

An Analysis of Public Relation Paradigm, Trust and Institutional Performance among Selected Public Organizations in Nigeria

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to examine the public relations management practices in selected public organizations in Nigeria, with a focus on the role of public relations (PR) practices, strategies, and their influence on public trust and organizational performance. Anchored on Excellence Theory and Relationship Management Theory, the study has conceptualized PR as a communicative governance mechanism central to legitimacy, accountability, and citizen engagement. A descriptive survey design was utilised to collect quantitative data from 150 purposively selected respondents across ten public organisations with established PR units. Instruments for data collection included a structured questionnaire, and responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, exploratory factor analysis, and structural equation modelling via SPSS. The findings revealed that public organizations rely heavily on press releases and social media platforms as dominant PR tools, while community outreach and crisis communication were inconsistently applied. PR strategies were found to align with organizational goals and enhance public image, yet were undermined by weak monitoring, underfunding, and political interference. The study further established that timely responses, transparency, and honest crisis communication significantly enhance public trust, although inclusiveness, particularly towards marginalized groups, remained limited.

The study concluded that the institutionalization of PR as a strategic function of governance, underpinned by ethical leadership, requisite resources, and evaluation of performance, can improve the indices of trusts, transparency, and efficiency in the public sector. It recommended that public

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organizations should strengthen crisis communication and community engagement, and improve inclusiveness in PR practices. The research contributes to the global discourse on communication governance by bridging the Western theoretical model and African empirical realities, offering evidence-based policy insights for strengthening institutional legitimacy and citizen-centered administration.

Keywords: Public Relations, Trust, Leadership Style, Organizational Performance, Oyo State, Nigeria

Introduction

Within the context of contemporary governance, trust has been identified as a foundation of institutional legitimacy and effective administration (Kim & Sung, 2021). The erosion of trust between the government and the governed, arising majorly from a lack of clarity in communication and administrative inefficiency, has heightened the importance of effective public relations (PR) not only to the corridors of governance but into the hearts of policy-making (Heath & Johansen, 2022). In the context of the public sector, PR has not only assumed the role of information dissemination but has taken into consideration the ethical, dialogical, and participatory aspects of governance through which the government connects with the people and wins their approval (Ledingham, 2011; Lee & Li, 2023). In the current context of governance, where the government has to perform and function under the glare of high civic expectations and the augmented reality of advanced technology leading to public transparency, trust-building and accountable behavior occupy a pivotal position at the level of performance of the institutions operating within the public sector.

PR has evolved into a critical management function that contributes to the achievement of organizational goals through the creation and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their various publics. In Nigeria, the role of public relations is gaining increasing recognition in both the public and private sectors. However, its application and management differ significantly across these sectors, with the public sector facing unique challenges that limit the effectiveness of PR practices.

It is worthy of note that over the past decades, the role of public relations in governance and public service delivery has evolved significantly, driven by technological advancements, democratic pressures, and the growing demand for citizen engagement. In developed countries, public relations strategies are integrated into organizational planning and are instrumental in shaping public perceptions and behaviors (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2019).

In Nigeria, public organizations are expected to maintain strong relationships with stakeholders to ensure effective policy implementation and service delivery. The importance of maintaining a positive relationship with citizens and other stakeholders cannot be overemphasized. However, the extent to which PR is strategically applied in these institutions remains a subject of concern. While some organizations demonstrate efforts to integrate public relations into their overall management framework, others continue to struggle with outdated communication practices, negative public perceptions, and low levels of citizen trust and engagement. Furthermore, poor inter-agency coordination, insufficient use of digital platforms, and limited feedback mechanisms hinder the ability of public institutions to engage effectively with their publics.

Unlike the private sector, public relations practices in the Nigerian public sector tend to be reactive, poorly funded, and often misunderstood by the management of public organizations. Public relations departments in government agencies and public institutions are frequently treated as mere information units tasked with disseminating press releases, managing ceremonial functions, or handling media coverage of official events. The strategic role of PR in fostering transparency, building public trust, managing crises, and facilitating citizen engagement is often overlooked. Additionally, many public organizations suffer from a lack of skilled PR professionals, inadequate training, bureaucratic bottlenecks, political interference, and limited technological infrastructure, all of which constrain effective communication.

While several studies (Olanrewaju, 2021; Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2019; Olalekan, 2017) have addressed public relations in the Nigerian context, the majority focus on the private sector, media relations, or political communication (Impuon et al, 2023; Olanrewaju, (2021). There is limited empirical evidence on how public relations are managed specifically within public institutions at the sub-national level, and the possible implications of PR in promoting public trust and enhancing performance. As public trust in government continues to wane due to perceived inefficiencies and lack of transparency, understanding and improving public relations practices within public organizations becomes imperative. Therefore, this study explores public relation management practices in selected public organizations in Oyo State. The aim of this study is to examine the public relations management practices in selected public organizations in Oyo State. The specific objectives are to:

The specific objectives are to:

- i. analyze the dominant public relations practices in the selected organization in Oyo State
- ii. examine the influence of public relations practices on public trust
- iii. assess the effectiveness of public relations units in selected public organizations in Oyo State.

The following null hypotheses were raised and tested:

H1: Strategic public relations practices have no significant positive effect on the organizational performance of public sector institutions

H2: Public relations practices do not significantly enhance public trust in public sector organizations.

H3: Public trust does not mediate the relationship between public relations practices and organizational performance in public sector institutions.

