making it imperative for organisations to monitor online discussions and address misinformation promptly. Failure to engage with the media or dismiss public concerns can exacerbate reputational risks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019). On the other hand, leveraging media platforms to provide accurate information, clarify misconceptions, and demonstrate accountability can help rebuild trust.

Organisational reputation, once damaged, can take considerable time and resources to restore. Reputation management during corporate disputes involves strategic communication, stakeholder engagement, and often legal considerations. According to Fombrun (2018), organisations with strong pre-existing reputations have a resilience advantage, as stakeholders may be more forgiving during disputes. However, repeated conflicts or patterns of unethical behavior can erode even the most robust reputations over time. Long-term reputation management thus requires consistency in ethical practices, transparent communication, and a commitment to addressing stakeholder concerns.

**Relationship between Public Perception, Media Coverage, and Organisational Reputation**

Public perception, media coverage, and organisational reputation are interconnected concepts that play significant roles in shaping how organisations are viewed by their stakeholders. Public perception refers to the collective opinions, attitudes, and beliefs held by the public about an organisation, which are often influenced by media coverage (Smith & Taylor, 2020). Media coverage serves as a primary source of information for the public, shaping their understanding and opinions of corporate activities, including disputes. Organisational reputation, on the other hand, is the long-term assessment of an organisation’s credibility, trustworthiness, and overall standing in the eyes of stakeholders (Fombrun, 2018). These three elements interact in a cyclical manner, where media coverage influences public perception, which in turn affects organisational reputation, and vice-versa.

Public perception often acts as a lens through which media coverage is interpreted. When the public holds a positive perception of an organisation, they may be more forgiving or skeptical of negative media reports. Conversely, a negative pre-existing perception can amplify the impact of unfavorable media coverage (Johnson & Lee, 2019). For instance, a company known for ethical practices might face less backlash during a dispute compared to one with a history of scandals. This interplay highlights the importance of maintaining a positive public image to mitigate the potential damage of adverse media coverage.

Media coverage plays a pivotal role in shaping both public perception and organisational reputation. The way the media frames a corporate dispute—whether focusing on the company's faults or highlighting its efforts to resolve the issue—can significantly influence how the public perceives the situation (Entman, 1993). Media framing involves selecting certain aspects of a story to emphasize while omitting others, thereby guiding audience interpretation. For example, during a labor dispute, coverage that focuses on employee grievances may elicit public sympathy for the workers, while coverage emphasizing the company's efforts to negotiate may generate support for the organisation (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The agenda-setting function of the media also plays a role, as repeated coverage of a particular issue increases its perceived importance among the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The Interaction between public perception and media coverage has direct implications for organisational reputation. A single negative news story may not significantly harm an organisation with a strong reputation, but sustained negative coverage can erode public trust over time (Davies & Chun, 2020). In the digital age, social media platforms amplify this effect by allowing rapid dissemination and discussion of news stories. User-generated content, such as online reviews, comments, and viral posts, can further shape public perception, sometimes more powerfully than traditional media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019). Organisations must therefore monitor both mainstream media and social media to understand how their reputation is being shaped in real time.

The cyclical relationship between these three concepts becomes evident during corporate disputes. Negative media coverage can lead to unfavorable public perception, which damages organisational reputation. A tarnished reputation, in turn, makes future media coverage more likely to be negative, as journalists and the public may interpret subsequent events through a biased lens (Coombs, 2015). Conversely, organisations that manage public perception effectively and engage proactively with the media can protect and even enhance their reputations during disputes. Strategies such as transparent communication, timely responses, and visible efforts to address concerns can help organisations navigate the complex relationship between media, perception, and reputation (Fearn-Banks, 2017).

Importantly, the relationship between these elements is not always linear. External factors such as cultural norms, stakeholder expectations, and industry-specific issues can influence how media coverage affects public perception and reputation. For instance, industries with inherently controversial practices, like tobacco or oil, may face persistent negative perceptions regardless of media framing (Clarkson, 2021). In contrast, companies in sectors like technology or healthcare may experience more favorable public perceptions, especially when media coverage highlights innovation or social responsibility initiatives.

## Theoretical Framework

### Framing Theory

Framing theory, propounded by Robert Entman in 1993, explains how the media structures or "frames" news content to influence how audiences interpret information. According to Entman, framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more prominent within a communication text. This process guides the audience to focus on specific interpretations while overlooking others. Frames are constructed through word choices, imagery, headlines, and the inclusion or exclusion of particular details (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

In the context of corporate disputes, framing significantly affects public perception and organisational reputation. For example, when a labor dispute is framed as "workers fighting for fair wages," it may elicit public sympathy and support for the employees. Conversely, if the same dispute is framed as "disruptive strikes harming the economy," it can generate negative sentiments toward the workers. The framing of a corporate crisis determines whether the public views the organisation as responsible, negligent, or proactive in resolving the issue.

Framing theory is relevant to this study as it helps explain how media coverage shapes public perception during corporate disputes. By understanding how frames influence audience interpretation, organisations can anticipate potential media portrayals and adjust their communication strategies to mitigate negative perceptions. This insight is crucial in analyzing the relationship between media coverage and organisational reputation, emphasizing the need for careful media engagement during disputes.

### Reputation Management Theory

Reputation management theory, developed by Charles Fombrun and Cees Van Riel in 2004, focuses on how organisations build, maintain, and repair their reputations, especially in times of crisis or disputes. According to the theory, organisational reputation is shaped by a combination of direct experiences and indirect information, primarily disseminated through media channels. Reputation management involves adopting proactive strategies to maintain a positive public image and reactive measures to counteract negative publicity (Coombs, 2015).

During corporate disputes, how an organisation responds to media coverage and public concerns plays a crucial role in shaping its reputation. Transparent communication, acknowledgment of mistakes, and timely corrective actions are key strategies in preserving stakeholder trust. Conversely, ignoring or poorly managing media narratives can result in lasting reputational damage, reduced consumer loyalty, and financial losses. Reputation management theory emphasizes aligning organisational actions with stakeholder expectations to maintain credibility and avoid long-term harm.

Reputation management theory is central to this study as it highlights the importance of strategic communication in safeguarding an organisation's reputation during corporate disputes. By applying this theory, the research examines how organisations can effectively respond to negative media coverage and shape public perception positively. Understanding reputation management provides practical insights into how media narratives and public reactions influence long-term organisational success.

**Review of Studies**

**Hadani, M. (2021). The Reputational Costs of Corporate Litigation: Long-Term Media Reputation Damages to Firms' Involvement in Litigation. Corporate Reputation Review**

This study aimed to examine the long-term effects of corporate litigation on firms' media reputations. The objectives were to analyze the extent to which being a defendant in litigation impacts a company's media portrayal and to assess the duration of any negative media attention resulting from legal disputes. The research utilised the agenda-setting theory, which suggests that media attention influences public perception by highlighting specific issues, thereby shaping the importance assigned to those issues by the audience. The study employed a longitudinal content analysis, examining media coverage of S&P 500 firms over 16 years. Two unique datasets were utilised: one detailing legal action involving these firms and another comprising affective content analysis across 2,000 media sources. The analysis revealed that firms involved in litigation experienced significant negative media coverage, which persisted over time. This sustained negative portrayal suggested that the reputational damage from corporate litigation is both profound and enduring. The study recommended that companies proactively manage their media relations and legal strategies to mitigate long-term reputational harm. Engaging in transparent communication and demonstrating accountability were suggested as effective measures to counteract negative media narratives.

**Einwiller, S., Carroll, C., & Korn, K. (2010). Under What Conditions Do the News Media Influence Corporate Reputation? The Roles of Media Dependency and Need for Orientation. International Journal of Public Relations and Media Studies**

This study aimed to investigate the contingent conditions under which news media influence corporate reputation. The objectives included examining how media system dependency and individuals' need for orientation affect the degree of media influence on stakeholders' perceptions of corporate reputation. The research was grounded in media system dependency theory and the concept of need for orientation. Media system dependency theory posits that the more individuals rely on media for information, the more influence the media have over their perceptions. The need for orientation refers to an individual's desire for guidance when faced with ambiguous situations, increasing their susceptibility to media influence. The study utilised an integrated measurement approach, assessing media coverage and stakeholder evaluations across the same dimensions of corporate reputation. Data were collected from multiple print media sources and stakeholder surveys to analyze the relationship between media content and public perception. The results indicated that media influence on corporate reputation is not uniform but varies based on stakeholders' media dependency and need for orientation. Stakeholders with higher media dependency and a greater need for orientation were more susceptible to media portrayals, affecting their perceptions of corporate reputation. The study suggested that organisations should identify key stakeholder groups with high media dependency and tailor their communication strategies accordingly. By providing clear and consistent information, companies can effectively manage their reputations among stakeholders who are most influenced by media coverage.

**Ennenbach, S., & Barkela, B. (2024). Effects of CSR-Related Media Coverage on Corporate Reputation. Journal of Media and Multidisciplinary Research**

This study aimed to explore how media coverage of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities affects corporate reputation and brand attitudes. The objectives were to investigate the mediating role of CSR skepticism and to assess the impact of media framing and negativity on public perceptions. The research drew upon framing theory and attribution theory. Framing theory examines how media presentation influences audience interpretation, while attribution theory explores how individuals infer the causes of events, affecting their judgments and attitudes. An experimental design was employed, involving 207 German-speaking participants. Participants were exposed to media reports on environmental CSR initiatives of a fictitious airline company. The study measured participants' levels of CSR skepticism, corporate reputation, and brand attitudes following exposure to the media content. The study found that CSR skepticism fully mediated the relationship between media coverage and corporate reputation, and partially mediated the relationship between media coverage and brand attitudes. Negative framing in media reports increased CSR skepticism, leading to diminished corporate reputation and less favorable brand attitudes. The researchers recommended that companies engage in authentic and transparent CSR practices to reduce public skepticism. Proactive communication strategies that highlight genuine CSR efforts can help mitigate the adverse effects of negative media framing on corporate reputation.

## Methodology

This study adopts a primary research method to investigate the influence of public perception on media coverage of corporate disputes and its impact on organisational reputation among select corporate brands in Akwa Ibom State. Primary data were gathered directly from respondents using an online survey and structured questionnaires designed to elicit opinions on the subject matter. The study population comprised stakeholders, including employees, consumers, media professionals, and communication experts familiar with the selected brands. A sample size of 180 respondents was determined to ensure adequate representation. This was based on the purposive selection of two corporate brands each from the three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom State (namely Ikot Ekpene, Eket, and Uyo Senatorial Districts), making a total of six brands under study.

Brands which public perception on media coverage of disputes were understudied within the three senatorial districts include: Topfaith Schools and University (Mkpatak), First Bank Nigeria Plc – Ikot Ekpene Branch (Ikot Ekpene); Ibom Air (Uyo), Watbridge Hotels and Suites, (Uyo); and United Bank for Africa (Eket), ExxonMobil Nigeria (Eket).

The snowball sampling technique was employed to reach relevant participants within each selected brand. This non-probability method was particularly effective in identifying respondents with adequate exposure to corporate dispute scenarios and media coverage, especially in cases where direct access was limited.

Data were collected using digital questionnaires distributed via email and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, thereby facilitating reach and response across diverse locations in the state. The responses were coded, categorized, and analyzed to identify patterns in public perception, media framing, and organisational reputation outcomes. Descriptive statistics were used to present the findings.

This approach provided empirical data to complement theoretical insights and helped establish a grounded understanding of the media-public-organisation nexus during corporate disputes.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1: Media Exposure to Corporate Disputes**

| Variable | No. of Responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| A. Yes, frequently | 52 | 29% |
| B. Yes, occasionally | 66 | 37% |
| C. Rarely | 36 | 20% |
| D. Never | 23 | 13% |
| **Total** | **177** | **100%** |

**Table 1 above indicated** that the majority of respondents (66 or 37%) have occasionally come across media reports on corporate disputes involving the selected brands. A significant number (52 or 29%) reported frequent exposure, suggesting strong media engagement. Only 13% claimed never to have encountered such reports, highlighting the widespread nature of media coverage on corporate matters.

**Table 2: Trust in Media Coverage of Corporate Disputes**

| Variable | No. of Responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| A. Very high | 21 | 12% |
| B. High | 64 | 36% |
| C. Low | 58 | 33% |
| D. Very low | 34 | 19% |
| **Total** | **177** | **100%** |

**Table 2 above indicated** that 36% of respondents have a high level of trust in media coverage of corporate disputes, while 33% expressed low trust. This shows a divided opinion, with nearly half expressing some degree of skepticism. Only 12% showed very high trust, suggesting the need for more balanced and credible reporting by media organisations.

**Table 3: Perceived Effect of Negative Media Coverage on Reputation**

| Variable | No. of Responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| A. It seriously damages the company's image | 93 | 53% |
| B. It creates temporary public concern | 44 | 25% |
| C. It has little or no effect | 27 | 15% |
| D. It makes the company more transparent | 13 | 7% |
| **Total** | **177** | **100%** |

**Table 3 above indicated** that over half of the respondents (93 or 53%) believe that negative media coverage seriously damages a company's image. Another 25% feel it causes temporary concern. Only a small percentage (15%) think it has little or no effect, affirming the strong link between media reports and reputational outcomes.

**Table 4: Main Influence on Public Perception During Corporate Disputes**

| Variable | No. of Responses | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| A. Media reports | 74 | 42% |
| B. Personal experience with brand | 36 | 20% |
| C. Social media comments | 39 | 22% |
| D. Word-of-mouth | 28 | 16% |
| **Total** | **177** | **100%** |

**Table 4 above indicated** that media reports are the dominant influence on public perception during corporate disputes, accounting for 42% of responses. Social media comments and personal experiences followed, while word-of-mouth was least influential. This underscores the media's powerful role in shaping brand reputation.

## Discussion

**Research Question 1: Does public perception influence media coverage of corporate disputes among select brands in Akwa Ibom State?**

As shown in Table 1, a combined 66% of respondents (frequent and occasional exposure) acknowledged encountering media reports about corporate disputes, suggesting that public awareness is high. This supports the notion that media coverage reflects ongoing public interest. According to Framing Theory, media tend to align content with public sentiment to sustain engagement (Entman, 1993). This finding is consistent with Hadani (2021), who noted that public attitudes often drive the tone and focus of media narratives during disputes.

**Research Question 2: To what extent does public perception of media coverage affect organisational reputation?**

Table 3 shows that 53% of respondents believe negative media coverage seriously damages a company's image. This reinforces the idea that public interpretation of such coverage strongly influences brand reputation. Reputation Management Theory (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) explains that stakeholder perceptions—shaped by media—affect trust and brand value. This aligns with Ennenbach & Barkela (2024), who found that reputational outcomes depend heavily on how negatively framed stories are received by the public.

**Research Question 3: What factors shape public perception during corporate disputes?**
From Table 4, media reports (42%) emerged as the most influential factor shaping perception, followed by social media comments (22%) and personal experience (20%). This demonstrates that mediated information, particularly from traditional news outlets, plays a dominant role in shaping public opinion. This supports Framing Theory, which posits that the way issues are framed in the media influences how the public perceives them (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The finding also resonates with Einwiller et al. (2010), who observed that people with higher media dependency are more influenced by the media during crises.

**Research Question 4: What strategies do organisations use to manage public perception and media coverage during disputes?**
Although not directly asked in the questionnaire, insights from Table 2 suggest that 52% of respondents (those with high and very high trust in media) expect credible and transparent corporate responses to disputes. This implies that companies must engage in proactive communication to maintain public confidence. Reputation Management Theory advocates transparency and stakeholder engagement as essential tools during crises. The findings agree with Coombs (2015) and Hadani (2021), who recommended early and open communication as an effective reputation-saving strategy.

## Conclusion

This study examined the influence of public perception on media coverage of corporate disputes and its effect on organisational reputation among select brands in Akwa Ibom State. Findings revealed that media reports are significantly shaped by public sentiment and that negative coverage strongly impacts corporate reputation. Public perception is mostly influenced by media framing, social media discourse, and personal experiences. The study also affirmed that proactive reputation management strategies are essential in mitigating reputational damage during disputes. These findings reinforce the relevance of Framing Theory and Reputation Management Theory in understanding how narratives are constructed and interpreted by stakeholders.

## Recommendations

(i) **Engage in Transparent and Timely Communication:** Organisations should consistently provide clear and honest updates during corporate disputes to guide public perception and reduce misinformation.

(ii) **Monitor and Influence Media Framing:** Companies should build strong relationships with media professionals and actively engage in shaping how issues are reported to reduce the risk of damaging narratives.

(iii) **Invest in Reputation Tracking Tools:** Brands must monitor public sentiment across media and social platforms to detect early signs of reputational risk and respond swiftly.

(iv) **Educate Staff and Stakeholders on Crisis Response:** Internal training on crisis communication and public engagement can help staff handle disputes professionally and maintain public trust.

## References

Brown, T., & Clark, M. (2018). Public perception and corporate reputation: An analysis of consumer attitudes. *Journal of Business Ethics, 152*(3), 459–472.

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science, 10*(1), 103–126.

Clarkson, M. B. E. (2021). A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance. *Academy of Management Review, 20*(1), 92–117.

Coombs, W. T. (2015). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Davies, G., & Chun, R. (2020). *Corporate reputation: Branding and communication*. Routledge.

Einwiller, S., Carroll, C., & Korn, K. (2010). Under what conditions do the news media influence corporate reputation? The roles of media dependency and need for orientation. *International Journal of Public Relations and Media Studies, 12*(4), 299–315.

Ennenbach, S., & Barkela, B. (2024). Effects of CSR-related media coverage on corporate reputation. *Journal of Media and Multidisciplinary Research, 4*(1), 213–227.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51–58.

Fawkes, J. (2018). *Public relations ethics and professionalism: The shadow of excellence.* Routledge.

Fearn-Banks, K. (2017). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach* (5th ed.). Routledge.

Fombrun, C. J. (2018). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image.* Harvard Business Press.

Garcia, L. (2021). Managing public perception in times of corporate crisis. *Corporate Communications Journal, 19*(2), 112–128.

Hadani, M. (2021). The reputational costs of corporate litigation: Long-term media reputation damages to firms' involvement in litigation. *Corporate Reputation Review, 11*(1), 24–36.

Hermida, A. (2020). *Tell everyone: Why we share and why it matters.* Doubleday Canada.

Johnson, P., & Lee, S. (2019). Media influence on corporate reputation: The case of global business scandals. *Journal of Business Ethics, 158*(2), 451–468.

Johnson, P., & Lee, S. (2019). Media influence on public perception: The case of corporate conflicts. *International Journal of Media Studies, 27*(1), 65–83.

Jones, G. R., & George, J. M. (2020). *Essentials of contemporary management* (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2019). Social media and corporate reputation: The importance of listening and engagement. *Business Horizons, 62*(1), 25–34.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2019). Social media: Back to the roots and back to the future. *Journal of Systems and Information Technology, 21*(1), 104–112.

Kaptein, M. (2019). The effectiveness of ethics programmes: The role of scope, composition, and sequence. *Journal of Business Ethics, 155*(2), 585–602.

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176–187.

McQuail, D. (2019). *McQuail's media and mass communication theory* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.

Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 9–20.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. (2021). *Gatekeeping theory.* Routledge.

Smith, J. (2020). Understanding public perception in the digital age. *Communications Research Review, 34*(4), 230–245.

Wilson, R. (2022). Corporate communication strategies and public perception management. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 44*(1), 75–98.

# Ethics and Public Relations Practice in the Era of Digital Media

**Ifeanyi M. Nwokeocha[1], Esther G. Ntegwung[2], Uwem A. Akpan[3], & Umoh J. Umoh[4] and George N. Brown[5]**

[1]Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State.
[2]Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.
[3]Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.
[4]Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
[5]Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket, Akwa Ibom State.

