

Adoption of Public Relations Models in Nigeria Organizations: A Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Sector Practices

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Abstract

The study is a comparative exploration of Public Relations Models adopted in Nigerian organizations. The papers' objective focuses on prevalent PR models and factors influencing its adoption in public and private sectors in Nigeria. Following the theoretical approach of communication accommodation theory, PR practitioners evolve their roles and responsibilities to align with organization culture and communication model. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 PR officers purposively selected across private and public entities in Uyo. Interview questions were guided by review of literature and communication accommodation theory to facilitate the interview process. Data from interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed using atlas ti 8. Findings indicate that Press Agency/Publicity Model was prevalent in public organizations, while Symmetrical PR Model was prevalent in private organizations. Further findings showed that bureaucracy influenced the adoption and effectiveness of PR models in public organizations whereas brand positioning influenced adoptions in Private entities. While private organizations embrace flexible two-way symmetrical PR models, public organizations remain constrained by bureaucratic, one-way Press Agency/Publicity models. This study advocates structural and policy reforms to elevate PR's strategic role in decision-making and progress beyond mere publicity and reputation management toward meaningful public engagement and excellence in PR practices.

Keywords: Public Relations, Public Relations Models, Public Relations Practitioners Models of Communication, Organizational Communications

Introduction

Public Relations here in after (PR) serves as a critical component of organizational communication, shaping relationships between the organizations and their respective stakeholders. Globally, PR and its models have evolved over time to reflect varying cultural, economic, and organizational contexts (Laskin, 2009). In Nigeria, a developing economy with diverse socio-cultural and political dynamics, the adoption and practice of PR often mirror the unique challenges and opportunities it holds across the public and private sector organizations in the country. Despite the growing recognition of PR's role in building trust, managing reputations, and fostering stakeholder engagement, the prevalent models utilized in Nigerian organizations remain underexplored with little clarity on the specific frameworks guiding these practices.

While various studies from contextual perspectives have examined the roles of PR, practitioners, their functions, and the communication models employed across sectors (Vlahović, et al., 2020; Christianah & Olayinka, 2023), however little attention has been given to identifying and analyzing the PR models most prevalent in the Nigerian context. Public Relations models, such as Grunig's Four Models of Public Relations, provide a theoretical and practical lens through which the practice of PR can be understood and evaluated. These models highlight the different approaches of communication, ranging from one-sided persuasion to two-ways dialogue and mutual understanding (Grunig & Kim, 2021). However, the extent to which these models have been adopted and adapted in Nigeria, especially considering sectoral differences is significantly lacking in existing literature.

Every organization, whether large or small, public or private, operates within unique structures tailored to meet the needs of their stakeholders and achieve their specific objectives. Consequently, the adoption of Public Relations models is influenced by various factors, including organizational priorities, corporate politics, bureaucratic structures, leadership styles, and socio-economic and cultural norms (Eyo & Hasan, 2021). Furthermore, understanding how sector-specific demands shape PR practices in Nigeria is essential for advancing the professionalization of the field. It also helps align PR practices with global standards while taking into account the local context. Thus, a comparative analysis provides an empirical basis for understanding PR's role and its models in promoting effective communication and driving sustainable organizational growth in Nigeria.

Background of Study

Public Relations is a strategic communication discipline that plays a pivotal role in fostering mutual understanding, managing organizational reputation, and facilitating effective stakeholder engagement (Müller, & Braun, 2021). Over the years, PR has transitioned from rudimentary information dissemination practices to structured models that guide its application in diverse organizational contexts. Models, such as Grunig and Hunt's Four Models of Public Relations press agency, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric offer frameworks for analyzing PR practices globally (Grunig & Kim, 2021). While these models have been extensively studied and applied in developed societies (Anani-Bossman, & Tandoh, 2023), however their adoption in developing nations like Nigeria remains underexplored, particularly within the unique dynamics of public and private sector organizations.

Nigeria presents a complex environment for PR practices due to its diverse socio-cultural, economic and political disparities. As such, public sector organizations in Nigeria often operate under bureaucratic systems, (Asaju, & Ayeni, 2021) with communication and public relations focusing mainly on information dissemination and reputation management as response to public scrutiny and accountability demands. Conversely, private sector organizations prioritize brand positioning, stakeholder relationships, and strategic communication to maintain competitive advantages (Lekara, & Owhorji, 2023). These divergent operational goals and structural differences significantly influence the adoption and adaptation of PR models in each sector.