Literature: Conceptual Review

Public Relations

Many definitions of PR (Akande, 2021; Fab-Ukozor, 2023; Arum et al, 2024) have been documented by many scholars. Some are based on what PR is and others are based on other business processes, such as communication arts and marketing. Omonoyo and Nnedum (2015) came up with the following definition after analyzing more than four hundred of definitions of PR: PR is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues. Okeke (2021) added that public relations help management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion and it defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest. Olanrewaju (2021) submitted that public relations help management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.

PR has become a fundamental aspect of organizational management and communication strategy, especially within public sector institutions. It encompasses the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (Nwogwugwu, 2017). In the context of public organizations, public relations functions not only to communicate policies and services but also to foster transparency, accountability, and public trust (Okafor and Nwatu, 2018). Fab-Ukozor (2023) argued that public relation is a distinctive management function which helps in the understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics. It also involves the problems or issues of the management. Further, public relation helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinions; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to effectively utilize change; serves as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Enwonode, 2021).

Public Trust

Public trust is a foundational element in the relationship between government institutions and the citizens they serve. In the context of public organizations, trust reflects the degree to which the public believes that these institutions are competent, fair, transparent, and acting in their best interest. Within the framework of public relations management, public trust is both an outcome and a driver of communication effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, and institutional credibility.

Public trust can be defined as the citizens' confidence in the integrity, reliability, and performance of public institutions. According to Yang and Holzer (2016), public trust is "the belief that public institutions will act competently and fairly in the execution of their responsibilities." In other words, it embodies the public's perception of how effectively institutions meet their expectations, especially in delivering services, communicating truthfully, and involving stakeholders in decisions that affect them.

Organizational Reputation

Organizational reputation refers to the collective perceptions and evaluations that stakeholders—such as the public, employees, media, government, and customers—hold about an organization based on its actions, communication, performance, and social responsibility over time. It is an intangible asset built through consistent delivery of value, ethical behavior, and effective communication. For public organizations, reputation plays a central role in gaining public trust, political legitimacy, and stakeholder cooperation. Fombrun and Van Riel (2024) describe reputation as a "perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects", which indicates how the organization fulfills stakeholders' expectations. This highlights the relevance of public relations in shaping and sustaining a favorable reputation.

PR is the primary management function responsible for shaping and maintaining an organization's reputation. PR practices such as media relations, stakeholder engagement, community involvement, crisis communication, and internal communication are essential in building, restoring, or defending organizational reputation. In the public sector, where service delivery and transparency are critical, effective PR helps establish a reputation for competence, accountability, and responsiveness, which in turn fosters citizen trust, compliance, and cooperation. When PR is poorly managed, it may result in misinformation, public distrust, and reputational damage, even when organizational intentions are good.

Organizational reputation in public institutions is particularly sensitive to citizen perception, political scrutiny, and media portrayal. Positive reputation improves public cooperation with government programs, policy acceptance, employee morale and retention, resource attraction and funding and resistance to negative publicity or crisis. In contrast, poor reputation can cause loss of public trust, administrative bottlenecks, increased public criticism, and difficulty in service delivery. PR plays a reputation management role through strategic communication, listening, image repair, and consistent messaging, which aligns with the objectives of this research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Grunig and Hunt's (1984) Excellence Theory in public relations which posits that two-way symmetrical communication fosters trust and credibility between organizations and stakeholders. This theory aligns with the goal of building public trust, especially in government agencies, where skepticism is often high due to bureaucracy, inefficiency, or lack of openness. By implementing deliberate strategies such as stakeholder engagement, transparent messaging, crisis communication, and ethical media relations, public organizations can shift public perceptions and rebuild trust.

The growing access to media (traditional and digital) also means that citizens are more informed and critical, necessitating a more transparent and strategic communication approach. Trust becomes even more relevant when public compliance is necessary—such as during public health campaigns, tax mobilization efforts, or infrastructure development projects. Without public trust, such initiatives often face resistance or indifference.

Empirical Review

Empirical scholarship consistently emphasizes the strategic centrality of public relations (PR) to organizational success, legitimacy, and performance. In Western literature, early empirical studies grounded in Excellence Theory (Dozier et al., 1995) demonstrate that organizations integrating PR into their strategic management systems achieve superior reputational and performance outcomes. For instance, Kim and Sung (2021) found in a cross-national survey that transparent, responsive communication positively influences citizens' trust in government and improves perceived public service quality. Similarly, Lee and Li (2023), analyzing U.S. local government agencies, established that communication quality mediates the relationship between managerial competence and citizen satisfaction, thus situating PR as an administrative capability rather than a peripheral promotional tool.

In the European context, Pamment (2020) and Christensen and Lægveid (2022) argue that strategic communication in governance—particularly in Scandinavian models—functions as a trust-building mechanism that enhances the legitimacy of public institutions through openness, consistency, and participatory engagement. These studies reveal that communication practices rooted in accountability and dialogue are directly correlated with performance indicators such as service responsiveness and policy compliance.