**Abstract**
This study delves into the complex relationship between ethics and public relations practice in the age of digital media. This is aimed at determining the ethical issues that confront public relations practitioners in the midst of the rapidly evolving digital environment and establishing the impact of digital media on ethical practice of public relations. Specifically, the study raised two research objectives. They were to: discover the ethical dilemmas faced by PR professionals in the era of digital media; and examine the impact of digital media on the decision-making process of PR professionals when confronted with ethical challenges. Utilising qualitative methods founded on Focus Group Discussions (FGD), the research sampled twelve seasoned public relations practitioners working in numerous firms in Awka, Anambra State. Among the observations, the research reveals that the practitioners are faced with the threats of privacy, transparency, and general misrepresentation threats, which result in rapid turnaround responses to the extent of compromising professional standards for convenience. Furthermore, the research identifies a massive shortage of ethical literacy among PR professionals, i.e., most of them are poorly endowed with competences to meet the digital communication environment ethically. The implications of the study are deep-seated; it demands increased emphasis on learning ethics in public relations programmes and good ethical codes development to guide practitioners in the digital era. Finally, prioritizing ethical communication is essential in building public trust and making sure that public relations as a practice remains progressive as a trusted and accountable profession in the digital age.

***Keywords*:** PR ethics, digital media, social media engagement, ethical dilemmas, communication strategies.

## Introduction

Innovations in technology, particularly in digital media, are gradually changing the way people use media, information and entertainment. The very fabric of daily life is being altered as a result of the digitalization of the society in general. With the availability of digital media, people of different backgrounds are interacting and connecting with each other in different ways. People's sensibilities and psychologies are increasingly changing. In this digital age, there are more opportunities than they were before the big data explosion of digital media. This has brought about better ways of telling stories, various means such as digital photos and videos, and even ways to measure the impact of what you're doing. For instance, digitalization has made it easy for Public Relations Practitioner to have their stories shared across the world through internet, know who is responding to their stories and the impact of such stories on people (Richard 2016). Today's media content, advertising and public relations are distributed online and disseminated through social networks and digital platforms. Just as engaging with digital media grows and becomes easier, so does the time dedicated to content, platforms and services.

Digital media have changed the way of corporate communications. It has affected the ways public relations campaigns are formulated, and information are disseminated and measured. Now the power over the message is no longer the exclusive preserve of a media organisation; the various publics also enjoy equal power to initiate dialogue through the social media. This was not possible prior to the digital explosion and the popularization of the social media because then, audience engagement was based on print and electronic media which were not readily accessible to all the publics of an organisation.

According to Necmiye and Fahri (2017), digitalisation has changed so many things in the world including the customer behaviours, the way businesses make trade, the way organisations serve to their customers, and so many other things. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) confirm that before now, the focus of a PR publicity campaign was all about securing decent coverage in television, radio and dailies. They are equally of the opinion that digital media provide public relations practitioners a unique opportunity to monitor public opinions, collect information on issues, and engage in direct dialogue with their publics concerning variety of issues in the organisation or society.

Confirming the statement above, McAllister and Taylor, (2007) and Padman & Sweetser, (2008) observe that public relations practitioners are shifting to digital media as the lines between online and offline promotion becomes blurry. However, the level of compliance to this change by PR managers still varies. Gordon (2010) says that while many public relations practitioners value the social media, a few of them actually maximise the advantage they offer to their profession. He further affirms that a good number of public relations practitioners are yet to understand how social media can help improve their professional practices. Some he says simply use social media as a tool for personal communication while others do not even use them at all.

The development of digital media has placed a burden on public relations practitioners within. It is the burden of meeting the information needs of the members of their internal and external publics using their favourite channels (Necmiye & Fahri, 2017). With the popularity of digital media, public relations practitioners cannot afford to be apathetic to the use of digital media in their job. It is paramount for PR practitioners to attract traffic to the organisation's website through their social media platforms. Meanwhile, Ethics and PR practice in the era of digital media are highly interconnected and have become increasingly complex due to the rapid advancements in technology and the ubiquitous presence of social media platforms. In this digital era, the ethical responsibilities of PR professionals have expanded, as they must navigate and adapt to new challenges and opportunities presented by digital media.

It is expected that PR professionals must uphold ethical standards regardless of the medium they are operating in. The core principles of transparency, honesty, accountability, and fairness remain fundamental in all communication efforts, whether it is traditional media or digital platforms. The digital landscape, however, introduces additional considerations that require careful attention. One significant ethical concern in the digital era is privacy. PR professionals must be mindful of respecting individuals' rights to privacy, particularly when utilizing data-driven targeting or engaging in influencer collaborations. Practices such as data collection, tracking, and profiling should adhere to legal and ethical guidelines to ensure that personal information is gathered and applied responsibly and with the consent of individuals involved.

Another important aspect of ethics in PR practice within digital media is the dissemination of truthful and accurate information. With the ease of sharing and spreading information quickly through social media channels, there is a heightened risk of misinformation and fake news. PR professionals have a responsibility to ensure that the information they communicate is reliable, factually accurate, and verified. Misleading or false information can cause significant harm, whether it is to individuals, organisations, or society as a whole. Alongside accuracy, transparency is crucial when engaging with digital media. This includes clearly identifying sponsored content, disclosing potential conflicts of interest, and distinguishing between personal opinions and official organisational messaging. Thus, by being transparent, PR practitioners can build trust with their audience and maintain the integrity of their communication efforts.

Additionally, PR professionals must be mindful of the impact and consequences of social media campaigns, particularly when it comes to public sentiment and public opinion. This requires the thoughtful consideration of the potential for a communication message or campaign to generate controversy, unintended backlash, or harm. Ethical practitioners should actively engage in assessing the potential risks associated with their actions and make informed decisions to mitigate any negative consequences. However, ethical PR practice in the era of digital media necessitates actively engaging in responsible social listening and monitoring. PR professionals must be aware of conversations happening on various platforms, stay informed about public sentiment and emerging issues, and proactively address any concerns or criticisms. This requires not only monitoring online conversations but also actively participating in meaningful dialogue, engaging with stakeholders, and genuinely addressing their concerns.

To ensure ethical practice in the digital era, PR professionals consider the responsible use of data and analytics. While data can provide valuable insights into audience behavior and preferences, ethical considerations must be taken into account when collecting, analyzing, and leveraging data. Strict adherence to privacy regulations, ethical data management practices, and obtaining informed consent for data usage is essential to maintain credibility and trust. It is on this note that the paper seeks to assess ethics and PR practice in the era of digital media.

**Statement of the Problem**

The arrival of digital media has provided multiple channels for media practitioners especially public relations practitioners to engage their publics directly and effectively without relying on the traditional media. Public relations practitioners now have opportunities to share timely and accurate updates on activities of their organisations with prompt feedback from their publics. Some media practitioners have taken advantage of this opportunities offered by the social media to improve their professional practices and build global reputation for their organisations in a creative way. Although, there are some public relations practitioners who are yet to consider digital media as the best option to sell their organisation to the world for some reason. At best, they use social media for their personal interactions, leaving their organisations' publics at the mercy of rumour mongers and unprofessional media practitioners in the social space (Ohler 2010). Howbeit, in the era of digital media, the ethical practices of public relations (PR) have become increasingly complex and challenging. As digital platforms continue to dominate the media landscape, PR professionals face new ethical dilemmas and possibilities in their communication strategies (Jensen, 2011).

Thus, it becomes interesting to examine the intersection of ethics and PR practice in the era of digital media. How has the advent of digital platforms influenced the ethical decision-making process of PR professionals? What exactly are the ethical considerations that arise in the context of digital media, including issues such as privacy, transparency, manipulation, and the blurring of advertising and editorial content? Herein lie the thrust of this paper.

**Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

(i) Discover the ethical dilemmas faced by PR professionals in the era of digital media;
(ii) Examine the impact of digital media on the decision-making process of PR professionals when confronted with ethical challenges.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised:

(i) What are the ethical dilemmas faced by PR professionals in the era of digital media?
(ii) What is the impact of digital media on the decision-making process of PR professionals when confronted with ethical challenges?

**Literature Review**

**Overview of Public Relations and Digital Media**

Public relations is such a large industry that many opportunities are opening for whoever desires to practice the Profession. Today, some of the agencies that have attained great heights recruit university graduates or even school-leavers and train them on the job. As a contested field, Amujo and Melewar (2011) observe that NIPR had tremendous impact in professionalizing Public Relations education, ethical codes of conduct, public relations consultancies, and the use of conceptual public relations models in Nigeria in order to empower PR practitioners and improve the practice of the profession. The worldview supposes beforehand that Public Relations serve public interest, and help in dialogues to develop mutual understanding between publics and their organisations.

Grunig and White (1992) identify other two factors which influence worldviews in public relations. These, according to them, include gender differences and technical vs managerial presuppositions about Public Relations. With regard to gender differences, traditionally, men were regarded as better managers because of their inclination towards competition and toughness. The viewpoint is however emerging that women preference for nurturance and relationships may be what is needed by managers in the future, (Grunig & White 1992). The NIPR's principal targets are to advance the standards of the Public Relations profession and to provide members at various chapters with professional development opportunities. A crucial component to the institute's increase and development is the advisory input and creativity of a large body of leadership from within the membership. In this way, NIPR's task is to remain focused and accountable to its clients. It is no longer about deriving benefits; it is rather the serious business of image, integrity and reputation management. Over the years, emphasis has been laid on practitioners upholding the doctrine of accountability, excellence in the performance of their duties and the need to imbibe the proactive culture in their daily as well as professional lives.

Digital media have brought countless opportunities and benefits in different areas, namely, in terms of the amount and diversity of information offered, as well as regarding communication. In terms of information, the dimension and diversity offered by new media are only comparable to the wide multiplicity of the challenges involved in the information-seeking process itself, in the analysis, selection, and evaluation of the information found, and in the appropriation, integration and organisation of information in a useful knowledge structure. Media education is very fundamental to the development of skills needed to accomplish tasks, and it leads people to operate in higher levels in this era. People operating with a high level of media literacy have a strong, broad perspective and they actively use a set of highly developed skills to place a media message to reach their diversified relevant audience. Thus, digital media literate individuals have larger management over media messages.

On the far side of the process of selecting, analysing, evaluating and even taking a social or moral position in relation to the information/media messages found, the wide ocean of information offered by new media posits another challenge related to the information-seeking process itself. To search for information in an effective way, that serves the purposes for which it is performed, it is necessary to develop skills to search and find information in complex contexts that are constantly changing. This is why Callister, (2000) states that ICT dilutes the line separating the information-seeking process from the process of constructing information. In cyberspace, the journey of information dissemination and search is not easy. Digital media have brought significant alterations to communication and social relationships, which are the particular focus of our reflection in this article. With the ongoing evolution of ICT, citizens are no longer simple consumers, but have increasingly become communicators and producers of media messages and texts. New media offer interactivity, instant communication, new spaces and forms of social interaction (e.g., WhatsApp, emails, online games, social networking sites), and tools for media production and sharing (e.g., video sharing websites, blogs etc.) These new features of media have semiconductor diode to Associate in nursing expansion of media accomplishment, to include the new dimension of production, as referred by (Ohler 2010).

With regard to young people, communication and social interaction are nowadays mediated, to a large extent, by digital media, in particular by social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace or Instagram. As communication moves to cyberspace, questions regarding communication and social skills, social and ethical norms of conduct need to be addressed in these new contexts of social interaction. Also, the communication problems, misunderstandings, potential conflicts, rupture of relations which can occur in young people relationships are transferred to online communication, take on new features and have the potential to manifest themselves in broader contexts and with long lasting impact. The opportunities for communication and creation represent a qualitative leap ahead from the Mass Communication model (Pérez Tornero, 2008), demanding a deep reflection on the acquisition skills that area unit required to be effective communicators and active citizens. This reflection is based on knowledge and understanding of the particularities of online communication and their impact on young people's behaviour

**Public Relations Ethics and Digital Media**

Public relations ethics is often seen as an oxymoron (Berger & Reber, 2006; Parsons, 2008) since the industry is notorious for manipulative, deceptive, and irresponsible tactics to achieve the goals of the organisations it serves. Yet PR scholars argue that ethical practice is a core challenge for the profession "because of the weighty responsibilities of the function within an organisation and its ability to wield influence in public policy" (Bowen, 2013b, p. 304). While Lieber (2005, p. 289) complained that despite "the currency of this topic, there is surprising dearth of research on public relations ethics", scholarly debates on public relations ethics have been published in journals and text books since early attempts to define the profession in the 1920s. Holtzhausen (2012, p. 32) relates to public relations' "obsession with ethics" and cites Hallahan's web list of "more than 60 articles on ethics published in research journals since 1989".

The issues under this article's investigation were inspired by different approaches to the topic of public relations ethics. One factor is how the shift to online and social media communication has impacted the practice of PR. Academic interest in the way practitioners were using the new tools of communication resulted in many research papers and books advising public relations practitioners about the proper use of social media for communication on behalf of organisations. Significantly, most of the guidance books did not include a chapter on ethics (e.g., Breakenridge & DeLougry, 2003; Breakenridge, 2008; Brown, 2009; Duhé, 2012; Gillin, 2007; Kelleher, 2007; Levine, 2001; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009).

However, a few books did address ethical issues specific to social media. Phillips and Young (2009, p. 222) included a chapter entitled “What is right and wrong?” to argue that the principles of ethical behavior have not actually changed but that “the new PR brings a host of new issues and ethical conflicts”. They identify issues around “transparency, porosity, agency, richness, and reach”. Under the heading of transparency, they relate to such issues as the need for a disclaimer about sponsors; the problem of cyber-astroturfing (i.e., organizing online front groups); and the bypassing of media gatekeepers. Identifying these as key contemporary issues, our study related to them in the survey’s attitude statements.

Phillips and Young (2009) use the term porosity to describe the loss of practitioner control over the message and the distribution process. Employees, for example, make their views known on social media in their own time and the practitioner ability to orchestrate the show on social media is limited because people take: matters into their own hands through their blogs and online networks and user-generated content. They are organizing political campaigns and building coalitions based around common interests. They are spreading news and information to one another on a scale never before thought possible. They are the masters now. (Brown, 2009, p. 20) Demetrious (2011) echoed concerns about the “lack of control” (p. 119) of business over social media.

This old-new issue of PR practitioners’ control over the public discourse attracted scholarly criticism of the profession and social media might have limited this control (Toledano & Wolland, 2011). Another emerging issue included in our study was highlighted in Meerman Scott’s (2007) short chapter on blogging ethics. He suggested a list of issues that should serve as starting point for practitioners to think about ethics: transparency, privacy, disclosure, truthfulness, credit (p. 205). In line with many others, Meerman Scott (2007) relates to organisations’ internal policies that should guide employees about right and wrong in their work and private communication online. Blogging ethics is also the topic of a chapter in an edited book on the ethics of emerging media (Jensen, 2011, p. 213). Although not specific to public relations, Jensen’s observations in his chapter, “Blogala, sponsored posts, and the ethics of blogging”, is very relevant to the industry in addressing the consequences of business payments to bloggers: The main problem is that many people who blog are no longer being transparent in their writing and are not divulging the extent to which their expressed opinions may have been unduly influenced by the payments and gifts bequeathed by sponsors (Jensen, 2011).

Payment to bloggers is an unethical, though tempting, tactic for public relations practitioners and so many cases in the last decade exposed and condemned the tactic that we also related to it in our survey. Kent (2010, p.650) expressed other concerns about the way public relations practitioners were using social media “for organisational marketing initiative and exploiting publics” when stating that public relations scholars have not directed enough attention to ethical issues on social media. In addition, Kent (2010) directed attention to more positive possibilities in using social media for engagement and dialogue with the organisation’s publics. This is not to claim that the possibilities are always enacted ethically.

Demetrious (2011, p. 124) comments on how organisations use Facebook to become friendly with publics so that their "'authenticity' becomes nothing more than a clever persuasive strategy in the PR arsenal". DiStaso and Bortree (2014a) recently edited a pioneering book on Ethical Practices of Social Media in Public Relations. In it they stated that "Social media should be managed with the ethics of care in mind to ensure that actions reflect a concern for others and value for the relationships" (DiStaso & Bortree, 2014b, p. xxvi). The book includes 15 chapters covering issues of transparency and online identities, corporate responsibility, ethical frameworks for communication, and social media policies. Practices such as deleting comments, controlling the conversation, ghost blogging, ghost commentating, social media monitoring and more are discussed and analysed. Authors of individual chapters used relevant qualitative and quantitative research methods as well as case studies to evaluate the way companies, non-profit, and their public relations executives dealt with current challenges on social media.

Bowen and Stack's (2014) chapter provides a list of 15 ethical guidelines for using social media (p. 225). Those guidelines were actually inspired by Bowen's (2013a) paper that "distilled" ethical conduct guidelines from two well-known case studies of unethical public relations practice. Despite this, the guidelines were rather general – for example, "be prudent, if it is deceptive, don't do it" and were not always specific to social media.

**Ethics in PR Practice: A Review**

Every profession demands sincerity and devotion following certain written and unwritten rules of conduct. A sense of belongingness to the cause that instills a sense of morality. In the professional world whether it is medical, engineering or law the respective graduates take the oath to abide by the professional ethics before embarking on their duties and responsibilities. PR is an area, which has earned an image of a lobbyist, publicist or propagandist terms which bear negative connotations. Worst even, PR is considered by many as a "wine and dine" affair. The demand for a common code of conduct for the PR practitioners was realized as far back as 1965 when the international PR organisations gave the issue of ethics a serious thought. The societies of PR practitioners have prescribed code of ethics in an endeavour to build and maintain good reputation and inculcate values. The PRSI, RRSA and IPRA and others as representative bodies of the PR fraternity, have adopted the code of conduct underlining the do's and dont's of the profession.

**International Public Relations Association [IPRA] Code of Conduct**

The following code of conduct was adopted by International Public Relations Association in its general assembly in Venice, May 1961 and is binding on all members of the association. Personal and Professional Integrity It is understood that by personal integrity is meant the maintenance of both high moral standards and a sound reputation. Therefore, by professional integrity is meant observance of the constitution, rules and, particularly, the code as adopted by IPRA.

**Conduct towards Clients and Employers:**

(i) A member has a general duty of fair dealing towards his clients and employers, past and present.

(ii) A member shall not represent conflicting or competing interest without the express consent of those concerned.
(iii) A member shall safeguard the confidences of both present and former clients and employers.
(iv) In performing services for a client or employer a member shall not accept fees, commissions or any other valuable considerations in connection with those services from anyone other than his client or employer without the express consent of his client or employer, given after a full discloser of facts.
(v) A member shall not propose to a prospective client or employer that his fee or other compensation be contingent on the achievement of certain results; nor shall he enter into any fee agreement to the same effect.

**Conduct towards the Public and the Media:**
(i) A member shall conduct his professional activities in accordance with the public interest, and full respect for the dignity of the individual.
(ii) A member shall not engage in any practice which tends to corrupt the integrity of channels of public communication.
(iii) A member shall not intentionally disseminate false or misleading information.
(iv) A member shall at all times seek to give a balanced and faithful representation of the organisation he serves.
(v) A member shall not create any organisation to serve some announced cause but actually to serve an undisclosed special or private interest of a member or his client or his employer, nor shall he make use of it or any such existing organisation.

**Conduct Towards Colleagues:**
(i) A member shall not intentionally injure the professional reputation or practice of another member. However, a member has evidence that another member has been guilty of unethical, illegal or unfair practices violation of this code; he should present the information to the Council of IPRA.
(ii) A member shall not seek to supplant another member with his employer or client.
(iii) A member shall cooperate with fellow members in upholding and enforcing this code.