Existing studies on public relations in Nigeria largely centered on the roles and functions of PR practitioners in Nigeria thus highlighting their contributions to information dissemination, crisis management, and stakeholder engagement (Aja, Chukwu & Odoh, 2019). However, there is limited research on the specific PR models guiding practices in Nigeria and leaving this critical gap in understanding how organizations align their communication strategies with practical and theoretical frameworks.

Conversely, understanding the prevalent PR models in Nigerian is essential for advancing professionalization of the PR industry in the country. Osobajo et al. (2023) highlighted that organizations in Nigeria often face challenges due to imbalance between individual-focused and group-focused approaches (individualism versus collectivism) in stakeholder interactions, management and organizational listening. The study further revealed that sub-stakeholder groups, such as managers, management teams, or PR practitioners, frequently are expected to collaboratively with organization structure while maintaining their independent functions. However, often they prioritize their personal interests over collective goals (Osobajo et al. 2023). This tendency undermines cohesive collaboration, slows decision-making processes, creates conflicting demands, and increases organizational pressures, ultimately hindering overall success. Perhaps the fallout of this is why public relations is often not included in strategic management in Nigeria due to organizational setup and power structures (Ubwa, 2014; Christianah, & Olayinka, 2023). Thus, by examining the adoption of PR models across public and private sector organizations, this study aims to uncover how contextual factors and sector-specific demands shape PR practices in Nigeria, offering a pathway for addressing these challenges and fostering more effective communication strategies.

Issues and Challenges of Public Relations in Nigeria

The field of public relations in Nigeria has experience significant growth over the years. However, much of the attention has been on the roles and functions of PR, with less emphasis on the models adopted by Nigerian firms (Olatunji, 2014). Likewise, Garba (2024) observed that the existing literature on Public Relations and communication models are mostly drawn from public organizations. Thus, besides limited research studies on PR models prevalent in Nigerian organizations, the scarcity of studies on private and public organizations limited comparative analysis of communication patterns across these two sectors. As a result, inferences of how Nigerian organizations are leveraging their PR and communication practice to meet the specific demands of their publics and operational environments have become very challenging.

Similarly, Public Relations in many Nigerian entities are often infused into departments such as Human Resources department, Legal department, or Marketing departments. This often leaves PR with little to no recognition and incapable of functioning independently (Gege, 2020). This has resulted in the relegation of PR to mere operational oriented functions or media-centric roles and no involvement in strategic management and decision-making (Adamu & Mohamad, 2019). This sentiment is shared by Thomas and Omojunikanbi, (2023) who noted the peripheral attention given to PR by Nigerian organizations has led to poor communication and an inability to engage stakeholders adequately because PR is often not given room to operate or function independently.

Subsequently, hierarchical and bureaucratic culture in organizations particularly in the public sector impacts PR and communication models in Nigeria. In addition, power distance culture which is deeply entrenched in workplace culture in Nigeria promotes hierarchical and bureaucratic practices which make management in these organizations assume absolute authority and rigid practices (Dibia, 2017; Yange et al., 2016). These practices promote a "master-servant" relationship which deprives internal and external publics participation in decision-making processes and denying customers, clients and the public quality service delivery (Oruh & Dibia, 2020). Thus, the centralized power structures of Nigerian firms marginalize stakeholders and restrict feedback or suggestions from publics (Shabbir, 2017; Funminiyi, 2018).

Furthermore, Public Relations and communication models across public and private entities in Nigeria focus on creating internal and external appeal to their publics. While public organizations prioritize external publics over internal ones, Olaleye et al., (2020) noted that this often leads to poor engagement of stakeholders and low brand awareness. Despite the emergence of private enterprises as an example in the use of PR models to strengthening organizational image and fosters relationship between organizations and their respective stakeholders, Adamu (2018) noted that this has not translated into improved communication practices as both private and public entities in Nigeria are still far from adopting adequate PR and communication models.