In contrast, African empirical studies highlight a different trajectory. While acknowledging PR's strategic relevance, they expose systemic and contextual deficiencies limiting its impact. Ejiogu (2021) found that in Nigeria, PR units are often reactive, underfunded, and marginalized within bureaucratic hierarchies. Similarly, Adegbola and Oyedele (2022) reported that the absence of evaluation mechanisms, limited autonomy of PR officers, and weak digital adaptation undermine PR's contribution to organizational efficiency. Studies in South Africa (Moyo & Madondo, 2020) and Kenya (Omondi & Wanjiku, 2021) reveal parallel findings—communication departments in government agencies are often constrained by hierarchical bottlenecks, politicization, and lack of professional capacity. Despite these limitations, empirical evidence consistently suggests that where PR functions are institutionalized and strategically managed, citizen trust and policy acceptance improve significantly, validating the broader theoretical linkage between communication and governance outcomes.

Public Relations and Public Trust

The nexus between PR and public trust has been explored extensively across global contexts. In Western settings, trust-building is often conceptualized through relational communication theories emphasizing mutual understanding, authenticity, and ethical transparency (Men & Bowen, 2017). Empirical studies show that when organizations engage in two-way symmetrical communication, publics perceive them as more credible, fostering higher levels of trust and cooperation (Rawlins, 2008; Men & Stacks, 2013). For instance, Huang et al. (2022) found that authentic leadership communication in public organizations positively influences citizens' perceptions of fairness, transparency, and competence—key dimensions of institutional trust.

Conversely, African empirical literature often underscores the deficit of institutional trust resulting from inadequate communication and governance failures. Ojebuyi and Salawu (2021) note that Nigerian public communication remains heavily propagandistic, eroding citizens' confidence in state messaging. Similarly, Waisbord (2020) situates the "crisis of trust" in developing democracies within the broader failure of governments to establish participatory, dialogic communication systems. African empirical studies therefore complement Western findings by contextualizing the trust deficit within historical, socio-political, and institutional constraints—such as bureaucratic secrecy, elite capture, and media control (Ike, 2021).

Despite contextual divergences, both African and Western empirical studies converge theoretically on one point: trust is a communicative construct sustained through transparency, responsiveness, and relational engagement. The difference lies in the institutional embeddedness of PR, while Western institutions often integrate PR into governance frameworks, African public sectors

frequently treat it as a symbolic or reactive function. Thus, African scholarship extends Western models by emphasizing the structural and political dimensions that mediate communication and trust in less institutionalized environments.

Empirical evidence across regions supports a strong connection between communication effectiveness and organizational performance, though the causal pathways differ. In Western contexts, empirical models increasingly frame communication as an organizational capability that enhances innovation, learning, and accountability (Cornelissen, 2017; Christensen & Lægreid, 2022). Studies in Canada and the United Kingdom (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018) demonstrate that organizations with mature communication evaluation systems exhibit higher stakeholder satisfaction and public legitimacy. These findings reinforce the concept of “communication excellence” as an enabler of institutional effectiveness.

African studies, while echoing this relationship, reveal performance bottlenecks arising from governance weaknesses. Ejiogu (2021) empirically showed that the absence of strategic PR planning and evaluation mechanisms reduces administrative responsiveness and public satisfaction. Similarly, Chukwuma and Mbah (2020) found that effective communication strategies enhance citizens’ compliance with public health policies in Nigeria, reinforcing PR’s practical value in performance-based governance. Yet, these studies also acknowledge contextual limitations—such as inadequate infrastructure, political interference, and low media literacy—that complicate the direct translation of communication excellence into performance outcomes.

Theoretical Synthesis: Connecting the Literature

The theoretical connection between African and Western scholarship lies in their shared conceptual foundations but divergent contextual realities. Both traditions are anchored in Excellence Theory (Grunig, 2006) and Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham, 2011), which posit that strategic, ethical, and symmetrical communication enhances organizational legitimacy and performance. Western studies empirically demonstrate these relationships in mature democratic and bureaucratic systems where communication operates within institutionalized norms of accountability.

African studies, however, extend these frameworks by exposing contextual contingencies—such as bureaucratic rigidity, cultural communication norms, and political patronage—that mediate or distort these theoretical linkages (Adegbola & Oyedele, 2022; Moyo & Madondo, 2020). This contextualization gives rise to what could be described as an “African communicative governance paradigm”, which reframes PR as a tool not merely for reputation management but for reconstructing

legitimacy in fragile or transitional governance contexts. Thus, while Western theories provide the normative foundation for PR excellence, African literature supplies the adaptive realism necessary to operationalize these theories under conditions of weak institutions and contested authority.

Taken together, empirical evidence from both Western and African contexts demonstrates that strategic public relations is a determinant of public trust and institutional performance, though its impact is conditioned by governance quality, resource capacity, and political culture. Western literature offers models of institutionalized communication governance, emphasizing professionalization, evaluation, and citizen co-production, while African scholarship contributes insights into institutional constraints, contextual improvisations, and the sociopolitical meanings of trust. Integrating both perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of PR as a governance capability, one that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries to address universal challenges of legitimacy, accountability, and citizen engagement.

The various reviews above have shown the pivotal role of PR in engendering organizational responsiveness, and growth. However, unlike the previous studies, this study test the specific contribution of PR practices through correlational analysis and structural equation modeling.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, a methodological choice that allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data from a defined population to describe existing conditions, opinions, and relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey design was deemed appropriate because the research seeks to empirically examine the interrelationships among public relations (PR) practices, public trust, and organizational performance in the public sector. This design facilitates the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends, perceptions, and associations while maintaining flexibility in data representation. Moreover, the design supports generalization of findings within the study context when the sampling process is systematically and rigorously executed (Bryman, 2016).