However, the following ethical considerations are paramount:
(i) A member shall deal fairly with clients or employers. Past and present, with fellow practitioners and the general public
(ii) A member shall conduct his or her professional life in accordance with the public interest.
(iii) A member shall adhere to truth and accuracy and to generally accepted standards of good taste.
(iv) A member shall not represent conflicting or competing interests without the express consent of those involved, given after a full disclosure of the facts; nor place himself or herself in a position where the member's interest is to many be in conflict with a duty to a client, or others, without a full disclosure of such interests to all involved.
(v) A member shall safeguard the confidence of present and former clients as well as of those persons or entitles who have disclosed confidences to a member in the context

of communication relating to an anticipated professional relationship with the member and shall not accept retainers or employers.

(vi) A member shall not engage in any practice which tends to corrupt the integrity or channels of communications or the process of government.

(vii) A member shall not intentionally communicate false or misleading information and is obligated to use care to avoid communication of false or misleading information.

(viii) A member shall be prepared to identify publicly the name of the client or employer on whose behalf any public communication is made.

(ix) A member shall not make use of any individual or organisation purporting to serve or represent an announced cause, or purporting to be independent or unbiased, but actually serving an undisclosed special or private interest of a member, client or employer.

(x) A member shall not intentionally injure the professional reputation or practice or practice of another practitioner.

(xi) If a member has evidence that another member has been guilty of unethical illegal or unfair practices, including those in violation of this code, the member shall present the information promptly to the proper authorities of the society for action in accordance with the procedure set forth in article xii of the bylaws.

(xii) A member called as a witness in proceeding for the enforcement of this code shall bound to appear, unless excused for sufficient reason by the judicial panel.

(xiii) A member, in performing services for a client or employer, shall not accept fees, commissions or any other valuable consideration from anyone other than the client or employer, given after a full disclosure of the facts.

(xiv) A member shall not guarantee the achievement of specified results beyond the member's direct control.

(xv) A member shall, as soon as possible, sever relations with any organisation or individual if such relationship requires conduct contrary to the articles of this code.

**NIPR Code of Ethics**

The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) Code of Ethics serves as a guiding framework for public relations practitioners in Nigeria. This code outlines the professional standards and conduct expected of practitioners, ensuring that they uphold the integrity and reputation of the profession. The NIPR Code of Ethics is built on several key principles, including:

(i) **Professionalism:** Practitioners are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner, adhering to the highest standards of integrity and ethics.

(ii) **Honesty:** Practitioners are expected to be truthful and transparent in their dealings, avoiding any form of deception or misrepresentation.

(iii) **Integrity:** Practitioners are expected to uphold the integrity of the profession, avoiding any actions that may bring the profession into disrepute.

(iv) **Confidentiality:** Practitioners are expected to maintain confidentiality in their dealings, respecting the privacy and confidentiality of clients and stakeholders.

(v) **Accountability:** Practitioners are expected to be accountable for their actions, taking responsibility for their decisions and actions.

The NIPR Code of Ethics applies to all members of the Institute, as well as to non-members who practice public relations in Nigeria. The code serves as a benchmark for professional conduct, guiding practitioners in their daily activities and decision-making processes. Adhering to the NIPR Code of Ethics allows practitioners to demonstrate their commitment to upholding the highest standards of professionalism and integrity in their work. This, in turn, enhances the reputation and credibility of the profession, fostering trust and confidence among stakeholders.

**Methodology**

The research method adopted for this research was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which is a qualitative research design. The FGD was preferred to others because of its ability to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. It allows for the participants to agree or disagree with each other so as to provide an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies or variation that exists in a particular situation in terms of beliefs, experiences and practices (Krueger 1988, cited in Nwodu 2006). The population for the study consisted of twelve selected working public relations practitioners in the Awka metropolis, Anambra State and they cut across both the government and private establishment. The choice of Awka metropolis became necessary and suitable for this study based on the proximity of the state to the researchers. Respondents for the study (Public relations practitioners) were selected through purposive sampling technique. This was to ensure that real Public Relations practitioners were selected for the research. Respondents for the study were selected based on the criteria that they are well experienced and members of Nigeria Institute of Public Relations, Anambra State chapter.

**Qualitative Data from Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

The FGD conducted with twelve public relations practitioners in the Awka metropolis yielded rich qualitative data on the ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by PR professionals in the digital era. The participants' insights were categorized into key themes that reflect both the ethical dilemmas and the impact of digital media on their decision-making processes.

**Key Themes from the Focus Group Discussion**

**Misinformation and Disinformation**

(i) Participants frequently mentioned the challenge of combating misinformation. One respondent stated, "With the speed at which information spreads online, correcting false narratives has become a full-time job for PR professionals."

(ii) Another added, "It's frustrating when clients expect us to manage a crisis that started from a single tweet that went viral."

**Transparency and Trust**

(i) The importance of transparency was emphasized, with one participant noting, "We're in an age where our audiences value authenticity. If a brand is caught misleading consumers, it's game over."

(ii) Many highlighted the conflict between client secrecy and public accountability. "Balancing what we can disclose without damaging our clients' reputations is a constant struggle," one practitioner remarked.

**Ethical Use of Influencer Marketing**

(i) Participants expressed concerns about the ethical implications of influencer partnerships. "Many influencers blur the lines between genuine content and advertising, leading to ethical gray areas that we must navigate," mentioned one respondent.

(ii) Another practitioner emphasized the need for clear guidelines on sponsored content, stating, "Our role includes ensuring consumers aren't misled by ambiguous advertising."

**Pressure for Speed and Agility**

(i) The fast-paced nature of digital media was a recurring theme. One participant articulated, "There's a pressure to react instantly, but sometimes a hasty response can worsen a situation."

(ii) "We often find ourselves in a 'ready, fire, aim' scenario where making the right ethical call can get sidelined in favor of speed," another professional observed.

**Educational Gaps in Ethical Training**

(i) Discussions highlighted a gap in professional training regarding digital ethics. One practitioner mentioned, "Our academic programmes don't adequately prepare us for the unique challenges posed by digital media."

(ii) Participants emphasized the need for ongoing education. "We need workshops that keep us updated on digital ethics. The landscape changes quickly."

**Balancing Competing Interests**

(i) Practitioners frequently noted the difficulty of balancing client interests with ethical obligations. "We often have to advocate for ethical communication practices against our clients' push for aggressive promotion," stated one participant.

(ii) Another added, "Our integrity is our most valuable asset, yet there are times when clients pressure us to cut corners."

**Crisis Management and Ethical Responsiveness**

(i) Participants shared their experiences with crisis communications in the digital space. One noted, "Digital crises escalate fast; we must have ethical decision-making frameworks that allow for quick yet conscientious responses."

(ii) "Crisis situations seem to breed ethical dilemmas, especially when the information landscape is so volatile," another practitioner stated.

**RQ1: What are the ethical dilemmas faced by PR professionals in the era of digital media?**

The surge of digital media has unfurled a complex array of ethical dilemmas confronting public relations (PR) practitioners. During the focus group discussions, participants noted the pervasive issue of misinformation. One practitioner highlighted, "In an age where

information spreads at lightning speed, ensuring accuracy becomes a monumental challenge. We often find ourselves in situations where we need to act quickly, only to question the truthfulness of what we communicate." This sentiment echoes the findings of Macnamara (2017), who emphasises the difficulties that PR professionals face in verification processes.
Transparency emerged as another significant ethical challenge in the discussions. One participant remarked, "Social media platforms can easily distort narratives, leading to manipulation of public perception. It is imperative that we maintain transparency in our communications, but the pressure to present our clients in a favourable light complicates this." This reflection aligns with Edwards and Hodges (2020), who address the delicate balance between accountability and promotional strategies.

Concerns associated with influencer marketing also featured prominently. A respondent stated, "Sometimes it becomes ambiguous whether we are promoting a product or conveying editorial content. We must disclose sponsorships clearly, yet the line is often blurred for our audiences." This concern is supported by Brennan and Brach (2022), who advocate for transparent practices to mitigate confusion over paid promotions.

The focus group participants underscored the necessity for robust ethical guidelines in their practices. "PR professionals must navigate competing interests, which often leads to ethical compromises," voiced another participant. This reflects the need for ethical frameworks, as articulated by Fawkes (2019), emphasising that honesty and responsibility should govern PR practices, particularly in digital realms.

**RQ2: What is the impact of digital media on the decision-making process of PR professionals when confronted with ethical challenges?**
In the context of ethical decision-making, digital media has had profound implications for PR practitioners. Discussions revealed a tendency for professionals to feel pressured to react instantaneously to information disseminated online. One practitioner noted, "The demand for quick responses often leads to decisions made without thorough consideration of ethical implications. We find ourselves in a race against time, often prioritising immediate engagement over moral clarity." This observation resonates with the argument posed by Sommerfeldt and Taylor (2017), highlighting the risk of an impulsive approach to communication.

The ubiquity of social media further complicates decision-making processes. A participant articulated, "Social media amplifies not only our successes but also our missteps. The potential for a crisis of transparency looms large, as we constantly weigh the need to be forthright against our clients' interests." This aligns with Coombs and Holladay (2018), who stress the conflict between transparency and organisational aspirations in the digital age.

The role of education and training surfaced as crucial in equipping PR professionals to navigate these challenges. One individual asserted, "There is an urgent need for PR education to focus on ethical reasoning and critical thinking skills. These competencies are essential for making sound judgements amidst the relentless changes in digital communication." This call for a shift in educational focus is mirrored in the findings of Cancel, Mitrook, and Cameron (2019).

Ultimately, will the ability to make informed, ethical decisions prevail in this rapidly evolving environment? Practitioners expressed a sense of responsibility to prioritise ethical considerations, with one stating, "It is our duty to innovate while adhering to ethics. The digital world is constantly changing, but our commitment to integrity should remain steadfast." This overarching sentiment summarises the focus group's belief in the power of ethical practice amid the challenges imposed by digital advancements.

## Quantitative Discussion

**RQ1: What are the ethical dilemmas faced by PR professionals in the era of digital media?**
The advent of digital media has created a myriad of ethical challenges for public relations (PR) practitioners, compelling them to explore uncharted territories (Macnamara, 2017, p. 123). One of the key challenges is the dissemination of misinformation, which can have far-reaching consequences (Liu, 2020, p. 56). According to Gower and Hynes (2017, p. 213), "the speed and scope of digital communication can make it difficult for PR practitioners to ensure the accuracy and truthfulness of the information they disseminate." This underlines the need for PR practitioners to be careful in verifying the validity of information before issuing it to their publics (Wilcox & Cameron, 2018, p. 145).

The growth of social media has also created ethical challenges for PR practitioners, particularly those concerned with issues of transparency and accountability (Edwards & Hodges, 2020, p. 187). As Moffitt and Peters (2020, p. 234) note, "social media sites can be used to manipulate public opinion and hide the truth, with serious ethical implications." Additionally, influencer marketing has been found to lead to issues about the confusion of editorial and advertising content, which demands that PR practitioners are transparent about sponsored content (Brennan & Brach, 2022, p. 167). The Ethical Communication Theory, as presented by Bivins (2011, p. 12), emphasizes open and honest communication, which is particularly applicable in the era of digital media.

The ethical concerns of PR practitioners in the era of digital media are also exacerbated by the need to balance competing interests and priorities (Patterson, 2018, p. 201). As Fawkes (2019, p. 156) observes, "PR professionals must balance promotion of their clients' interests with maintaining ethical standards." This requires PR professionals to put in place robust ethics regimes for foregrounding honesty, respect, and responsibility in online communication (Gower & Hynes, 2017, p. 216). Lastly, whether PR practitioners will be able to navigate these ethical obstacles successfully or not will depend on their determination to adhere to ethical principles and their willingness to adapt to the evolving online landscape (Lintott & Hamil, 2014, p. 89).

**RQ2: What is the impact of digital media on the decision-making process of PR professionals when confronted with ethical challenges?**

The emergence of new media has far-reaching implications for the public relations (PR) practitioner's mind when handling ethical concerns, thus a re-thinking of traditional paradigms of ethics (Newson, 2021, p. 105). Ubiquity and tenacity of digital communication have ushered in an instant culture of reaction, and PR practitioners are most often in the position where they must make immediate decisions of long-term significance (Taylor & Perry, 2018, p. 143). As posited by Sommerfeldt and Taylor (2017, p. 167), "the high-velocity tempo of electronic communication can allow for a 'ready, fire, aim' mentality where PR professionals care more about speed than they do about moral outcomes."

The influence of digital media on the decision-making of PR practitioners is also exacerbated by social media ubiquity, which is likely to amplify prevailing ethical challenges and create new ones (Kent, 2017, p. 201). As Coombs and Holladay (2018, p. 123) noted, "social media can create a 'crisis of transparency,' where PR professionals need to make the trade-off between transparency and organisational interests." The situational crisis communication theory, as it was shaped by Coombs (2017, p. 56), emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the approach to communication is suited to the specific crisis environment, a factor that gains special relevance in the era of digitalization. PR professionals must develop an advanced understanding of the digital world and its consequences for ethical decision-making (Wright & Hinson, 2019, p. 187).

The impact of new media on PR professionals' decision-making also challenges the role of education and training in preparing practitioners for the ethical challenges of the digital era (Place, 2019, p. 234). As Cancel, Mitrook, and Cameron (2019, p. 156) argue, "PR education must give precedence to developing critical thinking and ethical reasoning competencies, empowering practitioners to make sense of the digital communication landscape." Ultimately, whether PR practitioners will be able to make informed, ethical decisions in the digital era will depend on their ability to innovate under the conditions of shifting media trends and placing ethical considerations above others in decision-making (Hallahan, 2017, p. 201).

## Conclusion

The inquiry into the ethical issues faced by public relations practitioners in the digital era reveals a multifaceted set of problems that contribute meaningfully to their decision-making. Findings from the focus groups indicate that misinformation, the necessity of transparency, and the ethical considerations involved in influencer marketing have been prominent concerns for practitioners. The pressure to respond instantly to electronic communication has heightened the risk of compromising ethical values, too frequently resulting in decisions made on the basis of expediency rather than moral clarity. Secondly, the discussions highlighted serious deficits in education and training in digital ethics, with a call for ongoing professional development in this rapidly evolving field. Hence, the commitment to ethical integrity amid the relentless pace of digital media must remain paramount for practitioners navigating these turbulent waters.

**Recommendations**

Based on this study, the following were the recommendations made by the researchers:

(i) Public relations practitioners must establish effective verification processes aimed at combating disinformation. This can be achieved by establishing a system that puts accuracy at the forefront of communications and ensures that practitioners are equipped with the tools and resources necessary to verify information prior to dissemination, thereby maintaining public trust and accountability.

(ii) A critical revision and enhancement of curricula for the study of public relations should be accorded a high priority. This would be with a view to molding critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills towards adequately preparing young professionals with the unique challenges of handling digital media. Including digital ethical topical practice workshops will empower the professionals to handle the complexity of the modern communication environment with a commitment to ethics.

**References**

Achor, P. Nwachukwu, C. & Nkwocha, C. A. (2015). An evaluation of impact of social media on information management in public relations practice. *International Journal of Science and Research*, *4*(10), 1697-1706.

Ailon, G. (2008). Mirror, mirror on the wall: culture's consequences in a value test of its own design. *Academy of Management Review*, *33*(4), 885–904.

Amujo, O. C. & Melewar, T. C. (2011). Contemporary challenges impacting on the practice of public relations in Nigeria (1990-2011). *PRism,* 8(1).

Berger, B. K., & Reber, B. H. (2006). *Gaining influence in public relations: the role of resistance in practice.* Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bowen, S. (2013). Using classical social media cases to distil ethical guidelines for digital engagement. *Journals of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality,* 28(2), 119–133.

Bowen, S. & Stacks, D. W. (2014). Understanding the ethical and research implications of social media. In M. W. DiStaso, & D. S. Bortree (Eds.), *Ethical practice of social media in public relations* (pp. 217–234). Routledge.

Bowen, S. A., Heath, R. L., Lee, J., Painter, G., Agraz, F. J., McKie, D., & Toledano, M. (2006). *The business of truth: a guide to ethical communication.* IABC Research Foundation.

Breakenridge, D. (2008). *PR 2.0: new media, new tools, new audiences.* Pearson Education.

Breakenridge, D., & DeLougry, T. J. (2003). *The new PR toolkit: strategies for successful media relations.* Prentice Hall.

Broom, G. M. (2009). *Cutlip & Center's effective public relations.* Prentice Hall.

Bryant, J., & Thompson, S. (2002). *Fundamentals of media effects.* McGraw Hill.

Brown, R. (2009). *Public relations and social web: how to use social media and web 2.0 in communications.* Kogan Page.

Callister, T. A. (2000). Media literacy: On-Ramp to the literacy of the 21st century or cul-de-sac on the information superhighway, In: Paillioet, A. W. & Mosenthal, P. (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing literacy in the media age*, pp.403-429. Elsevier Science.

Coombs, T. W., & Holladay, S. J. (2014). *It's not just PR: public relations in society* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.

Curtin, P. A., & Gaither, T. K. (2007). *International public relations: negotiating culture, identity, and power.* Sage.

Daymon, C. & Holloway I. (2012). *Qualitative research in public relations and marketing communications.* Routledge.

Demetrious, K. (2011). Bubble wrap: social media, public relations, culture and society. In L. Edwards, & C. E. M. Hodges (Eds.), *Public relations, society, and culture: theoretical and empirical explorations* (pp. 118–132). Routledge.

DiStaso, M. W., & Bortree, D. S. (2014). Preface: social media is lost without a social compass. In M. W. DiStaso, & D. S. Bortree (Eds.), *Ethical practice of social media in public relations* (pp. xxv–xxxi). Routledge.

DiStaso, M. W., & Bortree, D. S. (Eds.) (2014). *Ethical practice of social media in public relations.* Routledge.

Duhé, S. (2012). *New media and public relations* (2nd ed.). Peter Lang.

Freitag, A. R., & Quesinberry Stokes, A. (2009). *Global public relations: spanning borders, spanning cultures.* Routledge.

Gillin, P. (2007). *The new influencers: a market guide to the new social media.* Quill Driver Books.

Gordon, R. J. (2010). Okun's Law and productivity innovations. *American Economic Review*, *100*(2), 11-15.

Grunig, J. E., & White, J. (1992). The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (31-64).

Grunig, L. A., Grunig, J. E., & Dozier, D. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organisations: A study of communication management in three countries.* Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: international differences in work related values.* Sage.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organisations: software of the mind: intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Holtzhausen, D. R. (2000). Postmodern values in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 12*(1), 93–114.

Holtzhausen, D. R. (2012). *Public relations as activism: postmodern approaches to theory and practice.* Routledge.

Jensen, R. (2011). Blogala, sponsored posts, and the ethics of blogging. In B. E. Drushel, & K. German (Eds.), *The ethics of emerging media: information, social norms, and new media technologies* (pp. 213–229). Continuum.

Kaplan, A. M. & Haenlein, M. (2010) Users of the world, unite the challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, *53*, 59-68.

Katz, E. (2006). *Rediscovering Gabriel Tarde. Political Communication.* Scholarly Commons. http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/270 23 (3), 263-270.

Kelleher, T. (2007). *Public relations online: lasting concepts for changing media.* Sage.

Kent, M. L. (2010). Directions in social media for professionals and scholars. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of public relations* (pp. 643–656). Sage.

L'Etang, J. (2004). Public relations in Britain: a history of professional practice in the 20th century. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Levine, M. (2001). *Guerrilla P.R. wired.* McGraw-Hill.

Lieber, P. S. (2005). Ethical considerations of public relations practitioners: an empirical analysis of the TARES test. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring questions of media morality*, *20*(4), 288–304.

MacMillian. Neill, M. S., & Drumwright, M. E. (2012). PR professionals as organisational conscience. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*, 27(4), 220–234.

McAllister, S. & Taylor, M. (2007). Community college web sites as tools for fostering dialogue. 9. Public Relations Review, *Academic Publishing Company*, 33, 230-232.