Effective Public relations and communication models emphasizes feedback and meeting organizational and stakeholder needs (Ewing, Men, & O'Neil, 2019). However, socio-political, economic, cultural, and environmental factors undermine adoption and practical application of PR models necessary to cater for the interest of all stakeholders regardless of their position in the organization. Undoubtedly, public and private sector organizations operate within distinct structural, cultural, and economic contexts that influence communication strategies on the organization. As a result of this, limited resource allocation and poor funding PR and communication of most Nigerian firms especially public organization. According to Ndinojuo et al., (2016) impact usage of contemporary digital tools inadequate resource allocation and investment in digital tools and communication affects practitioner's ability to function effectively. Thus, PR practitioners as communicators or actors representing their organization, inability to perform their roles and functions effectively anchors on the communication framework of their respective organization.

Principally, public relations practice in Nigeria is still primarily focused on dissemination of information with most practitioners lacking specialization and skills required in the profession

in this era (Nytse, & Agbele, 2023). Similarly, research indicates that less than 10% of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Nigeria engage registered PR practitioners (Nwakanma 2013). This indicates lack of engagement of and highlights the nature of communication and PR models deployed by organizations in Nigeria. Therefore, the investigation into the models of PR in this study is directed at analyzing the common PR and communication models used within Nigerian private and public firms with a view toward improving communication practices across sectors. Hence the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

Objectives

1. To examine the prevalent Public Relations models adopted by public and private sector organizations in Nigeria.
2. To compare the factors influencing the adoption of Public Relations models in public and private sector practices in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Public Relations Roles

The origin and development of public relations have been widely studied, with the evolution of PR roles also receiving significant attention, from foundational research to contemporary perspectives shaped by technological advancement. Public relations is essential for organizations to build and maintain a positive image, reputation, and relationships with stakeholders (Oparaugo, 2021). Broom and Smith (1979) identified five foundational PR roles namely: technical service provider, expert prescriber, communication process facilitator, problem-solving facilitator, and acceptant legitimizer. Broom (1982) reclassified the five roles into two major roles categorized as managerial and technical roles.

Dozier and Broom (1995) further elaborated on the technician and managerial topology arguing that technician role includes creative and operational tasks of communication, such as developing messages, creating contents, and dealing with media while, the managerial role requires involvement in strategic decision making including diagnosing organizational problems and providing solutions to meet stakeholder needs (Knight, & Sweetser, 2021). The technician is thus mainly entrusted to execute communication tasks; on the other hand, the managerial role includes practitioners who take part in making decisions and direct reporting to management (Tam et al., 2022).

Notable, the advent of information and communication technology has advanced the role of PR with practitioners assuming the functions of digital content creation and management of platforms such as social media, websites, and blogs aimed mainly at creating interactive two-way communication an online appeal and reputation management (Purba, & Indainanto, 2024). Neill and Lee (2016) noted that social media has not only introduced a new dimension to the role of PR but has equipped PR professionals with tools to enhance their effectiveness. Similarly, Pepple, Acholonu, and Koko (2020) stated that ICT has fitted practitioners into newer and more advanced data analytics premises to measure audience engagement, analyze sentiment, and gauge performance on the campaigns in real time (Pepple, et al., 2020). These upgrades in roles have ascended PR practitioners who once served as media relations, reactive complaint responses to strategic analyst able to predict trends and add measurable value to stakeholders.

Adoption And Application of Public Relations Models

Prior to the postulation of public relations models, early research in PR was focused on the communication behavior of individual practitioners acting on behalf of the firm (Grunig, & Kim 2021). Over the years, various scholars have developed models to conceptualize the practice of public relations, focusing on its approaches, processes, and effectiveness. Among the most influential contributions are James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in their seminal work *Managing Public Relations* (1984), which delineates four models of public relations. These models have since become the cornerstone for understanding PR theory and practice.

The first of Grunig and Hunt's four PR models is the press agency/publicity model, which is considered the earliest and form of public relations. This model emphasizes one-way communication from the organization to the public, aiming primarily to generate attention, often prioritizing visibility over accuracy or ethical concerns. The model relies heavily on persuasion and manipulation, using exaggerated or sensationalized messages to capture public interest (Demir, Sümer & Karakaya, 2020). Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a time of growing mass media and increased competition for public attention, this model often involved publicity stunts and dramatic storytelling (Grunig & Kim, 2021).

P.T. Barnum is widely recognized for popularizing publicity stunts, using exaggerated claims and fabricated stories to shape the public's perception of PR as centered around spectacle and publicity (Grunig & Kim, 2021). Despite its effectiveness in attracting attention, the model faces criticism for its ethical shortcomings and lack of focus on building meaningful relationships with audiences. The model's one-way communication ignores audience feedback, open communication, potentially undermining credibility and trust, which are essential for long-term organizational success (Vlahović et al., 2020).