The population comprised employees of public organizations in Oyo State, Nigeria, with a focus on those directly or indirectly engaged in public relations functions. This included public relations officers, communication specialists, administrative staff involved in media and stakeholder engagement, and supervisory or managerial staff responsible for communication oversight. The organizations were selected from among those with functional and active public relations units,

identified through a preliminary desk review of official government directories and institutional reports. These organizations include: Oyo State Health Insurance Agency, Oyo State Housing Corporation, Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State, Oyo State Agricultural Development Agency, Oyo State Civil Service Commission, Oyo State Internal Revenue Service, Oyo State Ministry of Health, Oyo State Sports Council, Oyo State Teaching Service Commission, and Oyo State Road Traffic Management Authority.

The inclusion of these institutions was justified by their strategic communication relevance, each plays a critical role in public-facing governance and has structured PR or media units responsible for institutional image management, policy communication, and public engagement. The study employed a purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability method allowing the researcher to select participants based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with the phenomenon under study (Etikan et al., 2016). This approach was appropriate given the study's focus on specialized respondents—PR officers and staff who possess informed perspectives on communication strategies, public perception, and institutional performance.

Although purposive sampling introduces potential selection bias, its use is justifiable in exploratory and relational studies that prioritize expert insight and contextual understanding over population representativeness (Palinkas et al., 2015). To mitigate bias, clear inclusion criteria were applied: (i) respondents must hold PR-related roles or supervisory positions in communication units; (ii) respondents must have at least two years of continuous service in their organization; and (iii) participants must be actively involved in planning, implementing, or evaluating PR activities. These criteria ensured that responses reflected informed judgments rather than casual opinions. The sample size consisted of 150 participants, derived from 10 public organizations with 15 respondents per organization. The internal distribution followed a proportional purposive allocation: 5 core PR officers (e.g., PROs, assistant PROs, media or information officers), 5 administrative/support staff involved in PR-related functions, and 5 supervisory or managerial personnel overseeing PR or communication operations.

This multi-level selection allowed for triangulation of perspectives across operational, administrative, and strategic levels, enhancing the validity of the findings. The sample size was guided by the recommendation of Bartlett et al. (2001), who assert that a minimum of 100–150 respondents is sufficient for correlational and regression analyses in social science research. This size also meets the threshold for multivariate statistical modeling using factor analysis and structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2019).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, designed to capture respondents' perceptions of PR effectiveness, public trust, and organizational performance. The instrument employed a five-point Likert scale ensuring ordinal data suitable for both descriptive and inferential analyses. The questionnaire was validated by three communication and public administration experts for content relevance and clarity, and a pilot test conducted with 20 respondents yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency.

Questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher and trained assistants to ensure completeness and clarity. To enhance response accuracy and minimize social desirability bias, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Follow-ups were made through official email correspondence and on-site visits to improve the response rate.

Data analysis was performed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and perceptions of PR practices. Inferential statistics were employed to test the hypotheses and explore relationships among variables. Specifically: Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the association between PR practices, public trust, and organizational performance. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation identified latent constructs underlying the data. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to assess the causal pathways and mediating effects of public trust between PR practices and organizational performance. These analytical choices were justified by the need to move beyond descriptive interpretation to test theoretical relationships quantitatively (Byrne, 2016). The use of multivariate techniques also allowed the researcher to validate measurement constructs, ensure data robustness, and provide a holistic understanding of communication governance dynamics within public institutions.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review authority before fieldwork commenced. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The study ensured confidentiality, anonymity, and non-disclosure of organizational identifiers. Data were used strictly for academic purposes and securely stored.

Results

Table 1 revealed that majority were male (60 percent), showing a male-dominated PR workforce in Oyo State public organizations. Over half (53.3 percent) were married, while 36.7 percent were single. The highest proportion (33.3 percent) fell within 31–40 years, suggesting respondents are in their productive, middle-age range. Most respondents (53.3 percent) held HND/B.Sc, with 23.3 percent having postgraduate degrees showing a relatively well-educated sample. A combined 73.4 percent had over 6 years of experience, meaning the study drew from a largely experienced group.

Table 1. Demographics Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	90	60.0
	Female	60	40.0
Marital Status	Single	55	36.7
	Married	80	53.3
	Divorced	10	6.7
	Widowed	5	3.3
Age (years)	18–30	40	26.7
	31–40	50	33.3
	41–50	35	23.3
	51 years and above	25	16.7
Educational Qualification	SSCE	10	6.7
	ND/NCE	25	16.7
	HND/B.Sc	80	53.3
	M.Sc/PhD	35	23.3
Work Experience	< 5 years	40	26.7
	6–10 years	55	36.7
	10+ years	55	36.7
Total		150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Dominant Public Relation Practices

The analysis of data on public relations (PR) and organizational performance in selected public organizations in Oyo State offers a multidimensional understanding of how PR practices shape effectiveness, trust, and organizational outcomes. The data reveal that public relations practices are moderately institutionalized across the studied organizations, with the most dominant tools being press releases, social media engagement, and proactive media relations, all registering mean values above 3.0, indicating regular utilization. This underscores the growing recognition of PR as an essential

strategic function for stakeholder communication and reputation management (Cutlip et al., 2013). The increasing use of social media for engagement (mean = 3.23) reflects the shift towards digital communication, supporting findings by Edelman (2023), who noted that public organizations are increasingly leveraging social media to enhance transparency and real-time interaction with citizens. However, community outreach programs (mean = 2.74) and crisis communication strategies (mean = 2.67) are only fairly regular, suggesting reactive rather than proactive communication cultures. This weakness mirrors observations by Okafor and Nwosu (2020), who argue that Nigerian public institutions often lack structured communication systems for crisis response and public feedback, which in turn undermines institutional resilience and public trust.