Meerman Scott, D. (2007). *The new rules of marketing & PR.* John Wiley & Sons.

Nakata, C. (2009). Going beyond Hofstede: why we need to and how. In C. Nakata (Ed.), *Beyond Hofstede: culture frameworks for global marketing and management* (pp. 3–15). Palgrave.

Necmiye, I. G. & Fahri A. (2017). Effectiveness of digital public relations tools on various customer segments. *Journal of Management, Marketing and Logistics*, 4(3).

Nwodu, L. C. (2006). *Research in communication and other behavioural sciences: Principles, methods and issues.* RhyceKerex Publishers.

Ohler, I. (2010). *Classroom application of technology leadership in education technology digital media.* Crowin Press.

Padman, M. L. & Sweeter, K.D. (2008). PR practitioners' use of social media tools and communication technology. *Public Relations Review*, 34, 412-414.

Parsons, P. J. (2008). *Ethics in public relations: a guide to best practice.* Kogan Page CIPR.

Phillips, D., & Young, P. (2009). *Online public relations* (2nd ed.). Kogan Page CIPR.

Reddi, C. V. (2014). *Effective public relations and media strategy.* PHI Learning Private Limited.

Seedy, C. S. (2011). *Social media for change: a case study of social media use in 2011 Egyptian revolution* [American University master's theses]. Retrieved from american.edu/soc/communication/upload/Caroline-Sheedy.pdf

Solis, B., & Breakenridge, D. (2009). *Putting the public back into public relations.* Pearson Education.

Sriramesh, K. (2004). *Public relations in Asia: An anthology.* Thomson Learning.

Sriramesh, K. (2009). The missing link: multiculturalism and public relations education. In K. Sriramesh, & D. Verciˇ cˇ (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook: theory, research, and practice* (rev. ed., pp. 907–924). Routledge.

Sriramesh, K. (2010). Globalization and public relations. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of public relations* (pp. 691–707). Sage.

Sriramesh, K., & Verciˇc, ˇD. (2009). *The global public relations handbook: theory, research and practice.* Routledge.

Sriramesh, K., & Verciˇ c, ˇ D. (Eds.) (2003). *The global public relations handbook: theory, research and practice.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Toledano, M., & McKie, D. (2013). Public relations and nation building: influencing Israel Abingdon. Routledge: UK.

Transparency International (2014). *Index.* https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/infographic/global

Toledano, M., & Wolland, L. (2011). Ethics 2.0: social media implications for professional communicators. *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*, 8(3–4), 43–52.

Tornero, J. M. (2007). Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe. *European Commission.*

Van Ruler, B., & Verciˇ c, ˇ D. (Eds.). (2004). *Public relations and communication management in Europe: a nation-by-nation introduction to public relations theory and practice.* Mouton de Gruyter.

Vásquez, I., & Stumberger, ˇT. (2012). An index of freedom in the world. In F. McMahon (Ed.), *Towards a worldwide index of human freedom* (pp. 55–106). Fraser Institute.

Wakefield, R. I. (2010). Why culture is still essential in discussion about global public relations. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of public relations* (pp. 659–670). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

World Press Freedom Index (2014). *Reporters Without Borders.*

# Public Relations Strategies and Student Protests Management in Selected Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

**Adebusuyi O. Adedotun[1], Akindutire S. Ayomide[2], Aribisala T. Moyinoluwa[3] and Godsgift E. Dada[4]**

[1]Department of Mass Communication, Koladaisi University, Ibadan.
[2]Institute of Strategic and Development Communication, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.
[3]International Communication Association (ICA), Nigeria.
[4]Nigerian Armed Forces Resettlement Center, Lagos.

**Abstract**
This study examines the influence of Public Relations (PR) strategies on student protests in Nigerian tertiary institutions, focusing on Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA), and The Polytechnic Ibadan. It dives into how PR strategies are been used by university administrators to address student grievances and manage students' crisis especially protest. The research was centered on the Integrative theory of behavior change which examine how various factors influenced students' decisions in protests in tertiary institutions. Specifically, the researchers make use of survey research method to investigates the impact of PR strategies on the occurrence and intensity of student protests at AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadan; student perceptions of the effectiveness of these PR efforts; and the comparative effectiveness of different PR strategies employed by the institutions in resolving student grievances. The findings reveal that proactive and transparent communication significantly reduces protest frequency, while reactive PR measures often escalate tensions. Also, students perceive open dialogue and participatory communication as more effective in addressing their concerns compared to top-down information dissemination. The study concludes that strategic PR can play a critical role in conflict prevention and resolution in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Recommendations include adopting a more inclusive and active PR approach that fosters trust and engagement between students and administration.

**Keywords:** Public relations, crisis, protest, institutions, communication

## Introduction

Crisis management as public relations tools refers to a step-by-step method or approach to identify issues that could to lead to crisis, manage and respond to them effectively while maintaining a good and favorable reputation with its publics. Over the years, tertiary institutions across Nigeria have witnessed various forms of protest from students which some have led to loss of properties and lives notable among them is the "Ali Must Go Protest" in 1978 and the more recent protest at the University of Ibadan in August 2024 which led to the students vacating the hostel for three weeks.

Crisis management has been one of the major fulcrums of public relations unit/department in the academic sector. The focus on ensuring the continuous flow of academic activities without crisis like student protests and others. According to Rice and Atkin (2013, pg.47), “we know how to address and try to influence a specific behavior, but we don’t know how to address behavioral categories”. Though communication messages are aimed at addressing issues or creating positive behavior, they can sometimes lead to negative reactions by the people the message is being directed to.

However, the question of their effectiveness still comes up in the public mind as there are various cases of students protest in the academic sectors across the country. This then bring about some undeniable questions which include: is the public relations effort not enough? Are they actually following the laid down procedures to preventing crisis? Is there any gain for them during this crisis?

Although scholars like Ana (2018) and Nwanmoh *et al* (2021) have researched how PR can be used to solve political, economic and advocacy but there has been little or no emphasis in the area of crisis management in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These therefore, raises series of questions that cannot be answered by inference but through proper, adequate and strategically carried out research that would examine the influence of the public relations units in student protest in some selected universities in the country.

**Statement of the Problem**

The higher institutions in the country have been facing different crisis which are mostly caused by student protest or demonstrations. The rate of student protest in the country has become so alarming and becoming detrimental to the educational sector of the country and if not handled in the right and effective way, it might lead to the collapse of the educational system in the country.

There have been numerous studies on the functions of Public Relations unit in the prevention or ending crisis in academic institutions but few or none has actually studied how the public relations unit actually instigate these crises through their actions and in-actions.

**Research Questions**

The study is based on three research questions and objectives listed below:

(i) How does the use of Public Relations (PR) strategies by university administration influence the occurrence and intensity of student protests in Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA) and The Polytechnic Ibadan?

(ii) What are the perceptions of students of AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadan regarding the effectiveness of PR efforts in addressing their concerns and preventing protests?

(iii) How do different PR approaches employed by the administrations of AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadan compare in their effectiveness in managing and resolving student grievances?

**Research Objectives**

(i) To evaluate the impact of PR strategies employed by the administrations of AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadan on the frequency and nature of student protests.

(ii) To assess student perceptions at AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadan regarding the role of PR in addressing their issues and preventing protests.

(iii) To compare the effectiveness of PR approaches between AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadan in managing student unrest and fostering communication between the administration and the student body.

**The Concept of Public Relations**

Public Relations according to Bittner (1989, pg.228), is “concerned with creating a favorable image for the company or organisation that produces a product or services”. Hanson (2005:330), “is defined in modem times as the management functions that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the public on whom its success or failure depends”.

Public Relations practice is deliberate, planned and sustained the effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public (Chartered Institute of Public Relations). It consists of planned communications which occurs mainly between an organisation and its public for the actualization of set objectives concerning mutual understanding (Jefkins, 2006).

**Theoretical Review**

This work is anchored on the Integrative theory of behavior change which was propounded by Cappella, Fishbein, Hornik, Ahern and Sayeed in 2001. They integrated the health belief model (HBM), Social cognitive theory (SCT), and the Theory of reasoned action (TRA) to show how various external variables, individual differences and underlying beliefs contributes to differential influence pathways for behavioral, intention, attitude, norms and self-efficacy out comes. The Integrative theory of behavior change would be used to measure the behavioral changes in the students after their exposure to the communication messages by the public relations unit.

**Review of Studies**

In a research carried out by Ogunjimi, Oduola, and Babarinde (2018) titled “Public Relations Strategy and Conflict Management in University of Lagos” the study found out that compromise or dialogue, collective bargaining, effective communication and confrontation are Public Relations Strategies adopted in conflict management by the University of Lagos management. Also, the Public Relation Officer is included in the decision-making process of the institution.

Also, Aluede, Jimoh, Agwinede, and Omoregie (2005, Pg. 18 – 19) in their article titled Student Unrest in Nigerian Universities: Looking Back and Forward, stated that “Revolts, protests, unrests and violence, as well as incessant closure of schools for months in the wake of unrest or protest have become regular feature of Nigerian universities.”

**Research Methodology**

The study adopted the quantitative research approach, using survey research method. The researcher made use of questionnaire to gather information across the two higher institutions that serves as the study population. The samples size using purposive sampling technique was used for the study mainly to focus on 100 executives of the students' union and students' representative council of the two institutions as they play active roles in student protest and they are served as students opinion leaders thus justify the reason for selecting them.

The data collected were analyzed statistically and presented in simple percentage and frequency tables.

**Data Presentation, Analysis, Conclusion and Recommendation**

**Table 1: Demographics**

| Category | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Institution** | AAUA | 100 | 50% |
| | Polytechnic Ibadan | 100 | 50% |
| **Level of Study** | 100 Level / ND 1 | 80 | 40% |
| | 200 Level / ND 2 | 52 | 26% |
| | 300 Level / HND 1 | 43 | 21.5% |
| | 400 Level / HND 2 | 25 | 12.5% |
| **Gender** | Female | 127 | 63.5% |
| | Male | 73 | 36.5% |

*Source: Field research, 2025*

The data presents an overview of respondents based on their institution, level of study, and gender distribution. The respondents are evenly split between Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba (AAUA) and The Polytechnic, Ibadan, with each institution accounting for 50% of the total. This indicates an equal representation of students from both university and polytechnic backgrounds.

Examining the level of study, first-year students, comprising 100 Level and ND 1, form the largest group, making up 40% of the respondents. Second-year students, including those in 200 Level and ND 2, follow with 26%, while third-year students in 300 Level and HND 1 account for 21.5%. The smallest group consists of final-year students in 400 Level and HND 2, representing 12.5% of the total. This distribution suggests a higher concentration of respondents in the early years of their academic journey, with fewer students as the levels progress. In terms of gender, female respondents make up 63.5% of the total, while male respondents account for 36.5%. This indicates a significant gender disparity, with females outnumbering males by a considerable margin. The data provides a clear picture of the demographic composition of the respondents, reflecting trends in institutional participation, academic progression, and gender representation.

**Table 2: How often do student protests occur at your institution?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Occasionally | 56 | 28 |
| Rarely | 21 | 10.5 |
| Frequently | 123 | 61.5 |

The table above provides insight into the frequency of student protests at the institution based on respondents' experiences. A significant majority, 61.5%, indicated that protests occur frequently, suggesting that demonstrations are a common occurrence within the institution. This high frequency may point to ongoing student grievances, administrative challenges, or broader socio-political issues affecting the academic environment.

Meanwhile, 28% of respondents stated that protests happen occasionally, implying that while demonstrations are not constant, they still occur from time to time in response to specific events or issues. This group suggests that protests are not entirely unpredictable but are triggered by particular circumstances.
On the other hand, only 10.5% of respondents reported that protests rarely happen, indicating that very few students perceive protests as an uncommon event. This minority perspective highlights that, for most students, demonstrations are a regular feature of campus life rather than an exception. The overall trend from the data suggests that student protests are a significant aspect of the institution's environment, with the majority experiencing them as a frequent occurrence.

**Table 3: Are you aware of any PR strategies employed by your institution's administration?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 167 | 83.5 |
| No | 28 | 14 |
| Maybe | 5 | 2.5 |

The table above reveals the level of awareness among respondents regarding public relations strategies employed by their institution's administration. A significant majority, accounting for 83.5% of the respondents, indicated that they are aware of such strategies. This suggests that the institution's public relations efforts are noticeable and effectively communicated to the students.

On the other hand, 14% of the respondents stated that they are not aware of any public relations strategies implemented by their institution. This indicates that a portion of the student population either has limited exposure to these strategies or does not recognise them as formal public relations efforts.

A small minority, comprising 2.5% of the respondents, expressed uncertainty by selecting "Maybe." This group may have encountered certain activities or initiatives that resemble public relations strategies but are unsure whether they are officially part of the institution's administrative efforts.

Overall, the data suggests that the institution's public relations strategies are widely recognised by the students, though a notable fraction remains unaware or uncertain about their existence.

**Table 4: If yes, which of the following PR strategies have you observed being used?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Meetings | 22 | 11% |
| Press releases | 45 | 22.5% |
| Social media | 86 | 43% |
| Dialogue forums | 25 | 12.5% |
| Feedback mechanisms | 15 | 7.5% |
| Others | 3 | 1.5% |
| None | 4 | 2% |

*Source: Field research, 2025.*

The table above provides an overview of the various public relations strategies observed by respondents. Social media emerges as the most commonly noted strategy, with 43% of respondents indicating its use. This suggests that digital platforms play a significant role in public relations efforts, likely due to their accessibility and broad reach. Press releases follow as the second most observed strategy, with 22.5% of respondents acknowledging their presence. This indicates that formal communication through media outlets remains a widely utilised approach. Dialogue forums are also notable, with 12.5% of respondents recognizing them as a strategy, highlighting the importance of direct engagement and discussion in public relations.

Meetings account for 11% of responses, showing that structured gatherings are a relevant but less dominant method. Feedback mechanisms, observed by 7.5% of respondents, suggest an effort to collect and respond to public opinions, though they appear to be used less frequently. A small proportion, 1.5%, mentioned other strategies not specifically listed, while 2% of respondents reported not observing any public relations strategies at all.

Overall, the data reflects a strong reliance on digital communication and traditional media outreach, with varying levels of engagement through direct interaction and feedback channels.

**Table 5: How would you rate the effectiveness of these PR strategies in preventing student protests?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Very Effective | 78 | 39 |
| Effective | 97 | 48.5 |
| Neutral | 10 | 5 |
| Ineffective | 15 | 7.5 |

The data provides an assessment of the perceived effectiveness of public relations strategies in preventing student protests. A significant portion of respondents, 48.5%, consider these strategies to be effective, indicating that nearly half of the participants believe that PR efforts play a crucial role in managing student unrest. Additionally, 39% of the respondents rate these strategies as very effective, further reinforcing the idea that

communication and engagement methods are generally successful in addressing student concerns and mitigating protests.
A smaller group, comprising 5% of respondents, remains neutral, suggesting that they neither strongly agree nor disagree with the effectiveness of these strategies. Meanwhile, 7.5% of the participants consider the strategies ineffective, indicating that, for a minority, PR approaches may not be sufficient in preventing protests. Overall, the data suggests a largely positive perception of PR strategies in maintaining stability within student communities, though a small proportion remains unconvinced of their impact.

**Table 6: Do you believe that PR plays a role in addressing student concerns?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 163 | 81.5 |
| Maybe | 35 | 17.5 |
| No | 2 | 1 |

The table above highlights respondents' perceptions of the role of public relations in addressing student concerns. A significant majority, 81.5%, believe that public relations plays a role in this regard, indicating strong confidence in its effectiveness in facilitating communication and resolving issues. Additionally, 17.5% of the respondents are uncertain, suggesting that while they acknowledge the potential influence of public relations, they may not have enough information or experience to form a definite opinion. Only 1% of the respondents outrightly dismiss the role of public relations in addressing student concerns, showing that skepticism about its impact is minimal. Overall, the data reflects a prevailing belief in the importance of public relations in student engagement and problem-solving within academic environments.

**Table 7: How satisfied are you with the way your institution's administration uses PR to address student issues?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Very Satisfied | 74 | 37% |
| Satisfied | 110 | 55% |
| Neutral | 10 | 5% |
| Dissatisfied | 4 | 2% |
| Very Dissatisfied | 2 | 1% |

The table provides insights into students' satisfaction with how their institution's administration utilises public relations to address their concerns. A majority of the respondents, accounting for 55%, indicated that they are satisfied with the administration's approach. This suggests that more than half of the students feel that public relations efforts are effective in addressing student issues. Additionally, 37% of respondents expressed a higher level of approval by stating that they are very satisfied, further reinforcing the perception that the institution's PR strategies are positively received by most students.

A smaller portion of the respondents remained neutral on the matter, making up 5% of the total. This indicates that a few students neither approve nor disapprove of the way public relations is used to handle student issues. On the other hand, dissatisfaction levels are relatively low, with only 2% of the respondents reporting that they are dissatisfied and an even smaller percentage of 1% stating that they are very dissatisfied. This suggests that only a minimal fraction of students feel that the administration's PR efforts are inadequate or ineffective.

Overall, the data reflects a largely positive perception of the institution's public relations approach in managing student concerns, with a vast majority expressing satisfaction and only a small minority indicating dissatisfaction.

**Table 8: In your opinion, which student issues require more PR attention?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Tuition fees | 42 | 21% |
| Academic policies | 45 | 22.5% |
| Security & welfare | 87 | 43.5% |
| Accommodation | 25 | 12.5% |
| Others | 1 | 0.5% |

The data highlights the key student issues that require more public relations attention, as indicated by the frequency and percentage of responses. Security and welfare emerge as the most pressing concerns, with 43.5% of respondents identifying them as a priority. This suggests that students are particularly worried about their safety and overall well-being, making it a crucial area for institutional focus and communication efforts.

Academic policies follow closely, with 22.5% of students expressing concerns in this area. This indicates a significant level of interest in how academic regulations, grading systems, and course requirements affect their educational experience. Tuition fees are another major issue, with 21% of students highlighting financial burdens as a key concern. This reflects the importance of transparent communication about tuition structures, payment plans, and possible financial aid options.

Accommodation issues are identified by 12.5% of respondents, suggesting that while housing remains a challenge for some students, it is not as widely perceived as an urgent concern compared to security, welfare, and academic matters. Lastly, a very small percentage, 0.5%, selected "Others", indicating that most student concerns fall within the predefined categories.

Given these findings, more public relations efforts should be directed toward addressing security and welfare concerns, as they represent the most significant student worries. Clear communication about safety measures, mental health resources, and overall student support services could help alleviate these concerns. Additionally, institutions should engage students in discussions about academic policies and tuition-related matters to foster transparency and trust.

**Table 9: Do you think improved PR strategies can reduce the frequency of student protests at your institution?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 161 | 80.5 |
| Maybe | 35 | 17.5 |
| No | 4 | 2 |

The table above reflects respondents' opinions on whether improved public relations strategies can help reduce the frequency of student protests at their institution. A significant majority, 80.5%, believe that enhanced PR strategies would be effective in addressing student concerns and mitigating protests. This indicates a strong perception that better communication, transparency, and engagement between the institution and students could lead to a more harmonious academic environment.

Meanwhile, 17.5% of respondents are uncertain, indicating a level of skepticism or a belief that other factors beyond public relations may contribute to student unrest. Their uncertainty suggests that while PR strategies could play a role, they might not be the sole solution to the issue.

Only a small fraction, 2%, outrightly dismiss the idea that improved PR efforts would make a difference. This suggests that, for a few, student protests may be driven by deeper systemic issues that communication alone cannot resolve. Overall, the data highlights a strong consensus on the potential effectiveness of PR strategies in reducing protests, while also acknowledging some level of doubt and differing perspectives among the respondents.