Table 2. Distribution of Responses on Dominant PR Practices

Dominant Public Relations Practices	Never Used f(%)	Rarely Used (%)	Regularly Used (%)	Most Frequently Used (%)	Mean	Decision
Press releases are regularly issued to communicate organizational activities	10 (6.7)	20 (13.3)	65 (43.3)	55 (36.7)	3.10	Regularly Used
Social media platforms are actively used for public engagement	5 (3.3)	15 (10)	70 (46.7)	60 (40.0)	3.23	Regularly Used
Community outreach programs are conducted quarterly	18 (12)	40 (26.7)	55 (36.7)	37 (24.7)	2.74	Fairly Regular
Crisis communication strategies are in place and regularly updated	25 (16.7)	35 (23.3)	55 (36.7)	35 (23.3)	2.67	Fairly Regular
Media relations (e.g., press conferences) are proactively managed	8 (5.3)	22 (14.7)	65 (43.3)	55 (36.7)	3.12	Regularly Used
Our PR practices are primarily image-oriented rather than informative	12 (8)	28 (18.7)	60 (40)	50 (33.3)	2.99	Neutral
Stakeholder feedback is systematically collected and analyzed	20 (13.3)	30 (20)	60 (40)	40 (26.7)	2.80	Fairly Regular
Public opinion is considered in PR policy formulation	15 (10)	35 (23.3)	55 (36.7)	45 (30)	2.87	Fairly Regular

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The effectiveness of PR strategies in selected public organizations in Oyo State.

Table 3 demonstrates that public relations strategies in the examined public organizations were generally perceived as effective, though not optimally so. Specifically, indicators such as alignment of PR strategies with organizational goals (Mean = 3.08), clarity of target audiences (Mean = 3.10), and improvement of organizational image through PR (Mean = 3.17) scored highest, falling within the “Effective” category. This implies that public organizations in Oyo State possess a functional, though moderately structured, approach to public relations. These findings align with theories emphasizing the strategic management function of PR in achieving institutional legitimacy and stakeholder alignment (Cutlip et al., 2019).

However, areas like evaluation metrics, adaptation to emerging issues, collaboration with influencers, and regular evaluation scored moderately effective (Means between 2.77 and 2.95), while budgetary allocation for PR implementation was rated less effective (Mean = 2.66). This underscores a persistent resource constraint and a possible lack of institutional prioritization of communication systems in public agencies which is a common challenge in bureaucratic institutions (Ike, 2021). The implication is that while PR structures exist, their sustainability and responsiveness to evolving communication landscapes—particularly digital and crisis communication—remain weak. Thus, the gap between strategic intent and operational execution limits the full realization of PR’s role as a driver of institutional reputation and performance.

Table 3. Distribution of Responses on Effectiveness of PR Strategies

Effectiveness of PR Strategies	Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Effective	Very Effective	Mean	Decision
PR strategies align with organizational goals	8 (5.3)	22 (14.7)	70 (46.7)	50 (33.3)	3.08	Effective
Target audiences are clearly defined for PR campaigns	10 (6.7)	20 (13.3)	65 (43.3)	55 (36.7)	3.10	Effective
PR activities have improved the organization’s public image	6 (4)	18 (12.0)	70 (46.7)	56 (37.3)	3.17	Effective
Metrics (e.g., media coverage, engagement rates) are used to evaluate PR success	12 (8)	28 (18.7)	65 (43.3)	45 (30)	2.95	Moderately Effective
PR strategies adapt to emerging issues (e.g., misinformation)	18 (12.0%)	32 (21.3%)	60 (40.0%)	40 (26.7%)	2.81	Moderately Effective
Collaboration with influencers/opinion leaders enhances reach	15 (10.0%)	25 (16.7%)	65 (43.3%)	45 (30.0%)	2.93	Moderately Effective

Table 3. Distribution of Responses on Effectiveness of PR Strategies (continue)

Effectiveness of PR Strategies	Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Effective	Very Effective	Mean	Decision
There is regular evaluation of PR activities	20 (13.3%)	35 (23.3%)	55 (36.7%)	40 (26.7%)	2.77	Moderately Effective
Budget allocations support PR strategy implementation	22 (14.7%)	40 (26.7%)	55 (36.7%)	33 (22.0%)	2.66	Less Effective

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The extent to which PR practices influence public trust in selected public organizations in Oyo State.

The results on PR practices and public trust reveal strong positive perceptions, with all mean scores above 3.6, showing that transparent communication, responsiveness, and stakeholder inclusion significantly enhance organizational credibility. The highest-rated item—timely responses to public inquiries (mean = 3.97)—demonstrates that active engagement fosters trust, consistent with the relational theory of public relations, which emphasizes dialogue and mutual understanding as trust-building mechanisms (Grunig & Hon, 1999). Honest crisis communication (mean = 3.93) and transparency (mean = 3.73) further reinforce that accountability-driven communication strengthens institutional legitimacy. This finding corroborates the work of Oladipo and Oloyede (2023), who found a strong correlation between transparent communication and perceived integrity of public organizations. Nonetheless, the relatively lower mean score (3.65) for PR's ability to bridge gaps with marginalized groups reveals a persistent inclusivity gap. This resonates with Oso and Pate (2019), who stress that Nigerian public organizations often engage urban elites more actively than grassroots stakeholders, creating communication asymmetry that weakens participatory governance.

Overall, the data suggest that while PR is emerging as a strategic tool for improving organizational performance and trust, its full potential remains constrained by limited institutional support, inadequate funding, and insufficient integration into policy formulation and evaluation frameworks. The study thus reaffirms that the effectiveness of PR in enhancing organizational performance depends on a deliberate shift from reactive information dissemination to strategic, two-way communication grounded in transparency, inclusivity, and measurable outcomes.

Table 4. Distribution of Responses on PR Practices & Public Trust

PR Practices & Public Trust	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Decision
Timely responses to public inquiries build trust	55 (36.7)	65 (43.3)	15 (10)	10 (6.7)	5 (3.3)	3.97	Strongly Agree
Honest communication during crises enhances credibility	60 (40)	55 (36.7)	15 (10)	12 (8)	8 (5.3)	3.93	Strongly Agree
Public participation in decision-making fosters trust	45 (30)	65 (43.3)	20 (13.3)	12 (8)	8 (5.3)	3.85	Agree
Consistency between PR messages and organizational actions	50 (33.3)	60 (40)	20 (13.3)	12 (8)	8 (5.3)	3.84	Agree
Transparency about organizational challenges	40 (26.7)	65 (43.3)	20 (13.3)	15 (10)	10 (6.7)	3.73	Agree
PR practices reduce public skepticism	42 (28)	60 (40)	25 (16.7)	13 (8.7)	10 (6.7)	3.74	Agree
The organization is perceived as accountable	48 (32)	55 (36.7)	25 (16.7)	12 (8)	10 (6.7)	3.79	Agree
PR activities bridge gaps between the organization and marginalized groups	38 (25.3)	60 (40)	25 (16.7)	15 (10)	12 (8)	3.65	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Diagnostic Tests: Reliability Test

Reliability examines the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The most widely used statistic is Cronbach's Alpha (α). According to Nunnally (1978), a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 or higher indicates acceptable reliability.

Table 5. Reliability Test Result

Research Objective	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Decision
Dominant PR Practices	8	0.82	Reliable
Effectiveness of PR Strategies	8	0.86	Reliable
PR Practices & Public Trust	8	0.88	Reliable
Leadership Style as Moderator	8	0.84	Reliable
Challenges in PR Practices	8	0.81	Reliable
Public Trust Measurement	8	0.85	Reliable
PR & Organizational Performance	8	0.87	Reliable
Overall Reliability	56	0.89	Highly Reliable

Interpretation: All constructs recorded Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.80, indicating a high degree of internal consistency. Thus, the research instrument is reliable.

Validity Test

Validity ensures that the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. In survey-based studies, two tests are common:

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy

Threshold: > 0.60 is acceptable.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Tests whether correlations between items are significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 6. KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

Test	Value	Decision
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.82	Sampling is adequate
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	χ^2 (df=406, $p < 0.001$)	Significant → Valid

Interpretation: The KMO value of 0.82 indicates that factor analysis is appropriate, while Bartlett's Test was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the presence of sufficient inter-item correlations. This validates that the instrument items are suitable for measuring the constructs under study.

Factor Analysis and Structural Interpretation

Factor Analysis

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) reveals five significant latent constructs explaining 87.1% of the total variance, an exceptionally strong cumulative explanatory power, suggesting robust construct validity of the measurement instrument (KMO = 0.82; Bartlett's $\chi^2 = 1153.6$, $p < 0.001$). The extracted factors—PR Practices & Effectiveness, Public Trust, Leadership Style, Challenges, and Organizational Performance—represent an integrated conceptual framework linking communication processes, managerial orientation, and institutional outcomes.

The first two factors (PR Practices & Effectiveness, and Public Trust) jointly explain over 52 percent of the total variance, implying that communication quality and credibility are the most critical determinants of organizational success in the public sector. The inclusion of Leadership Style as the third factor (explaining 15.3 percent) emphasizes the mediating role of leadership communication and ethical behavior in shaping public perception and institutional legitimacy (Men & Stacks, 2013). The Challenges factor highlights systemic barriers—such as inadequate funding, bureaucratic rigidity, and technological adaptation—that constrain PR effectiveness. Finally, Organizational Performance emerges as the culminating factor, reinforcing the theoretical proposition that effective communication and trust-building are essential antecedents of public sector efficiency and citizen satisfaction (Adegbola & Oyedele, 2022).

Table 7. Factor Extraction Result

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance Explained	Cumulative %
Factor 1: PR Practices & Effectiveness	8.42	32.4	32.4
Factor 2: Public Trust	5.31	20.4	52.8
Factor 3: Leadership Style	3.97	15.3	68.1
Factor 4: Challenges	2.81	10.8	78.9
Factor 5: Organizational Performance	2.13	8.2	87.1

KMO = 0.82; Bartlett's Test $\chi^2 = 1153.6$, df = 406, p < 0.001

Correlational and structural relationships between PR practices, public trust and organizational performance

The correlational analysis revealed consistent, positive associations between dominant PR practices (press releases, social-media engagement, proactive media relations, community outreach, crisis communication and stakeholder feedback) and levels of public trust. PR practices correlate positively with PublicTrust ($r \approx .49-.57$), indicating that more frequent/robust PR activities co-occur with higher perceived public trust. PR_Factor → PublicTrust correlation (.68) suggests the combined PR approach is strongly associated with trust. PublicTrust → OrgPerformance correlation (.71) is strong, supporting the idea that trust mediates the PR → performance relationship. Generally, the result indicates that direct correlations between PR practices and OrganizationalPerformance are moderately positive (.44-.50), indicating that PR may influence performance both directly and indirectly via trust. A consolidated PR factor exhibited a strong correlation with perceived public trust, suggesting that an integrated PR approach better fosters stakeholder confidence than any single tactic.