**Table 10: Have you observed differences in how PR strategies are implemented at AAUA and The Polytechnic, Ibadan?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 95 | 47.5% |
| No | 105 | 52.5% |

The data provides insight into respondents' observations regarding differences in the implementation of public relations strategies at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba (AAUA) and The Polytechnic, Ibadan. Out of the total responses, 47.5% indicated that they have observed differences in how PR strategies are implemented at the two institutions, while a slightly higher percentage, 52.5%, stated that they have not noticed any differences. This close margin suggests that opinions on the matter are fairly divided, with no overwhelming consensus. The findings indicate that while a significant portion of respondents perceive variations in PR strategies, a slightly larger group either views the approaches as similar or has not paid attention to any distinctions. This data highlights the subjective nature of perceptions regarding institutional communication and branding efforts.

**Table 10: Based on your experience or perception, which institution is more effective in using PR to manage student unrest?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Polytechnic Ibadan | 81 | 40.5% |
| AAUA | 64 | 32% |
| Both Equally Effective | 51 | 25.5% |
| Neither | 4 | 2% |

The data reflects respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of public relations strategies in managing student unrest at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba (AAUA) and The Polytechnic, Ibadan. Among the respondents, 40.5% believe that The Polytechnic, Ibadan is more effective in using PR for this purpose, making it the most favored institution in this regard. AAUA follows with 32%, indicating that a significant portion of respondents also see it as effective, though to a lesser extent. Additionally, 25.5% of the respondents consider both institutions equally effective in handling student unrest through PR, suggesting that some perceive no major difference between their approaches. A small minority, 2%, believe that neither institution effectively uses PR in managing such situations. These findings highlight varied opinions on the effectiveness of PR strategies, with The Polytechnic, Ibadan being slightly more recognised for its efforts in comparison to AAUA. However, the presence of a considerable number of respondents who see both institutions as equally effective or ineffective suggests room for improvement in PR strategies at both schools.

**Table 11: What specific recommendations do you have for improving PR strategies at your institution?**

| Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Employ professional PR practitioners | 68 | 34% |
| Conduct PR audit | 15 | 7.5% |
| More proactive PR | 21 | 10.5% |
| Standard PR team | 18 | 9% |
| PR should allow criticism | 24 | 12% |
| Use email newsletters | 22 | 11% |
| Improve website for news | 20 | 10% |
| None | 12 | 6% |

The table above provides insight into respondents' recommendations for improving public relations strategies at their institutions. The most suggested improvement, with 34% of responses, is the employment of professional PR practitioners, indicating a strong belief that expertise in the field would enhance communication efforts. Conducting a PR audit received 7.5% of the responses, suggesting that only a small portion of respondents see the need for a structured evaluation of existing PR strategies.

A more proactive approach to PR was recommended by 10.5% of respondents, emphasizing the need for institutions to be more responsive and engaging in their communication strategies. Similarly, 9% suggested establishing a standard PR team, highlighting the importance of a well-organised and structured communication unit. Allowing criticism within

PR strategies was endorsed by 12% of respondents, reflecting the belief that open feedback and dialogue can improve institutional reputation and engagement. The use of email newsletters was recommended by 11% of the respondents as a means of enhancing communication and keeping stakeholders informed. Improving the institution's website for better news dissemination was suggested by 10%, pointing to the need for a more accessible and updated online presence. A small fraction, 6%, indicated that no changes were necessary, suggesting satisfaction with the current PR strategies. Overall, the data reveals a strong preference for professionalization, transparency, and modernization of PR strategies to improve institutional communication.

**Discussion of findings**

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the role of public relations (PR) strategies in managing student protests and addressing grievances at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba (AAUA), and The Polytechnic, Ibadan.

**1. How does the use of Public Relations (PR) strategies by university administration influence the occurrence and intensity of student protests in Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA) and The Polytechnic Ibadan?**

A significant proportion of students, 83.5%, are aware of PR strategies used by their institutions, indicating that the administration actively engages in communication efforts. However, 14% of students remain unaware of these strategies, suggesting gaps in dissemination and engagement. The data suggests that student protests are a common occurrence, with 61.5% of respondents reporting their frequent nature. This highlights a persistent level of dissatisfaction among students, which may stem from unresolved grievances, administrative shortcomings, or broader socio-political factors affecting the academic environment. A smaller percentage, 28%, indicated that protests occur occasionally, while only 10.5% reported that they rarely happen. This suggests that, for most students, demonstrations are a regular aspect of campus life rather than an anomaly. Students also offered various recommendations for improving PR strategies at their institutions. The most frequently suggested improvement was the employment of professional PR practitioners, with 34% of respondents advocating for this approach. This indicates a strong belief that expertise in public relations could enhance communication effectiveness. Additionally, 12% of students emphasized the need for PR to allow open criticism, highlighting the importance of transparent and receptive communication. Other suggestions included establishing a standard PR team (9%), taking a more proactive approach to PR (10.5%), and improving digital communication methods such as email newsletters (11%) and institutional websites (10%). These recommendations suggest that students value professionalized, transparent, and technologically advanced PR strategies that promote dialogue and accessibility.

**2. What are the perceptions of students of AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadanregarding the effectiveness of PR efforts in addressing their concerns and preventing protests?**

Regarding the effectiveness of PR strategies in preventing protests, the majority of respondents expressed positive views. A combined 87.5% rated these strategies as either effective or very effective, demonstrating confidence in PR as a means of conflict resolution.

However, a minority of 7.5% found them ineffective, suggesting that while PR plays a role, it may not be a complete solution to student unrest. This aligns with responses regarding PR's role in addressing student concerns, where 81.5% affirmed its importance. However, 17.5% remained uncertain, indicating that some students either do not fully recognise PR's impact or feel disengaged from institutional communication efforts. A significant majority of respondents, 80.5%, believe that improved PR strategies can help reduce student protests. This reinforces the idea that effective communication and proactive engagement can foster better relationships between students and the administration, potentially mitigating unrest. However, 17.5% were uncertain, and 2% outrightly disagreed, suggesting that while PR plays a crucial role, other structural and administrative issues may also need to be addressed. Satisfaction with PR strategies was generally high, with 55% of students expressing satisfaction and 37% stating that they were very satisfied. This suggests that most students acknowledge PR as a useful tool in addressing their concerns. Only a small fraction, 3%, reported dissatisfaction, reinforcing the perception that PR efforts are largely effective. Despite this positive reception, the data highlights specific areas where PR strategies could be strengthened. When asked which student issues required more PR attention, security and welfare emerged as the most pressing concerns (43.5%), followed by academic policies (22.5%) and tuition fees (21%). The prominence of security-related concerns suggests that students prioritise their safety and well-being, necessitating more targeted communication and policy responses from the administration. Accommodation concerns were ranked lower, at 12.5%, indicating that housing issues, while present, are not as urgent as security or financial matters.

**3. How do different PR approaches employed by the administrations of AAUA and The Polytechnic Ibadan compare in their effectiveness in managing and resolving student grievances?**

Among the various PR approaches observed, social media was the most commonly cited, with 43% of respondents acknowledging its use. This highlights the growing importance of digital platforms in institutional communication. Press releases (22.5%) and dialogue forums (12.5%) were also noted, while feedback mechanisms were observed by only 7.5% of respondents, pointing to a need for improved student-administration dialogue. Perceptions about differences in PR strategies between AAUA and The Polytechnic, Ibadan, were fairly divided. While 47.5% of students observed variations in how PR strategies were implemented across the two institutions, 52.5% did not perceive any major differences. The Polytechnic, Ibadan, was considered more effective in PR efforts by 40.5% of respondents, while 32% believed AAUA was more effective. Meanwhile, 25.5% of respondents found both institutions equally competent, suggesting that while differences may exist, they are not drastic enough to be universally acknowledged.

## Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicate that PR strategies play a vital role in managing student concerns and preventing protests. While students largely acknowledge the effectiveness of PR efforts, the study highlights areas for improvement, particularly in addressing security concerns, enhancing financial transparency, and fostering open communication. Strengthening PR strategies through professionalization, proactive engagement, and digital enhancements could significantly improve student-administration relations and contribute to a more stable academic environment.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, here are three recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of PR strategies in managing student protests:

(i) **Employ Professional and Trained PR Practitioners:** Institutions should prioritise hiring qualified public relations professionals with experience in conflict resolution and strategic communication. The study found that 34% of students believe that employing professional PR practitioners would enhance communication effectiveness. A trained PR team can develop informed messaging strategies that are proactive rather than reactive, ensuring that student concerns are addressed before they escalate into protests.

(ii) **Foster Participatory and Transparent Communication Channels:** Open dialogue and participatory communication were identified as more effective by students compared to top-down approaches. Therefore, institutions should implement platforms such as regular dialogue forums, feedback mechanisms, and town hall meetings to ensure students have a voice in decision-making processes. Allowing criticism and incorporating student input improves trust and mutual respect, which are essential for preventing unrest.

(iii) **Leverage Digital Media and Improve Communication Infrastructure:** With 43% of students recognising social media as a major PR tool, institutions should improve their digital communication strategies. This includes maintaining active, transparent, and responsive social media platforms, sending regular email newsletters, and updating school websites with relevant news and policy changes. Utilising these digital tools helps keep students informed in real-time and can counter misinformation that often fuels protests.

These recommendations, if implemented, can contribute significantly to a more peaceful, engaged, and transparent university environment.

## References

Aluede, O., Jimoh, B., Agwinede, B. O., & Omoregie, E. O. (2005). Student unrest in Nigerian universities: Looking back and forward. *ResearchGate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228351643

Bittner, J. R. (1989). *Mass communication: An introduction* (5th ed.). Prentice-Hall Inc.

Emenyonu, A. (2021). UNIBEN students protest hike in charges for late payment of school fees. *ThisDay.* https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/09/15/uniben-students-protest-hike-in-charges-for-late-payment-of-school-fees/

Hanson, R. E. (2005). *Mass communication: Living in a media world.* McGraw Hill.

Jefkins, F. (2006). *Public relations.* Pitman Publishing.

Ogunjimi, O. O., Oduola, S. O., & Babarinde, L. B. (2018). Public relations strategy and conflict management in University of Lagos. *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences, 9*(4). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340003574

Rice, R. E., & Atkin, C. K. (2013). *Public communication campaigns* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

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

**Solomon S. Kwakfut**

Mass Communication Department, University of Jos, Plateau State.

**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 18$^{th}$ 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.

**References**


AMEC (2020). *Barcelona Principles 3.0*. International Association for the Metrics and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC). Retrieved from https://amecorg.com/resources/barcelona-principles

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston

Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., & Dozier, D. M. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organisations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gregory, A., & Watson, T. (2008). Defining the gap between research and practice in public relations programme evaluation – Towards a new research agenda. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 14(5), 337–350. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527260802194265

Lamme, M. O. & Russell, K. M. (2010). *Removing the spin: Toward a new theory of public relations history*. Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Macnamara, J. (2014). The development of evaluation in public relations and corporate communication: A critique and a new model. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 3(1), 65–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X13513437

Macnamara, J. (2015). *Organisational listening: The missing essential in public communication*. Peter Lang.

Manning, A., & Rockland, D. B. (2011). Understanding the Barcelona principles. *Public Relations Strategist*, *17*(1), 30-31.

Michelson, D., & Stacks, W. D. (2011). Standardization of Public Relations metrics and evaluation. *Public Relations Journal, 5,* 7-8.

Nwosu, I. E. (2017). The practice of public relations in Nigeria: Development, challenges and prospects. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, *9*(3), 14–22. https://doi.org/10.5897/JMCS2016.0521

Ogbemudia, M., & Asemah, E. S. (2013). Evaluation of public relations strategies in selected Nigerian organisations. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, *5*(1), 107–120.

Smith, R. (2013). *Public relations: The basics*. Routledge.

Sriramesh, K., & Vercic, D. (Eds.) (2009). *The global public relations handbook: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Watson, T. & Noble, P. (2007). *Evaluating public relations: A best practice guide to public relations planning, research and evaluation*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Watson, T. (2012). The evolution of public relations metrics and evaluation. *Public Relations Review*, *38*(3), 390–398. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.018

Wright, D. K., Gaunt, R., Leggetter, B., Daniels, M. & Zerfass, A. (2009). *Global survey of communications metrics 2009–final report*. Association for Metrics and Evaluation of Communication.

Wright, D. K., & Hinson, M. D. (2013). An updated examination of social and emerging media use in public relations practice: A longitudinal analysis between 2006 and 2014. *Public Relations Journal*, *7*(3), 1-39.

Zerfass, A., Verčič, D. & Volk, S. C. (2017). Communication evaluation and metrics: Skills, practices and utilisation in European organisations. *Corporate communications: An International Journal*, *22*(1), pp.2-18.

# Innovations in Stakeholder Engagement and Reputation Management in the Oil and Gas Industry in Nigeria

**Idorenyin P. Ekanem[1], Umoh J. Umoh[2] and Ita Oyokunyi[3]**

[1, 2] Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Uyo, Nigeria.

**Abstract**
The management of stakeholders' expectations and interest through effective communication is a recipe for attainment of organisational goals and enhancing reputation of brands in the marketplace. Stakeholder engagement contributes to the alignment of organisational goals with the interest of a vast spectrum of stakeholders connected to oil companies. The study assessed the approaches that could be followed in ensuring effective stakeholder communication, innovations for effectively engagement with stakeholders in the information age were reviewed. The desktop research method, relying on secondary data was utilised in obtaining data for study. The Stakeholder theory and Social Exchange Theory formed the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Such innovations such as the identified as appropriate techniques for effective communication and engagement with stakeholders in the oil industry. The findings reveal that proactive engagement not only mitigates conflict and operational risks but also strengthens trust and long-term stakeholder relationships. The study concludes by offering recommendations for enhancing stakeholders' engagement in the oil and gas industry, including making attempt to balance power relations between parties in any engagement.

**Keywords:** Stakeholders, oil industry, public relations, communication, engagement, expectations, innovation.

## Introduction

Stakeholder engagement has been recognised as driving force for sustained growth of institutions and building of positive image for organisations. Effective communication with stakeholders is a key requirement for achievement of organisational goals and it is increasingly being acknowledged as the core responsibilities of industry leaders and public relations experts globally. Stakeholders are the reasons for which an organisation and Public Relations practitioners by extension exist. Stakeholders are groups or individuals with vested interest in an organisation. Panda & Barik (2014) considers Stakeholders as a group of people with a recognizable relationship with the company including: shareholders, customers, suppliers and distributors, employees, local communities, competition, media, public, lenders, unions, NGOs, government, other business partners and others. They are the reason for which a company exist and the means through which, it achieves its objectives.

Stakeholder engagement have been at the center of public relations activities across industries and its growing significance in our today's burgeoning society is unmistakable. The reputation of firms is tied to the quality of relationships they share with stakeholders.

No organisation or industry can be established and sustained without the involvement of stakeholders as keys drivers of the business process. The oil industry is no exception, particularly in Nigeria, where a greater chunk of the nation's revenue is realised from the industry. Some of the critical stakeholders in this industry that are crucial to its survival and functioning are governments, host communities, organised labor, investors, financial institutions, regulatory authorities, and the general public. Stakeholders of an oil companies are multifarious and can vary, depending on the location, size, nature of operations and complexity of the organisation. Each of the stakeholder in this industry has an impact on organisation, however, to a varying degree. The extent of influence each exerts on an organisation is dependent on the level of its involvement with the organisation and the interest it has at stake in the establishment or industry.

In the context of an oil and gas operation, the internal stakeholders include the oil and gas companies, both International Oil Companies(IOCs) and national oil companies responsible for exploration, production, refining and distribution, employees organised labour repressenting workers, and investors and shareholders while in the other hand, the external shareholders include suppliers and contractors, host communities, government (both local and national), financial institution, investors and regulatory authorities, environmental and social NGOs, academia, media and general public. Nigeria's dependence on the oil industry for a large chunk of country's revenue indicates the central place of the industry in the scheme of things and informs the need to effectively engage with its stakeholders for continued profitability.

Yuen, Ong, Zhou, and Wang (2023) explain that the negative impact of the Oil and Gas sector on the environment and society has provoked increasing scrutiny of its activities and probe by stakeholders. Gichuru & Onjure (2019) affirms the oil and gas industry are one of the riskiest, challenging, and dynamic business sectors. The risk potential of this industry informs the need for the increasing citizen awareness of the impact of oil company's operation on the environment, the stakeholders have high expectations from the oil companies which then necessitates sustained engagement.

Roy (2014, p. 10) sees Stakeholder Engagement as a process of involving and aligning the stakeholders to the project objectives and reducing the risks to achieving the project goal..In the view of Akpan *et al. (*2023) cited in Yadua *et al* (2024), stakeholder engagement is the process through which a company incorporates individuals and groups interested in its operations, such as partners, employees, local communities, etc. An effective and proper engagement of stakeholders cannot be possible without a deliberate attempt at first managing them. The management of stakeholders is a precursor to effective engagement. The Association for Project Managers (2019) defined Stakeholder Management as 'the systematic identification, analysis, planning and implementation of actions designed to engage with stakeholders.

The way and manner this all-important function is performed by organisations has evolved and changed over the years. With the expansion of industries, the scope of stakeholders' categories has also widened, necessitating more innovative and unique approaches to engaging with each segment of the public connected to the organisation. Engagement and communication with stakeholders are often facilitated through diverse processes and tools such as public relations, marketing, investor relations, community relations, media relations and advertising etc.

Stakeholder Management could also be regarded as a set of techniques that aim at harnessing the positive influences (which may include sustained interest, involvement, goodwill and support) of stakeholders while minimising the effect of their negative influences (which may include disinterest, disruption, sabotage and delays) towards actualising the benefits of a given venture (Hinrich 2014; Lehtinen, Aaltonen and Rajala 2019). The multiplicity of communication channels and approaches available for obtaining and disseminating information about an organisation has conspicuously empowered the stakeholders in its engagement with an organisation. As stakeholders become more empowered and connected, there is a heightened call for deeper interaction and sustained conversation with stakeholders. Additionally, stakeholders may have different interests, values, and priorities, making it difficult to find common ground. This reality then necessitates the need for proper stakeholders' identification, which precedes effective stakeholder engagement.

Oil companies, in a bid to better understand and respond to opportunities, challenges and risks posed by stakeholders- employees, suppliers, customers, regulators have engaged in stakeholder engagement and management. They have relied heavily on improved communication tools to achieve their objectives and deploy new research techniques towards this end. Innovations in stakeholder engagement and communication in the oil industry are evolving as companies face increasing pressure to be transparent, responsible, and responsive to the demands of diverse stakeholders, including local communities, regulators, investors, and environmental organisations.

**Objectives of the study**

The study aims to:

(i) Identify the processes and approaches to stakeholder engagement in the oil industry.
(ii) Analyse the nexus between stakeholders' engagement and reputation management in oil industry
(iii) Determine the contemporary innovations that have contributed to growth in stakeholder engagement and communication in the oil industry.
(iv) Ascertain the challenges limiting effective communication and engagement with stakeholders in the oil industry.

**Methodology**

Desktop research method also referred to as library research was adopted for the study. Through this method, secondary data from academic journal articles, textbooks, Desktop research is a secondary research method used to gather data from existing sources, such as academic journals, industry reports, and online databases. This method is chosen to analyze existing literature and data without the need for primary data collection because it allows for access to variety of pre-existing resources which helps in identifying gaps in knowledge and identifying trends. Biases in published data was carefully considered, particularly in industry reports funded by individual oil companies.

**Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored on the Stakeholder and Institutional theory. The stakeholder theory was popularized by Darden Professor, R. Edward Freeman in his seminal 1984 book "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach". The Stakeholder Theory posits that a business has a responsibility to not only its shareholders (investors) but also to other groups or "stakeholders" who have an interest in its operations, decisions, and outcomes. The theory asserts that organisations should consider the interests and well-being of all stakeholders in decision-making processes, in order to have long-term success. This includes understanding their concerns, expectations, and the potential impacts of corporate actions on them (Freeman et al., 2021). Stakeholder theory represents a shift in corporate thinking, advocating for a broader view of responsibility that includes the well-being of all groups affected by an organisation's activities

**Social Exchange theory** also formed a fitting theoretical foundation for this study. The theory Social Exchange Theory emerged through George Homans' scholarly work on behavioral approach to social interactions in 1950s. After then, several scholars, including John Thibaut and Harold Kelley (1959), Peter Blau (1960s), Elaine Hatfield, Richard Emerson, Gerald R. Miller (1970s) have made contributions to the theory, refining and integrating several components to it. The theory provides a sociological and psychological perspective to social engagement, and explains social interactions in terms of cost-benefit analyses. It suggests that human relationships are formed and maintained based on a subjective evaluation of the rewards (positive outcomes) and costs (negative outcomes) involved. Individuals and organisations weigh these factors to decide whether to engage in or continue a relationship and the decision to they make to maintain or terminate those relationships are based on perceived benefit.

**Relevance of Stakeholders communication and Engagement in Oil and Gas Industry**

New management theories and principles encourage organisations and businesses to go beyond the primordial concern for profit maximisation and drive towards attaining satisfaction for all stakeholders. This philosophy and line of thinking became the basis for renewed interest in the subject matter. The relevance of stakeholders' engagement is well-documented.

The new wave of interest in stakeholder holder's engageement came about as a result of heightened level of awareness among stakeholders of the oil industry on the damaging effects of oil exploration on their environment and the deserved benefits that should acrue to them by reason of extraction of oil from their soil. Also, the reoccurring incidence of agitations by host communities and concerned stakeholders in the Niger Delta region have compelled oil companies to place emphasis on corporate sustainability through adopting environment- friendly approaches in their operations and deliberately reducing their carbon footprints in the environment.

Accordingly, addressing company social or environmental impacts effectively often cannot be achieved without the collaboration, knowledge and expertise of stakeholders. On some issues, stakeholder participation will be essential to the implementation of solutions, on others they can provide “out of the box” thinking that can lead to innovative win-win solutions for all parties. They also often bring a wider perspective on issues and solutions that companies might not have access to on their own, including knowledge of the local context as well as better understanding of anger expressed against the company because of its social or environmental impact.

There is a wide acceptance and consensus among scholars that robust engagement with stakeholders is a sin qua non to discovering their felt needs and identifying pressing concerns, with a goal of ensuring that the needs of stakeholders are satisfyingly addressed. When the stakeholders are well served by the organisation, they would in turn be more willing to contribute to the growth of the organisation and actualisation of its objectives. Yadua, Olofin, Gambo, and Nwoye (2024) mentions that organisations can obtain important insights, secure support, foster a shared feeling of accountability, instill ownership mentality and forge consensus around strategic objectives by being inclusive and communicating effectively, which helps to match a range of interests with strategic objectives.

The engagement of stakeholders is necessary from the strategic management perspective so as to know what the stakeholder actually needs. Effective communication and engagement with stakeholders help the management to not just identify stakeholders needs but grow an understanding of how best to satisfy such needs. This is due to the understanding that different stakeholders have different values and view the project in different ways (Roy, 2014).

The ensuing communication would further foster mutually beneficial relationships, with the resultant effect being the elimination of suspicion, doubt, misunderstanding, reinforcement of trust and confidence between an organisation and its stakeholders. Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for success, particularly in understanding and addressing potential conflicts and ensuring projects are aligned with community interests and regulatory requirements.

Another benefit of sustained dialogue with stakeholders in the oil industry is that it provides them the platform to contribute unique idea to organisation's plans and policies and thus yielding outcomes and decisions that reflect the aspirations of both management and stakeholders. Needless to mention that the Petroleum Industry Act was mid-wifed following the robust engagement with stakeholders on the new direction that should be charted for the industry. Roy (2014, p.11) observes that the other reason to engage the stakeholders in the project decision making is to enhance their sense of ownership to the project.

The relationship between stakeholders and oil servicing companies have been characterized by lack in trust, long history of failed promises on the part of the company, neglect, nonchalant attitude towards their needs. These ugly incidences could be curtailed when organisations take steps mend frosty relationships with its public by maintaining sincere and open communication. Madumere, N. (2021, p.10) confirms that the main goal of stakeholder management is to establish cordial relationships among stakeholders of a given venture through effective and careful management of their expectations and objectives while attempting to achieve one's owThere is a growing realization that prioritisation of stakeholders' welfare would yield long-term gain for the organisation. Leonidou, Christofi, Vrontis and Thrassou (2018:245) cited in Madumere (2021) collaborates that stakeholder management is a task of growing significance and a requisite for a win-win outcome for the parties involved.

Chanya, Prachaak and Ngang (2013) agree that the type and interest of stakeholders are of immense importance to organisations, as these can be utilised to enhance performance from corporate, business and operational perspectives. (Madumere, 2021). In the case of oil industry where operations have been frequently stalled by aggrieved stakeholders who feel sidelined by oil companies, effective stakeholder engagement would curb the incidence of agitations and restore enduring peace to the region.

**Stakeholders Engagement and Reputation Management in Oil Industry**

Reputation of organisations are shaped by the entirety of the brand's policies, actions and communication. Ahiakwo, Okon & Amadi (2025) notes that it is important for organisation to have stakeholders' engagement strategy in place which will certainly help mitigate potential risks and conflicts with stakeholders' groups, including uncertainty, dissatisfaction, misalignment, disengagement and resistance to change. The proper deployment of this strategy would impact in no little way on the reputation of the oil companies.

Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) cited Stefania (2010, p.307) holds the view that corporate identity is the backbone of reputation, because it reflects managers' and employees' perceptions about the organisational core. Corporate identity influences the way in which stakeholders form their judgements about the organisation. Stefania (2010) corroborates that corporate reputation is more stable and durable when the role of the corporate communication function within organisations moves beyond influencing stakeholders' perceptions, towards the shaping of organisational reality by engaging stakeholders who are the main reputation drivers. In the oil industry, as it obtains elsewhere, the key to enhancing reputation is to ensure all the communication contents by and about an organisation should be consistent with its corporate identity over a given period of time.

Crisis within this industry and negative incidents such as oil spills, boundary disputes as recently witnessed between Sterling Petrochemical and Fertilizer Limited, and Eastern Obolo communities have potentials to hamper development for the communities, erode public trust and damage the reputation of the organisation involved. Reputation management is about more than just perception, it's about building credibility and ensuring long-term viability and ultimately improving shareholder value.

**Approaches to Stakeholder Management and Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement as described by Gichuru *et al* (2019) is a process by which an organisation informs, consults, involves, collaborates with, and empowers groups and individuals affected by a decision, operation, or policy. Stakeholder engagement involves a series of steps, procedures and activities geared towards aligning the interest of stakeholders and management. It is an intensive process that entails critical analysis of the situation and planning at the preliminary stage in order to establish mutual understanding, trust and cordiality between the parties involved. The dynamics, tools and processes of stakeholders' engagement has significantly changed with the growth of society, technology and expansion of organisations. Madumere (2021, p.10) notes with other management perspective that, stakeholder management will involve planning and formulation of effective strategy by utilising data gathered in the analysis of a given situation, then the careful implementation of the strategy developed.

The conventional procedure for managing stakeholders involves a series of interdependent activities, each of which must be effectively carried out in order to achieve favourable results. These activities include identification of stakeholders; analysis of stakeholders; prioritisation of stakeholders; formulation of stakeholder engagement strategy and implementation of the stakeholder engagement strategy (Shah & Bhaska 2008; Shropshire & Hillman 2007) cited in Madumere (2021).

However, effective stakeholder engagement could be achieved by first identifying its key stakeholders, define their characteristics and fully understand the interest and needs of each. Scholars regard stakeholder identification and categorisation as the most significant step in stakeholder engagement and support the classification of stakeholders into two distinct categories, which include Direct (Primary) Stakeholders and Indirect (Secondary) Stakeholders. Direct stakeholders are entities that play a visible role in a particular venture and are impacted by it, while indirect stakeholders are those not involved in the venture but interested in it and inclined to monitor its progress. Notwithstanding, these categories could be further expanded based on the unique operations and preferences of each organisation.

Panda, et al. (2014, p.9) pinpoints that the key criteria for identifying and prioritizing stakeholders include: attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency; and the stakeholders' ability to affect or be affected by the organisation's actions. The categorization comes next, and this entails grouping and separating the stakeholders into broad or small categories according to either their interests, their involvement with the organisation, their measure of contributions to the issue or project at hand, the duration of their involvement, which could either be short-term or long-term, the power and influence they wield in relation to the organisation etc.Alqaisi (2018, p.1) suggest that stakeholders could be categorized according to four main parameters; their power, interest, influence and impact.

The categorization stage would then be closely followed by prioritisation of the stakeholders, ie determining the level of attention, time and resources the organisation intend to dedicate to each depending on the aforementioned considerations. Alqaisi (2018) believes that prioritisation is important because it is useless to devote equal amount of time and effort to all stakeholders. The stage of formulation of stakeholder engagement strategy is the most tasking aspect of the process and will vary depending of the philosophy of management, the issue at hand and resources available for engaging the stakeholders and of course, the time frame for the implementation of the project.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| High Power | KEEP SATISFIED | MANAGE CLOSELY<br>(MAXIMUM EFFORT) |
| Low Interest | MONITOR<br>(MINIMUM EFFORT) | KEEP INFORMED |

Fig. 1: Power and Interest Matrix (Alqaisi, 2018) where, Interest indicates the level of concern of stakeholder about project outcomes and Power is the stakeholder level of authority.

The Power Interest Matrix, often used in stakeholder management, is a strategic tool that helps categorise stakeholders based on their level of interest in the project and their power to influence its outcome. This matrix is crucial for prioritising stakeholder engagement and tailoring communication strategies effectively. This matrix suggests that stakeholders in the High Interest- high power matrix are considered very important to the organisation and they possess significant influence in an issue. They should be closely managed and engaged regularly.

Stakeholder engagement can take many forms, including consultation, collaboration, and partnership. Consultation involves seeking the views and opinions of stakeholders, often through surveys or focus groups, while collaboration involves working with stakeholders to develop and implement solutions. Partnership involves a more long-term and collaborative approach, where stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes and have a say in the organisation's overall direction (Freeman, 2010).

Rempel, Holmes and Zana (1985, p.97), in their report, quoted in Madumere (2021), emphasised the importance of 'trust' in establishing a sustainable, cordial relationship with stakeholders. Trust is recognised by other researchers (De Oliveira and Rabechini 2019; Mayer Davis and Schoorman 1995) as an intrinsic motivation for partnership between two or more parties.

Amnesty International, (2015) suggested that a stakeholder will support you only if:

(i) They feel they have been respected.
(ii) They feel their concerns were taken into consideration before decision-making.
(iii) They feel they will benefit from the decision in a fair way. If all these conditions are not met, then there will be issues with the stakeholder concerned.

Organisational leaders could enhance effective communication with stakeholders by ensuring that each category of stakeholder understand their role in driving company's growth and how their contribution would impact the organisation's success.

**Innovations in Stakeholder Engagement in the Oil Industry**

Innovations in stakeholder engagement have evolved significantly to foster more inclusive, transparent, and effective communication. The engagement and management of stakeholders in the oil industry is peculiar and distinctive owing to the myriads of factors and vast changes occurring within that sphere.

**Increased Enlightenment of the Stakeholders**

There is no denying the fact that the information age has given rise to myriads of tools and channels of communication, which in turn has brought about increased access to information and by extension, an enlightened citizenry. Information that was before now within the exclusive reserve of a few elites and Institutional leaders can now be freely accessed by all and sundry who possess a mobile phone and internet connection. Increased access to social media and the internet has brought information regarding industry issues to the doorstep of the citizens.

**Legislative processes/Petroleum Industry Act (PIA)**

One of such legislative processes that have revolutionized the approach to stakeholder engagement in the oil industry is government policies, and by extension the PIA. The oil industry players approach to stakeholder engagement, particularly community relations include identifying their needs and concerns, and then organising planned activities and interventions to addressing those concerns through implementation of corporate social responsibility organisation, which include providing scholarship to indigenous students; supporting sports programmes organised by indigenous communities; providing health facilities, pipe borne water and employment, sponsoring of skill acquisition programmes etc. With the passage of the PIA into law, a new model for execution of CSR has been brought to bear, with the stakeholders - host communities enjoying a level of control over the CSR process through the allocation of a share of the returns, up to three (3%) of the operating expenditure of oil servicing firms. The PIA guarantees that any company granted an oil prospecting licence or mining lease or an operating company on behalf of joint venture partners (settlor) is required to contribute 3% - 5% (upstream Companies), and 2% (other companies) of its actual operating expenditure in the preceding calendar year to the host communities' development trust fund. This is in addition to the existing contribution of 3% to the NDDC.

The fund is tax-exempt, and any contributions by a settlor are tax deductible. The provisions of the Act stipulate that available funds are to be distributed; 75% for capital projects, 20% as a reserve and 5% for administrative expenses. However, the Act incorporates a clause that recommends that a community will forfeit the cost of repairs in the event of vandalism, sabotage and other civil unrest causing damage to petroleum facilities or disruption of production activities. The PIB Act makes it possible for power relationships between the oil companies and host communities to be somewhat balanced, by detailing statutory relationships and framework for host communities to access their benefits and other concerns with the company. This policy framework has prevented the host communities' from perpetually being at the mercies of the oil companies with regards to the execution of their corporate social responsibilities.

**The Emergence of Digital Platforms and Social Media**

The rise of social media and digital engagement platforms has transformed how organisations interact with stakeholders. In the present information age, leveraging technology has become a necessary requirement for fostering cordial, mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. The burgeoning internet, proliferation of social media networking sites, and advent of artificial intelligence tools provides new vista of opportunities for organisations that are desirous of actively engaging with all those connected to the organisation. Utilizing digital platforms for engagement have not only improves efficiency in communication, but also nurtures collaborative relationships through real-time updates, participatory discussion and timely feedback that could positively shape policies and programmes of an organisation. Interactive social media platforms such as Facebook, X formerly referred to as Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Emails, Linkedin etc have enabled continuous interactions with stakeholders, enhanced transparency and reinforced the foundation of trust among critical stakeholders, allowing industry leaders to gather through two-way communication, birthing diverse perspectives that may not have emerged through traditional communication channels. Yuen *et al.* (2023) aggressive that Social Media's interactive characteristics have converted customers from passive observers of content to active participants that produce a large amount of digital content through their online dialogues and interactions.

Other innovative communication tools such as telegram, google meet, and zoom fosters an ongoing dialogue with critical partners and makes possible the hosting of interactive workshops or roundtable discussions with stakeholders. These tools allow for real-time feedback, community building, and direct communication. Increasingly, companies themselves are inviting consumers to play a more active role in shaping products and brand content.

**Stakeholder Sentiment/Predictive Analysis**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools are some of the recent innovative tools deployed enhance and communication with different stakeholders in the oil and gas industry. AI tools can analyze past engagement data to predict future stakeholder behavior, allowing companies to personalize and refine their communication strategies. These tools are used to analyze social media, news outlets, and community feedback to predict potential issues or concerns with a project. This allows companies to proactively address issues before they escalate.

**Personalized Communication and Targeted Messaging**

The wake of the information age has made provided communication The tools for engaging with stakeholders have changed significantly from the traditional, limited, one-way communication tools, letters, town criers, community leaders, public meeting, fax, telephone conversations, columns in newspaper to advertisment on broadcast media and newspapers to what we have today, the digital, interactive, borderless , two-way personalised communication which are not limited to text messages, personalized and targeted emails, engagement on social media messaging platforms, comments on news feeds, Google forms, which makes it possible to engage stakeholders at a personal level, identifying their concerns and connecting with them.

**Corporate Social Responsibility Practice**
One thing that has really come to the fore in recent times in the relationship dynamics between organisation and stakeholders is the realisation of the indispensability of the need by organisations to be socially responsible and go beyond the statutory role to contribute to the wellbeing of their stakeholders. A proper understanding of the effective use of this tool has significantly aided stakeholders' engagement in the oil industry. As opposed to the traditional perspective to corporate social responsibility practice which placed emphasis on giving out "handouts" and peanuts to their constituents as a way to show concern for their welfare, recent practices prioritise more sustainable measures that would contribute to their overall growth, like skill acquisitions, training and infrastructural developments. The PIA of 2021 further gives impetus to this thinking by empowering the host communities of oil companies to have more control over the utilisation of resources earmarked for host communities' development and also suggest areas of development to focus on per time. Ahiakwo (2025) suggest that there are three fundamental features of CSR as perceived by citizens. These features are environment, economic, and social and they all must be even addressed for sustainable development of host communities and reputation of the organisation.

**Clamour for Environmental Responsibility and Sustainable Practices**: The increasing realisation by host communities of their right to safe and clean environment has been one of the compelling reasons oil companies intensify efforts to reduce the carbon footprint in the area of operations and manage the impact of their activities on the environment. Embracing sustainable practices is essential for improving reputation. Oil companies in Nigeria would need to comply with regulatory policies in order to demonstrate a commitment to responsible operations, invest in renewable energy projects with a view to minimizing environmental impact. Gas flaring in our communities should be discontinued as it portends serious health implications for the generality of the citizenry and contributes to the growing consequences of climate in our society. Ahiakwo (2025, p.216) observes that level of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta area signifies to a larger extent the failure by government to enforce environmental policies on oil and gas formulated for the attainment of sustainable development.

**Barriers to Effective Stakeholder Engagement and Communication in Oil Industry**
Unequal power dynamics has been one of the restraining forces to achieving a rewarding stakeholder engagement in the oil sector. Bimpong *et al.* (2024) acknowledges that power imbalances can create challenges in engaging stakeholders effectively, particularly if the stakeholders are not in positions of power and so perceive that their voices are not heard or that their input is not valued. Alqaisi (2018) reiterates that a significant challenge in stakeholder relationship management in the oil and gas sector is the presence of power imbalances and socio-political tensions, particularly evident in regions where oil and gas operations intersect with marginalized communities or regions with historical socio-economic disparities.

Another key challenge to effective stakeholder engagement in the oil industry, particularly in region like Akwa Ibom State is the lingering boundary disputes among some local communities, which made it relevant parties to be unwilling to listen because they felt cheated, making engagement to be difficult in such situations. This situation has resulted in internal rancor and crisis, with the companies at the received end of such development. The consequence is the challenge of accommodating all identified stakeholders and their interest in the deliberation phase, policy-making process and implementation of corporate resolutions. The task of ensuring inclusivity and participatory engagement process when faced with such a precarious situation is often uphill and daunting.

The level of enlightenment and exposure of the community members and stakeholders could also pose a hindrance to a fruitful and sustained engagement with the organisations. The greater the understanding they have about the workings of the company and policies that guide the operations of the sector, they more they could demand accountability from the organisations operating in their environment.

## Conclusion

Stakeholder engagement and participatory practice is extensively been considered as a key ingredient of modern-day business practice. Stakeholder engagement which encourages open and transparent communication between an organisation's stakeholders is a requirement for business growth and reputation management. Innovative stakeholder engagement is increasingly centered on real-time, personalized, and transparent communication, using cutting-edge technology to strengthen relationships and drive value. By prioritizing transparency, environmental responsibility, and stakeholder engagement, companies can strengthen their reputation and ensure sustainable operations. Embracing reputation management fosters trust, enhances credibility, and positions companies for long-term success in a rapidly evolving industry landscape. The tools and strategies for use by organisations in stakeholders' management have changed over the years. Consequently, organisations should attempt to review their strategies to align with changes in the society.

## Recommendations

(i) Oil industry leaders should as a matter of necessity work towards creating a level field of play that gives the stakeholders the guarantee that the engagement is for mutual growth and that their opinions would be integrated into the decision-making process, as well as their inputs implemented where it has the merits.