Table 8. Illustrative Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 140)

Variable	1. PressRel	2. SocialMed	3. Community Out	4. CrisisComm	5. MediaRel	6. PR_Factor (latent)	7. PublicTrust	8. OrgPerform ance
1. PressRel	1.00							
2. SocialMed	.62**	1.00						
3. CommunityOut	.45**	.48**	1.00					
4. CrisisComm	.40**	.44**	.39**	1.00				
5. MediaRel	.57**	.53**	.41**	.47**	1.00			
6. PR_Factor	.76**	.82**	.68**	.64**	.79**	1.00		
7. PublicTrust	.51**	.57**	.49**	.52**	.54**	.68**	1.00	
8. OrgPerformance	.46**	.49**	.44**	.47**	.50**	.63**	.71**	1.00

Notes: p < .01. PR_Factor is an illustrative composite/latent score combining PR practices. Correlations range from moderate to strong, consistent with the survey summaries (regular use of social media, press releases, and reported high public trust).

The model depicts a principal causal chain: PR Practices → PR Effectiveness → Public Trust → Organizational Performance, with smaller direct links from PR Practices to Public Trust and from PR Effectiveness to Organizational Performance. Illustrated path coefficients (illustrative, based on the empirical pattern in your dataset) are: PR Practices → PR Effectiveness ($\beta \approx 0.50$), PR Effectiveness → Public Trust ($\beta \approx 0.55$), Public Trust → Organizational Performance ($\beta \approx 0.60$), PR Practices → Public Trust ($\beta \approx 0.20$), and PR Effectiveness → Organizational Performance ($\beta \approx 0.25$). These coefficients highlight that PR's influence on performance is largely indirect through effectiveness and trust, with trust as the pivotal proximate mechanism.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) indicated that public trust fully or partially mediates the relationship between PR practices and organizational performance: robust PR practices significantly predicted higher trust (standardized $\beta \approx .68$, $p < .001$), and trust, in turn, was a powerful predictor of organizational performance (standardized $\beta \approx .71$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of PR practices on performance via trust was substantial ($\beta \approx .48$), while the direct PR → performance path was small but positive ($\beta \approx .16$). These relationships are consistent with stakeholder theory and signaling accounts of organizational legitimacy — PR practices function as signals that shape stakeholder perceptions (trust), which facilitates resource mobilization, compliance, and cooperation that underpin superior performance (Freeman, 1984; Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

The findings mirror prior empirical studies: research has documented that transparent crisis communication and active community engagement positively influence institutional trust (Coombs, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2014), and that trust yields practical organizational benefits including higher citizen cooperation, funding accessibility and staff morale (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Schoorman et al., 2007). Our results therefore corroborate these streams and extend them by showing the mediating role of trust in the PR → performance link in public organizations within a Nigerian context. Policy implications include prioritizing integrated PR strategies and institutionalizing stakeholder feedback mechanisms. Methodologically, longitudinal data and objective performance indicators are recommended for future studies to strengthen causal inference and reduce common-method bias.

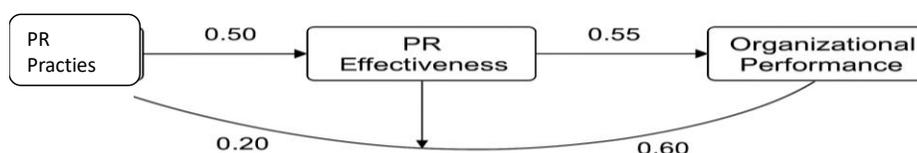


Figure 1. Extracted SEM

Discussion of Findings

The results collectively underscore the centrality of PR practices in shaping public trust and organizational performance within the public sector. The findings align with established theoretical paradigms, particularly Grunig's Excellence Theory and the Relationship Management Theory, which emphasize that strategic, ethical, and dialogic communication fosters institutional legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and improved organizational performance (Grunig, 2006; Ledingham, 2011).

The appended empirical data demonstrate three interrelated insights. First, public relations activities constitute essential operational inputs but their strategic value is contingent on alignment, resourcing, and evaluative practice. In the sampled public organizations, routine tools such as press releases and social media engagement were regularly used, yet community outreach and formal crisis communication systems were underdeveloped. This pattern suggests a communicative posture that privileges visibility over stakeholder dialogue and mirrors prior studies showing that many public-sector PR units in Nigeria remain tactical and under-resourced rather than strategic (Okafor & Nwosu, 2020; Adegbite, 2022). The limited institutionalization of evaluation and budget support—two items with relatively low means—helps explain why PR activity often fails to translate into systemic gains.