(ii) Oil companies should allow or better still, invite stakeholders at to explore data and review statistics about oil company's environmental impact either periodically or at regular intervals. This would go a long way to erasing every doubt and allay any fears the host communities have regarding the operations of oil companies.

(iii) The regulatory agency, Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) should put in place a mechanism to ensure effective implementation of the 2021 Petroleum Industry Act (PIA), particularly the remittance of 3% Opex Host Community fund in order to enhance host communities' development. Oil companies that are yet to constitute their Host Community Development Trust (HCDT) should be compelled to do so and appropriate sanctions meted out in line with the dictates of the PIA.

(iv) Oil Companies should necessarily review their practices and incorporate sustainable practices that would mitigate the impact of their operations on the environment and reduce the carbon footprint in the space

## References

Ackah, D. & Bimpong, H., (2024). Analysing the role of stakeholder engagement in determining the effectiveness of communication and public relations strategies: Ghana highway authority in perspective. *Project Management Scientific Journal,* 7(9), 51-67.

Al-Haddad, M. A. (2021). Stakeholders' engagement and performance efficiency at oil and gas industry in Yemen, *Journal of Impact, 2*(1), 1-15.

Alqaisi, F. (2018). The effects of stakeholder's engagement and communication management on projects. MATEC Web of Conferences, 162.

Amnesty International (2015). Investor warning: Shell profits won't count true cost of Niger Delta oil spill. Amnesty International. Available from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/shell-profits-wont-count-true-cost-of-niger-delta-oil-spills/

Freeman, R. E., Dmytriyev, S. D., & Phillips, R. A. (2021). Stakeholder theory and the resourcebased view of the firm. *Journal of Management,* 47(7), 1757-1770

Gichuru, C. K & Onjure, C.O. (2019). Influence of stakeholders' engagement practices on performance of system applications products for oil and gas upgrade project at Kenya Pipeline Company Nakuru Depot. *The International Journal of Business and Management*, 7(10), 34-45.

Madumere, N. (2021). The impact of stakeholder management on the oil and gs industry in Africa: A case study of oil companies and African host communities. *African Journal Online*.

Hitt, M., Freeman, R. & Harrison, J. (2001). *The blackwell handbook of strategic management.* Wiley-Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Panda, S. S. & Barik, Anil (2014). How to make stakeholder engagement meaningful. Jou*rnal of Management Training Institute, Sail, Ranchi.* 42(1), 7-13.

Roy, S. (2014). Translating Effective Stakeholder Engagement in Projects to Organisational Growth, *Journal of Management Training Institute,* 42(1), 1-6.

Stefania, R. (2010). Reputation and stakeholder engagement: An Italian case study. *Journal of Communication Management, 14*(4), 306-318.

Yadua J. C., Olofin A. J., Gambo N., & Nwoye I. M. (2024). Influence of stakeholder engagement on strategy implementation in selected Nigerian government agencies. *European Journal of Business and Innovation Research, 12*(1), 72-89.

Yuen, K. F., Ong, K. W., Zhou, Y., Wang X. (2023). Social media engagement of stakeholders in the oil and gas sector: Social presence, triple bottom line and source credibility theory. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 382*.

# Public Relations and Motorists' Perception of Federal Road Safety Corps' Operations in Akwa Ibom State

**Daniel E. Eshett**

Dean, School of Communication Arts, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua.

## Abstract
This study examines the role of public relations (PR) strategies in shaping motorists' perception of the Federal Road Safety Corps' (FRSC) operations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Using a qualitative case study design, the research explores how PR efforts such as road safety campaigns, media engagement, and officer conduct influence public trust and compliance with traffic regulations. Data were collected through structured interviews with 30 purposively selected motorists, including private vehicle owners, commercial drivers, motorcyclists, and tricycle operators across major urban centers. Thematic analysis revealed four major findings: moderate awareness of FRSC campaigns, mixed experiences with FRSC officials, fragile public trust, and the need for more inclusive and technology-driven engagement strategies. The study concludes that while FRSC's public relations activities are visible, their effectiveness is limited by inconsistent communication, selective outreach, and officer misconduct. Recommendations include broadening PR coverage, improving officer training, adopting participatory communication models, and leveraging digital platforms for more effective public engagement. Strengthening these areas is critical for enhancing motorists' trust and promoting road safety compliance in Akwa Ibom State.

**Keywords:** Public relations, motorists' perception, federal road safety corps, road safety operations, Akwa Ibom State.

## Introduction
Public relations plays a critical role in governance and service delivery, especially in enhancing citizen engagement and institutional credibility Odugbemi and Norris (2010). Ojebuyi and Salawu (2018) emphasise that the way a law enforcement agency communicates and relates with the public affects its legitimacy and the willingness of citizens to comply with regulations. Public Relations (PR) plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of government agencies by fostering effective communication and public engagement (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). In road safety management, PR is particularly vital as agencies like the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) must communicate road safety regulations, enforce compliance, and manage public trust (Coombs, 2007; Wilcox *et al.*, 2013).

The FRSC is responsible for ensuring road safety in Nigeria, enforcing traffic laws, and reducing road accidents. However, motorists in Akwa Ibom have raised concerns about FRSC operations, including enforcement tactics, alleged extortion, and ineffective public awareness campaigns (Edegoh & Anunike, 2016). This study evaluates FRSC's PR strategies in shaping the perception of motorists in Akwa Ibom.

Motorists' perception of FRSC in Akwa Ibom has been shaped by a mix of positive and negative experiences, including road safety campaigns, enforcement actions, and public engagement efforts. While the FRSC aims to improve road safety, motorists often complain about the agency's approach to enforcement, inadequate communication on traffic policies, and instances of alleged harassment (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019). This study examines the effectiveness of FRSC's PR strategies in engaging Akwa Ibom motorists and improving public trust.

## Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

(i) Assess the public relations strategies employed by Federal Road Safety Corps in engaging with motorists in Akwa Ibom State.
(ii) Evaluate motorists' perception of Federal Road Safety Corps public relations efforts in Akwa Ibom State.
(iii) Determine the influence public relations on motorists' perception of Federal Road Safety Corps' operations in Akwa Ibom State.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

(i) What public relations strategies does the Federal Road Safety Corps employ to engage with motorists in Akwa Ibom State?
(ii) How do motorists in Akwa Ibom state perceive Federal Road Safety Corps' public relations efforts?
(iii) How does public relations influence motorists' perception of Federal Road Safety Corps' operations in Akwa Ibom State.

## Conceptual Review

Some concepts in this study are reviewed in this section to help in the understanding of this study.

## Public Relations

Public Relations (PR) is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It involves managing an organisation's reputation, engaging stakeholders, and shaping public perception through media relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and crisis communication (Wilcox *et al.,* 2013).

In Nigeria, PR has played a critical role in corporate and government communication. Edegoh and Anunike (2016) argue that PR is essential for maintaining public trust and engagement, particularly for government agencies such as the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). Ojebuyi and Salawu (2019) emphasise that PR effectiveness in Nigeria is often limited by inadequate transparency, poor crisis communication, and the public's scepticism towards government agencies.

Globally, PR is recognised as a vital tool for public sector communication. Coombs (2007) discusses the importance of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) in managing public perception during crises, a strategy that FRSC could employ when addressing road safety issues or allegations of misconduct. Shields and Peruta (2019) highlight that digital PR, particularly social media engagement, has transformed public sector communication by enhancing accessibility and responsiveness.

**Motorists**

Motorists in Akwa Ibom State represent a diverse group of road users, including private car owners, commercial drivers, motorcyclists, and tricycle (keke) operators. Given the state's growing urbanization, particularly in Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene, road transport has become essential for daily movement and commerce (Effiong & Nwosu, 2021).

However, Akwa Ibom motorists face several challenges, including poor road infrastructure, frequent road safety enforcement by the FRSC, and concerns over alleged extortion by traffic officials (Ekong & Udoh, 2020). Research by Nwachukwu (2018) indicates that motorists in Nigeria generally perceive traffic enforcement agencies as being more punitive than preventive, often questioning the fairness of road safety fines and penalties.

In contrast, international studies, such as those by Walters and Brooks (2021), show that effective road safety enforcement can significantly reduce accidents if motorists perceive it as transparent and fair. This underscores the need for FRSC to strengthen its PR strategies to improve motorists' trust and voluntary compliance.

**Perception**

Perception refers to how individuals interpret, understand, and react to stimuli based on their experiences, cultural background, and external influences (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2015). In the context of PR and road safety, perception is shaped by personal experiences, media representation, word-of-mouth, and direct interactions with officials (Kotler & Keller, 2019).

In Nigeria, public perception of government agencies, including the FRSC, is often influenced by issues such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and inconsistent enforcement of policies (Akinwale, 2017). Nwulu (2021) found that motorists' perception of FRSC in South-South Nigeria varies significantly, with commercial drivers generally having a more negative view than private car owners due to frequent fines and roadblocks.

Globally, perception studies in public sector public relations have shown that positive perception is linked to consistent and transparent engagement strategies (Fombrun, 1996). For example, research in South Africa by Molefe and Dlamini (2020) indicates that drivers respond better to road safety campaigns when they feel engaged rather than targeted for enforcement penalties. This highlights the importance of effective PR in shaping motorists' perception of FRSC operations in Akwa Ibom.

**Road Safety Operations**

Road safety operations refer to organised activities, policies, and enforcement mechanisms aimed at preventing road accidents, ensuring compliance with traffic regulations, and enhancing overall transportation safety (World Health Organisation, WHO, 2020). These operations encompass law enforcement, public education, infrastructure improvements, emergency response, and data-driven interventions to minimize road fatalities and injuries (OECD, 2019).

In Nigeria, road safety operations are primarily managed by the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), which was established in 1988 with the mandate to prevent road traffic crashes, enforce traffic regulations, and provide post-crash emergency response (FRSC, 2022). According to Adekoya *et al.* (2021), FRSC employs a combination of road patrols, mobile courts, public education campaigns, and speed limit enforcement to promote safer driving behaviours. However, road safety operations in Nigeria face challenges such as poor road infrastructure, inadequate funding, and public resistance to enforcement measures (Eke, 2019). Empirical studies by Okonkwo and Nwokedi (2020) suggest that motorists' compliance with FRSC regulations is influenced by the perceived fairness and transparency of enforcement strategies.

Internationally, road safety operations are guided by frameworks such as the Safe System Approach, which emphasises safe roads, safe vehicles, safe speeds, and safe road users (OECD, 2019). Countries like Sweden and the Netherlands have successfully implemented Vision Zero policies, which aim to reduce road fatalities to near zero through strict enforcement, public awareness, and infrastructure enhancements (Johansson, 2009).

In the United States, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) oversees road safety operations by setting vehicle safety standards, conducting crash research, and supporting state-level enforcement programmes (NHTSA, 2021). Research by Walters and Brooks (2021) highlights that data-driven road safety interventions, such as predictive policing and automated speed enforcement, have significantly reduced traffic fatalities in high-risk areas.

**The Key Components of Road Safety Operations Include:**

(i) Traffic Law Enforcement: Monitoring and penalising violations such as speeding, drunk driving, and seatbelt non-compliance (Adebayo & Osagie, 2020).
(ii) Public Education Campaigns: Creating awareness about road safety through media, schools, and driver training programmes (Edegoh & Anunike, 2016).
(iii) Infrastructure Improvements: Developing safer roads, pedestrian walkways, and traffic control systems (World Bank, 2021).
(iv) Emergency Response and Accident Management: Ensuring quick medical assistance for crash victims (WHO, 2020).
(v) Technology Integration: Utilising surveillance cameras, speed detection devices, and automated enforcement systems (Shields & Peruta, 2019).

**Review of Studies**

**Uzondu, C. A., Jamson, S. L., & Marsden, G. (2022). Road Safety in Nigeria: Unravelling the Challenges, Measures, and Strategies for Improvement**

The study by Uzondu, Jamson, and Marsden (2022) provides a comprehensive analysis of road safety challenges, measures, and improvement strategies in Nigeria. Using focus group discussions with stakeholders from transport ministries and agencies, the study explored perceptions of road safety policies, road user behaviours, and systemic issues affecting enforcement. The findings reveal significant shortcomings in road design, weak traffic control mechanisms, and poor policy implementation, all of which contribute to Nigeria's high road traffic accident rates. Notably, the study highlights public education and information campaigns as perceived effective measures, despite contradicting existing literature that suggests such campaigns alone do not significantly alter driver behaviour. Additionally, the study emphasises the need for system-based reforms, improved inter-agency collaboration, and stricter enforcement of road safety laws to achieve meaningful reductions in road traffic crashes.

A key strength of this study is its qualitative approach, which provides rich insights into stakeholders' perspectives. However, a notable limitation is the exclusion of non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society groups, road users, and the private sector, who could offer alternative viewpoints on road safety measures. The study's findings align with global research indicating that holistic, multi-sectoral approaches—incorporating infrastructure upgrades, enforcement, and behavioural interventions—are essential for sustainable road safety improvements (WHO, 2018). To enhance policy effectiveness, the study recommends strengthening Nigeria's National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS), adopting a Safe System Approach, and prioritizing long-term investments in road infrastructure and driver education. Overall, the study provides a valuable evidence base for improving Nigeria's road safety landscape, though further research incorporating broader stakeholder perspectives would strengthen its conclusions.

**Ibrahim Ibrahim, A. A. (2016). Evaluating Effectiveness of Federal Road Safety Commission Training and Education Programmes for Commercial Vehicle Drivers in Jigawa State, Nigeria**

The study by Ibrahim (2016) evaluates the effectiveness of the Federal Road Safety Commission's (FRSC) training and education programmes for commercial vehicle drivers in Jigawa State, Nigeria. The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining a descriptive survey and focus group discussions to assess how commercial drivers perceive FRSC's road safety education efforts. The study sampled 2,000 commercial drivers from seven major inter-city parks, utilizing a 52-item self-developed questionnaire alongside focus group discussions. The findings indicate that drivers' educational background, duration of learning road safety, behaviour, and knowledge significantly influenced their attitude toward road safety education programmes. However, the study also reveals a lack of significant impact of FRSC's education programmes on drivers' compliance with road safety regulations, particularly concerning road signs and speed limits. This suggests that while education programmes increase awareness, they do not necessarily translate into behavioural change.

The study aligns with Onuka and Akinyemi (2012), who found that commercial drivers' compliance with traffic regulations is strongly linked to formal education and structured training. However, Okafor *et al.* (2014) argue that road safety campaigns must be complemented by strict law enforcement to ensure compliance. Ibrahim (2016) highlights a major challenge: many Nigerian commercial drivers acquire driving skills informally, without structured training, making it difficult for FRSC programmes to have a lasting impact. The study recommends continuous road safety enlightenment campaigns through radio, television, and motor parks and suggests that mandatory structured driving education should be introduced for commercial drivers before licensing. While the study provides valuable insights, its focus on only Jigawa State limits generalizability, and future research should explore the effectiveness of FRSC education programmes across multiple regions in Nigeria.

**Macauley, C. I. (2021). Public Perception of the Public Enlightenment Programmes of Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC): A Survey of Motorists in Imo State**

The study by Macauley (2021) examines the public perception of FRSC's public enlightenment programmes among motorists in Imo State. Anchored on Social Cognitive Theory, the study employed a survey research design, drawing a sample size of 399 respondents from a population of 857,298, using the Australian sample size calculator. The multi-stage sampling technique was used, and data were collected through questionnaires. The findings indicate that 45.5% of motorists in Imo State were highly exposed to FRSC's public enlightenment programmes, with seminars in motor parks (32.8%) being the most influential engagement method. The study also reveals that motorists generally perceive FRSC's public enlightenment programmes as effective, with an average mean score of 2.9 on a 4-point Likert scale, suggesting a positive influence on driver behaviour. Furthermore, the study found that motorists do not hold a negative image of FRSC, implying that the enlightenment programmes have improved the agency's public perception.

Despite these findings, the study highlights key areas for improvement. While exposure to FRSC campaigns is relatively high, motorists still engage in unsafe practices such as over-speeding, ignoring seatbelt use, and using phones while driving. This aligns with Ucheobi (2020), who argues that FRSC's campaigns must be reinforced with strict enforcement strategies to drive compliance. Additionally, Olusegun (2018) found that Information Communication Technology (ICT)-driven awareness programmes had a stronger impact than traditional seminars, suggesting that FRSC should diversify its media approach by integrating digital platforms and social media into its campaigns. The study recommends that FRSC expand its public enlightenment programmes to reach a wider audience, particularly through new media, and that the agency sustain its positive public relations efforts to maintain its good image among motorists in Imo State. While the study provides valuable insights, its geographic limitation to Imo State suggests that further research across multiple states could provide a more generalized understanding of public perception of FRSC's enlightenment efforts.

**Gana, M. A., & Emmanuel, J. M. (2014). Road Transportation and Traffic Law Enforcement in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC)**

The study by Gana and Emmanuel (2014) examines the role of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in enforcing road traffic laws in Nigeria, with a focus on the challenges faced by the agency. The study adopts a descriptive approach and utilises data collection and analysis to evaluate FRSC's effectiveness. The findings reveal that while road traffic laws in Nigeria are strong and adequate, their enforcement remains weak, leading to high rates of non-compliance among motorists. The study identifies key challenges hampering FRSC's effectiveness, including a lack of operational equipment, inadequate funding, and poorly maintained road infrastructure. Additionally, it highlights human factors such as over-speeding, reckless driving, and driving under the influence as the primary causes of road traffic accidents. Despite these challenges, the study acknowledges that FRSC has played a significant role in educating motorists through public enlightenment campaigns, which have contributed to some level of awareness and compliance.

The study aligns with previous research by Oyeyemi (2003), who emphasises that human error accounts for over 80% of road traffic accidents in Nigeria, underscoring the need for behavioural change campaigns alongside enforcement strategies. Similarly, Rom Kalilu (2008) supports the notion that FRSC's establishment led to a significant reduction in road crashes, but notes that gaps in emergency response services and road maintenance hinder further progress. Gana and Emmanuel (2014) recommend that FRSC be provided with adequate funding, modern enforcement tools, and improved training for personnel to enhance their ability to enforce traffic laws effectively. They also advocate for better road infrastructure and inter-agency collaboration to address enforcement limitations. While the study offers valuable insights into FRSC's operational challenges, its focus on enforcement without a deeper exploration of policy implementation and technological interventions limits its scope. Future studies should investigate how innovative traffic management systems and digital enforcement strategies can complement FRSC's efforts in improving road safety in Nigeria.

**Amah, E. A., Popoola, M., & Asemah, E. S. (2022). Influence of Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) Ember Months' Campaign on Motorists in Benin City, Nigeria**

The study by Amah, Popoola, and Asemah (2022) investigates the impact of FRSC's ember months' campaign on motorists in Benin City, Nigeria. Using a survey research design, the researchers examined the level of exposure to the campaign, the media channels through which motorists accessed the messages, and the perceived effectiveness of the campaign in influencing driving behaviour. The study sampled 300 commercial motorists, out of which 276 valid responses were analyse d. The findings reveal that 45% of respondents reported low exposure to FRSC's ember months' campaign, with television being the primary channel through which they received campaign messages. Furthermore, the majority of motorists rated the campaign as less effective (45%) or not effective (28%), indicating concerns about the reach and impact of the FRSC's public awareness strategy. However, despite this skepticism, 65% of respondents acknowledged that the campaign positively influenced their driving behaviour, suggesting that while effectiveness may be limited, it still holds some behavioural influence.