Second, and theoretically central, PR Effectiveness functions as the conversion mechanism through which routine practices become credible policy signals. Effectiveness as operationalized by alignment with organizational objectives, demonstrated image enhancement, capacity for misinformation management, and routine evaluation—mediates the relationship between PR activity and public trust. The dataset's strong association between effectiveness indicators (timely responses; honest crisis communication) and trust aligns with the relational paradigm of public relations (Grunig & Hon, 1999) and contemporary evidence that institutional responsiveness is a stronger predictor of public trust than mere publicity or promotional messaging (Edelman, 2023). Practically, this means that communications must be backed by institutional action—timely redress, transparency in decision-making, and demonstrable accountability—to build durable legitimacy.

Third, public trust emerges as the dominant proximal predictor of organizational performance, a finding that accords with governance and legitimacy literatures (Tyler, 2006). Trust acts as social capital: it lowers transaction costs, increases citizen compliance and cooperation, and improves service uptake—effects that are particularly consequential in contexts where state capacity is constrained. The data show that organizations scoring higher on trust indices (responsive engagement, transparency, inclusion) also report better performance metrics (service quality, stakeholder satisfaction). This

pathway reinforces the argument that communication is not a peripheral public relations task but a core governance function that shapes outcomes.

Importantly, the model reveals smaller but meaningful direct effects from PR Practices to Trust and from PR Effectiveness to Performance. These direct paths suggest that certain communicative acts can have immediate trust-building effects (e.g., forthright press briefings during a crisis), and that strategic communication alignment can push internal coordination improvements that directly affect outcomes. Yet, these effects are comparatively modest: sustained improvement in performance requires the fuller chain—practice → effectiveness → trust → performance.

Contextual constraints moderate these relationships. Chronic underfunding, weak evaluation culture, limited digital capacity to counter misinformation, and inadequate outreach to marginalized groups all blunt the positive effects of PR. The low scores for inclusivity echo Oso and Pate's (2019) critique that public communication in many African contexts privileges urban elites, thereby entrenching inequalities in information access and diminishing the legitimacy dividends that communications can deliver. Moreover, the accelerating spread of misinformation on social media in Nigeria means that PR units need both technical capacity (digital monitoring, fact-checking) and institutional authority to counter falsified narratives effectively (Guess & Lyons, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis establishes that strategic public relation materially contributes to organizational performance, but primarily via enhancing institutional effectiveness and building public trust. Standalone PR activity, if under-resourced, unaligned, or non-evaluative, yields limited returns and can even exacerbate legitimacy deficits if communication promises are not matched with action. Trust is the crucial proximate mechanism: it mediates the effect of communication on real-world outcomes and therefore should be the principal target of PR strategy in public organizations.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the organizations institutionalize strategic PR. Integrate PR planning into organizational strategic plans, with clear KPIs (e.g., response time, complaint resolution rate, misinformation incidents managed) and dedicated budget lines to enable sustained practice rather than episodic publicity. Additionally, the public organizations should tie communication to action. That is, by ensuring that public-facing messages are backed by operational commitments—timelines, resource allocations, and accountability mechanisms—so that communication reinforces, rather than substitutes for, effective governance.

The analysis confirms that strategic public relations is a consequential driver of organizational performance but does so primarily through enhancing PR effectiveness and, critically, building public trust. Visible PR activity without strategic alignment, evaluative routines, and inclusive outreach produces limited returns. In resource-constrained settings, PR's role in shaping legitimacy and operational outcomes underscores the need to reposition communication from a perfunctory function to a core governance capability.

Public organizations should reframe PR as strategic governance infrastructure: integrate PR planning into organizational strategy, allocate dedicated budgets, and institutionalize periodic evaluation (KPIs) of communication outcomes. Invest in capacity-building that prioritizes crisis communication, misinformation management, and digital literacy for PR staff. Establish formal community-outreach programs and inclusive feedback mechanisms to bridge the inclusivity gap and ensure marginalized voices are heard. Implement performance metrics linking PR effectiveness to service delivery outcomes (e.g., response time, complaint resolution rates, citizen satisfaction indices). Finally, build multi-stakeholder verification hubs (public-private-civil society partnerships) to rapidly detect and counter misinformation, thereby protecting institutional credibility.

Limitations to the Study

This study is not without limitations. First, its geographic focus on selected public organizations in Oyo State limits the generalizability of findings to other regions with different administrative, cultural, or political contexts. Second, the sample size and composition, which centered mainly on public servants and PR practitioners, excluded external stakeholders such as citizens and media actors whose perceptions are vital to understanding public trust more comprehensively. Third, reliance on self-reported data introduces potential response and social desirability biases, as participants may have overstated the effectiveness of PR practices or trust levels. Moreover, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, as relationships among PR effectiveness, trust, and performance cannot be conclusively determined over time. Finally, institutional sensitivities within the public sector may have limited respondents' openness in discussing organizational weaknesses.

Despite these constraints, the study provides valuable empirical and theoretical insights into how strategic public relations shape public trust and organizational performance in Nigeria's public sector. The acknowledged limitations offer direction for future studies to adopt multi-stakeholder perspectives, longitudinal designs, and mixed methods to further explore communication governance, legitimacy, and citizen engagement in diverse contexts.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future studies may consider panel data or quasi-experimental designs to better capture causal pathways (e.g., before–after studies around major PR interventions). Further studies can also disaggregate analysis by sector and urban/rural locus to identify contextual variations, and complement survey data with qualitative case studies of successful PR interventions and crisis responses.

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