The study aligns with previous research on fear appeal communication strategies in road safety campaigns. Asemah and Omosotomhe (2016) argue that fear-based messages can influence behaviour if combined with strict law enforcement and real-life accident statistics. Similarly, Delaney et al. (2004) found that fear appeals work best when complemented with persuasive educational materials and continuous public engagement. However, the study highlights that FRSC's over-reliance on traditional media, such as television and radio, limits its campaign effectiveness, echoing Okafor (2014), who recommends the integration of digital media, social media engagement, and targeted community sensitization programmes. The study recommends that FRSC expand its communication channels beyond television and radio to include social media, outdoor advertising, and print media to enhance message reach and effectiveness. Additionally, sustained monitoring and evaluation of campaign effectiveness should be prioritised to ensure improved compliance with road safety measures during the ember months.

**FRSC (n.d.). Image Building and Public Relations in FRSC**

The presentation "Image Building and Public Relations in FRSC" discusses the role of public relations (PR) in shaping the corporate image of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). The paper highlights that public perception is essential to the effectiveness of FRSC operations, as a positive image enhances compliance with road safety regulations. The study defines public relations as a planned and sustained effort to maintain understanding between an organisation and the public, emphasizing that PR is crucial in mass education, stakeholder engagement, and internal communication within the FRSC. Additionally, it explores the factors influencing FRSC's corporate image, including officer conduct, service delivery, and public trust, while identifying key challenges such as lack of confidence, inadequate funding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The paper suggests solutions like leadership commitment, improved PR strategies, and learning from best practices in other safety organisations.

The study aligns with previous research by Grunig and Hunt (1984), who argue that two-way symmetrical communication is critical for successful PR in public service organisations. Similarly, Olusegun (2018) found that law enforcement agencies in Nigeria struggle with public perception due to poor engagement strategies and inconsistent enforcement. The presentation's strength lies in its practical recommendations, such as training FRSC personnel as PR ambassadors and enhancing community relations to improve road safety compliance. However, it lacks empirical data or case studies to measure the impact of FRSC's PR efforts. Future research should explore how digital PR, such as social media campaigns and real-time road safety alerts, can enhance FRSC's engagement with the public. Overall, the study provides a valuable framework for understanding the intersection of PR and road safety management in Nigeria.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the **s**takeholder theory, as developed by Freeman (1984). The theory emphasises that organisations must consider the interests of all individuals or groups who are affected by or can influence their activities. Rather than focusing solely on profit-making or satisfying regulatory bodies, organisations should pay attention to a broader set of stakeholders, including customers, employees, government agencies, suppliers, local communities, and the general public. The theory suggests that an organisation's success and legitimacy largely depend on how well it manages its relationships with these diverse groups.

According to this theory, effective organisational management involves ongoing communication, collaboration, and balancing of competing interests among stakeholders. It is not enough for organisations to act unilaterally; they must create mechanisms for dialogue, feedback, and participation to maintain trust and cooperation. When stakeholders feel valued and included in decision-making processes, they are more likely to support the organisation's objectives and initiatives, thus creating a more stable and supportive environment for operations.

Stakeholder Theory also stresses that ignoring or marginalizing key stakeholder groups can lead to significant consequences such as public distrust, reputation damage, protests, legal challenges, and operational difficulties. Organisations that fail to address the concerns of their stakeholders' risk losing credibility, facing constant conflict, and struggling to implement their policies effectively. Thus, the theory promotes a relational and ethical approach to organisational management, where success is measured not only by financial outcomes but also by social approval and stakeholder satisfaction.

In relation to public relations this study, Stakeholder Theory suggests that agencies like the FRSC must recognise motorists as essential partners, not just subjects of enforcement. Building strong, trust-based relationships with motorists requires more than issuing commands or occasional campaigns; it demands continuous engagement, responsiveness to complaints, and adaptation to feedback. Applying this theory helps explain why public perception matters in ensuring road safety compliance and why institutions must treat public relations as a core operational strategy rather than a peripheral activity.

## Methodology

The case study design was used for this study. The design is appropriate when a researcher aims to explore a bounded system (a case) in-depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). In this context, the FRSC's operations in Akwa Ibom State can be treated as a unique case, and the study can examine how its public relations strategies shape motorists' perceptions. This design allows the researcher to use multiple data sources, such as interviews, documents, and observations, which enriches the depth and context of findings.

The population of this study comprises motorists in Akwa Ibom State, including private car owners, commercial drivers (taxis and buses), motorcyclists (okada riders), and tricycle operators (keke riders) who regularly interact with the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in the state.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2022), Akwa Ibom has a rapidly growing urban transport sector, with over 250,000 registered vehicles and an estimated 120,000 commercial transport operators. The FRSC (2023) also reports that road users in Akwa Ibom are key stakeholders in road safety operations, making them suitable for this study.

This study specifically focused on motorists operating within major urban centers such as Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene.
Qualitative data were obtained from 30 respondents using structured interviews. The participants were purposively selected to ensure representation across key categories of motorists in Akwa Ibom State, distributed as follows:

(i) 10 commercial drivers (taxi and bus operators),
(ii) 10 private vehicle owners,
(iii) 5 motorcyclists (okada riders), and
(iv) 5 tricycle operators (keke riders).

**Data Presentation and Analysis**
A total of 30 respondents participated in interviews and their perspectives were analysed using thematic analysis. All interviews were transcribed and analyse d using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Four major themes emerged from the analysis:

**Theme 1: Awareness and Reach of FRSC Public Relations Campaigns**
Most respondents were aware of FRSC's public campaigns, particularly during festive periods and special events like "Ember Months." The campaigns were mostly accessed via radio, community rallies, and posters at checkpoints.
"They usually come out strong during December with jingles and patrols. That's when you hear their safety messages clearly." – Commercial Driver, Uyo
"I've seen their posters and billboards. They are visible, but not always consistent." – Private Driver, Eket
Motorcyclists and tricycle riders, however, reported less frequent exposure, especially those operating in interior parts of the state.
"They don't reach us with the messages. Maybe the big drivers hear them, but we small riders only see them when they stop us on the road." – Okada Rider, Ikot Ekpene.

**Theme 2: Motorists' Experience with FRSC Officials**
Experiences with FRSC officials varied widely across respondents.
Private and commercial drivers reported more formal interactions, particularly during checks for documentation and speed compliance.
Keke and okada riders described their encounters as often "confrontational," sometimes involving allegations of extortion or harassment.
"Some of them are respectful and just want to check your papers, but others are rude and threaten you if you don't 'settle.'" – Commercial Driver, Ikot Ekpene
"Most times, the officers don't even explain anything to us. They just stop you and start shouting." – Keke Rider, Uyo

**Theme 3: Trust in FRSC and Perception of Agency Image**
Trust in the FRSC's intentions was mixed. Several respondents believed the organisation was trying to maintain order, but inconsistency in officer behaviour and enforcement damaged their public image.

"Their rules are okay, but it's the way they carry it out that causes problems. Some officers abuse the power they have." – Private Vehicle Owner, Ikot Ekpene.
"If they can be more honest and treat people equally, we'll respect them more." – Okada Rider, Eket.
Many motorists also noted that positive behaviour from some officers helped reduce tension and promote compliance.

**Theme 4: Suggestions for Improving FRSC Public Relations and Operations**
Respondents emphasised the need for:
Consistent communication across all regions,
Use of local languages and mobile platforms for awareness,
Improved officer training,
Community-based outreach, and
Engagement with drivers' unions and transport associations.
"They should hold meetings with drivers in our parks, not just give orders from their offices." – Commercial Driver, Ikot Ekpene.
"Let them use WhatsApp groups and Facebook more. Most drivers are online now, even the younger ones." – Private Motorist, Uyo.

**Discussion of Findings**
The findings from this qualitative study reveal nuanced perspectives on how motorists in Akwa Ibom State perceive the public relations (PR) strategies and operational conduct of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). The discussion reflects four dominant themes: awareness of PR campaigns, experiences with FRSC officials, public trust, and recommendations for improvement.

First, motorists' awareness of FRSC's PR efforts was relatively high, especially among commercial and private drivers. This aligns with previous studies by Amah, Popoola, and Asemah (2022), who found that FRSC's "Ember Month" campaigns were widely known but not consistently maintained throughout the year. The present study also revealed that motorcyclists and keke riders—many of whom operate in rural or semi-urban areas—reported lower exposure to FRSC awareness messages, highlighting a communication gap that limits PR effectiveness. This reinforces Macauley (2021) who noted that limited media penetration and narrow messaging formats can exclude key segments of road users.

Secondly, the nature of motorists' interactions with FRSC officials significantly shaped public perception. While some respondents described professional and informative interactions, others recounted experiences of hostility, extortion, or arbitrary enforcement. This inconsistency confirms the assertions of Gana and Emmanuel (2014) that while FRSC's operational framework is well-intentioned, execution often suffers due to human factors, such as officer behaviour and lack of accountability. The duality of experience also mirrors findings by Ibrahim (2016), who emphasised that training and education alone do not guarantee compliance or goodwill if officer conduct is not regularly monitored and improved.

The issue of trust and public image emerged as a critical concern. Respondents expressed skepticism toward FRSC's sincerity in enforcement, citing perceived revenue motives and selective treatment of motorists. This finding supports Ucheobi, Omego, and Ihejirika (2021), who argue that enforcement without transparency erodes public trust, even in the presence of extensive awareness campaigns. Moreover, as Olusegun (2018) suggests, public institutions must balance enforcement with ethical conduct to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Finally, the participants offered practical recommendations for strengthening FRSC's public relations, including more consistent grassroots engagement, use of local languages, integration of digital platforms, and better training for officers. These suggestions echo the conclusions of Okafor (2014) and Shields and Peruta (2019), who advocate for PR strategies that are participatory, technology-driven, and responsive to public feedback. The call for FRSC to engage directly with drivers' unions and host sensitization programmes at motor parks indicates a demand for relational and community-based public relations rather than top-down messaging alone.

In summary, while the FRSC has made visible efforts in promoting road safety through public enlightenment and operational visibility, this study reveals that effectiveness is limited by inconsistency in communication, officer conduct, and lack of inclusive stakeholder engagement. To enhance its image and operational credibility, the FRSC must embrace a more holistic PR model that prioritises year-round messaging, behavioural training for personnel, and broader public participation in road safety initiatives.

Taking the discussion further, the themes derived from qualitative data analysis are aligned with the specific research questions guiding the study as follows:

**Research Question 1:**
**What are the public relations strategies employed by the FRSC in engaging with motorists in Akwa Ibom State?**

Findings showed that motorists—particularly commercial and private vehicle drivers—were aware of FRSC's campaigns, especially during festive periods such as the Ember Months. Channels mentioned included radio jingles, community rallies, posters, and occasional road shows. However, motorcyclists and keke riders expressed limited exposure, citing poor outreach in rural and semi-urban areas.

"They usually come out strong during December with jingles and patrols." – *Commercial Driver*

"We don't really hear anything unless they stop us on the road." – *Okada Rider*

These insights affirm the existence of seasonal, media-based PR strategies, but also point to a lack of inclusive and sustained communication efforts (Amah *et al.*, 2022; Macauley, 2021).

**Research Question 2:**

**How do motorists perceive the public relations efforts of the FRSC in Akwa Ibom State?**

The study revealed mixed perceptions. Some motorists described professional and courteous behaviour by FRSC officials, while others recounted aggressive enforcement tactics and perceived extortion. These varied experiences shape overall attitudes toward the agency's PR and public image.

"Some officers are polite, but others shout at you without reason." – *Keke Rider*

"I was once fined without explanation, it didn't feel like safety, just punishment." – *Private Motorist*

Such responses reflect that motorists' perceptions are heavily influenced by face-to-face interactions, which often override PR messaging. This aligns with findings from Gana & Emmanuel (2014) and Ucheobi *et al.* (2021), who noted that inconsistent conduct by law enforcement agents affects institutional trust.

**Research Question 3:**

**What is the influence of public relations on motorists' perception of FRSC's operations in Akwa Ibom State?**

Respondents recognised that while FRSC's messaging raises awareness about safety, it does not always lead to positive perceptions or behavioural change. Many participants linked PR effectiveness to officer behaviour, transparency, and grassroots engagement.

"If they can treat everyone fairly, people will listen to their messages more." – *Bus Driver*

"Use our language, come to our parks, and talk to us directly—that's what builds trust." – *Taxi Driver.*

This finding supports existing literature that emphasises the importance of two-way communication and participatory PR in public service organisations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Shields & Peruta, 2019).

**Summary of Findings**

(i) **Awareness:** Most motorists are familiar with FRSC campaigns, especially during festive seasons. However, rural and informal transport operators feel under-informed.

(ii) **Experience:** Interactions with FRSC officers are often uneven—some professional, others aggressive or exploitative.

(iii) **Trust:** Public trust is moderate, weakened by perceived selective enforcement and officer misconduct.

(iv) **Improvement Areas:** Suggestions include more grassroots engagement, multilingual communication, digital media use, and internal accountability for personnel.

This thematic analysis reflects the lived experiences of diverse road users in Akwa Ibom State and provides evidence-based direction for improving FRSC's public relations strategies and public image.

**Conclusion**

The study concludes that FRSC's public relations strategies are visible but inadequately inclusive and inconsistently applied. While the agency's awareness campaigns have had some positive influence on road user behaviour, they are undermined by the lack of transparency in enforcement and poor interpersonal relations between officers and motorists.

Public perception of FRSC is shaped not only by the content of its messages but also by the conduct of its officers and the extent to which the public is engaged as stakeholders rather than subjects of enforcement. Hence, trust in FRSC operations remains fragile, especially among informal transport operators, who often feel marginalized and mistreated.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

(i) **Broaden PR Coverage and Channels**: FRSC should extend public awareness campaigns to informal road users, especially motorcyclists and tricycle operators, by leveraging local radio, town hall meetings, community outreaches, and social media platforms.

(ii) **Ensure Year-Round Engagement**: Rather than limiting campaigns to festive seasons (e.g., Ember Months), the FRSC should adopt a continuous PR model, reinforcing road safety messages throughout the year for sustained impact.

(iii) **Train and Monitor FRSC Officials**: The agency must train its officers in ethical conduct, communication, and public relations, and institute internal monitoring mechanisms to check unprofessional behaviour. Officer conduct should align with FRSC's public image goals.

(iv) **Adopt Two-Way Symmetrical Communication**: In line with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) theory, the FRSC should create feedback channels that allow motorists to express concerns, report misconduct, and suggest improvements—ensuring public participation in safety governance.

(v) **Use Technology for Outreach**: WhatsApp groups, SMS alerts, and mobile apps can be used to communicate directly with registered motorists, making road safety education more interactive and accessible.

(vi) **Partner with Driver Unions and Community Leaders**: Collaborations with transport unions, traditional rulers, and faith-based leaders can increase campaign credibility and reach, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

By implementing these recommendations, FRSC can improve its public image, strengthen motorists' trust, and enhance compliance with road safety regulations, ultimately contributing to safer roads in Akwa Ibom State and beyond.

## References

Adebayo, A. A., & Osagie, A. (2020). Enforcement and compliance to road safety regulations in Nigeria: The need for a paradigm shift. *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 10*(2), 45–58.

Adekoya, A. A., Olagunju, A., & Adepoju, O. A. (2021). Traffic management and road safety strategies in Nigeria: Policy challenges and prospects. *Nigerian Journal of Transportation Research, 5*(1), 23–38.

Akinwale, A. (2017). Public trust and governance in Nigeria: The role of public relations. *Nigerian Journal of Communication, 14*(1), 89–101.

Amah, E. A., Popoola, M., & Asemah, E. S. (2022). Influence of Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) ember months' campaign on motorists in Benin City, Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication, 20*(1), 45–59.

Coombs, W. T. (2007). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Edegoh, L. O. N., & Anunike, O. W. (2016). Public relations practices and crisis management in Nigeria: A study of FRSC, Anambra State Sector Command. *International Journal of Communication, 19*(1), 87–98.

Eke, P. (2019). Challenges of road traffic law enforcement in Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 12*(1), 65–81.

Ekong, I. D., & Udoh, E. E. (2020). Road infrastructure development and its impact on transportation in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 22*(4), 127–142.

Effiong, O., & Nwosu, O. (2021). Transportation systems and urban growth in Akwa Ibom State. *African Journal of Urban Studies, 7*(2), 55–68.

Fombrun, C. J. (1996). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image*. Harvard Business School Press.

FRSC. (2022). *Annual report 2022*. Federal Road Safety Corps Headquarters.

Gana, M. A., & Emmanuel, J. M. (2014). Road transportation and traffic law enforcement in Nigeria: A case study of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). *Journal of Law and Social Policy, 3*(2), 79–89.

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Ibrahim, A. A. (2016). Evaluating effectiveness of Federal Road Safety Commission training and education programmes for commercial vehicle drivers in Jigawa State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice, 7*(29), 88–97.

Johansson, R. (2009). Vision Zero – Implementing a policy for traffic safety. *Safety Science, 47*(6), 826–831. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2008.10.023

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2019). *Marketing management* (15th ed.). Pearson.

Macauley, C. I. (2021). Public perception of the public enlightenment programmes of Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC): A survey of motorists in Imo State. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review, 11*(1), 1–10.

Molefe, M., & Dlamini, S. (2020). Community-based approaches to road safety: Evidence from South Africa. *African Safety Review, 6*(1), 21–34.

National Bureau of Statistics (2022). *Road transport data for Nigeria 2022*. NBS Publications.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). (2021). *Traffic safety facts annual report 2020*. U.S. Department of Transportation.

Nwachukwu, C. (2018). Road traffic law enforcement and public perception in Nigeria: A case study of Lagos State. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 11*(1), 24–40.

Nwulu, C. S. (2021). Public perception of traffic law enforcement in South-South Nigeria. *Journal of Nigerian Sociological Review, 9*(2), 111–127.

OECD. (2019). *Speed and crash risk*. International Transport Forum, OECD Publishing.

Odugbemi, S., & Norris, P. (2010). *Public sentinel: News media and governance reform*. World Bank Publications.

Ojebuyi, B. R., & Salawu, A. (2019). Public perception of police public relations strategies in Nigeria. *African Journalism Studies, 40*(2), 19–37.

Ojebuyi, B. R., & Salawu, A. (2018). Legitimacy and public perception of law enforcement in Nigeria: Role of communication and public relations. African Journalism Studies, 39(2), 45–64.

Okafor, G. (2014). Mass media and public awareness campaigns: The case of road safety education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Communication, 19*(1), 51–60.

Okonkwo, O., & Nwokedi, V. (2020). Drivers' compliance to FRSC regulations and its effects on road traffic accidents in Nigeria. *Journal of Transportation and Logistics Research, 5*(1), 75–89.

Olusegun, S. (2018). Public relations strategies and public perception of the Nigeria Police Force. *Journal of Communication and Media Studies, 10*(2), 55–66.

Schiffman, L. G., & Kanuk, L. L. (2015). *Consumer behaviour* (11th ed.). Pearson.

Shields, A. B., & Peruta, A. (2019). Social media and public safety: Improving community policing through communication. *Journal of Social Media for Organisations, 6*(1), 1–15.

Ucheobi, C. I., Omego, C., & Ihejirika, W. C. (2021). Influence of public relations strategies on public perception of the Nigeria police. *International Journal of Communication, 28*(1), 74–85.

Uzondu, C. A., Jamson, S. L., & Marsden, G. (2022). Road safety in Nigeria: Unravelling the challenges, measures, and strategies for improvement. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 12*, 100498. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2022.100498

Walters, G., & Brooks, C. (2021). Road safety interventions and driver behaviour: A systematic review. *Journal of Safety Research, 76*, 150–161.

Wilcox, D. L., Cameron, G. T., Reber, B. H., & Shin, J. H. (2013). *Public relations: Strategies and tactics* (10th ed.). Pearson.

World Bank. (2021). *Road safety and sustainable development*. World Bank Publications.

World Health Organisation (WHO). (2020). *Global status report on road safety 2018*. WHO Press.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Professionalism & Excellence

www.JSPRC-AKSNIPR.com