Public information model represents an evolution in PR practice, focusing on the dissemination of accurate information. As part of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) PR models, it emphasizes transparency, objectivity, and accountability, positioning organizations as responsible sources of truth to build trust with stakeholders (Zellatifanny, Rumata & Sakinah, 2021). Though still a one-way model, it aims to provide carefully crafted information to foster credibility. This model is especially effective in government and public sectors where transparency is essential, and it aligns with societal expectations for accountability (Solovei & Putte, 2020). However, despite its ethical appeal, it remains limited by its one-way communication, failing to incorporate audience feedback or dialogue, which restricts meaningful engagement (Macnamara, 2016). Furthermore, this approach is unable to account for the complexities of audience perception, especially in diverse or fragmented publics where purely informational methods may not suffice.

The Two-Way Asymmetrical Model, by Grunig and Hunt (1984), focuses on persuasion rather than mutual understanding, involving two-way communication where feedback is analyzed to refine messages, but the primary goal remains to align public attitudes with organizational objectives (Setoutah et al., 2024). This model is often used in marketing, advertising, and political campaigns, where influencing public behavior is a key outcome. It relies on audience research and data-driven strategies to craft targeted communication, using tools like surveys and polls to refine messaging (Setoutah et al., 2024).

Despite its effectiveness in achieving organizational goals, the model is limited as it prioritizes the organization's goals over building reciprocal relationships or genuine understanding, potentially leading to imbalanced communication, stakeholder distrust, and reduced long-term engagement (Duffy, 2000). Some scholars argue that this can lead to manipulation, ethical abuse and eroding trust over time, particularly when stakeholders perceive the organization's actions as self-serving (Idris, 2019). Thus, the focus on persuasion over dialogue limits the model's applicability in contexts where long-term relationships and trust-building are crucial, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and community engagement (Balakrishnan, Angusamy, & Rosli, 2023).

Finally, the Two-Way Symmetrical Model represents the most ethical and advanced form of PR, advocating for balanced communication and mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. Unlike asymmetrical models, it focuses on dialogue, where both parties share power and work towards mutually beneficial outcomes (Lee, 2022). This model emphasizes transparency, inclusiveness, and stakeholder research to foster genuine engagement (Kent & Lane, 2021).

The strengths of PR models lie in their ability to build long-term trust and sustainable relationships with various publics (O'Mahony, 2021). However, the adoption of PR or communication models is incumbent on the organization as management goals and business agenda, corporate politics, stakeholders' expectations, power structure and funding are factors influencing PR in any given entity (Eyo & Hasan 2021). Consequently, some scholars argue that achieving true symmetry can be challenging, as it is time-consuming and resource-intensive, and power imbalances between organizations and their publics can hinder equal participation (Meyer, 2021; Pavla et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, the Two-Way Symmetrical Model remains the gold standard in PR for promoting ethical practices and fostering collaborative communication. Hence, the first research question is RQ1: What are the prevalent Public Relations models adopted by public and private sector organizations in Nigeria.

Public Relations Models and Practice Across Regions

The origins and perspectives of public relations differ significantly across regions. Evidently, the variation of PR practices across regions is shaped by distinct cultural, historical, and socio-political peculiarities (Dhanesh, & Duthler, 2019). While North America has led in developing foundational PR theories and models, other regions have equally adapted these practices and aligned them with local values and traditions. Understanding these regional differences is essential for the development of culturally sensitive and effective PR strategies in a globalized world (Joseph, 2023). Each region's approach to PR reflects unique societal needs and communication practices, resulting in diverse perspectives on the profession.

The United States is often regarded as the birthplace of modern PR. Scholarly, the field emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, driven by industrialization, mass communication, and the need to manage public opinion (Myers, 2020). Early practitioners like Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays laid the foundation for PR by emphasizing strategic communication and relationship-building. Ivy Lee's "Declaration of Principles" established transparency and honesty as critical components, while Bernays integrated psychology and persuasion into PR practices (Bernays, 1928; Macnamara, 2022). North American PR is

characterized by the dominance of the Excellence Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which emphasizes strategic management, two-way symmetrical communication, and ethical practices.

In Europe, public relations have historical roots in propaganda and statecraft. During the late 19th and early 20th century, PR was primarily associated with government communication, particularly during the two World Wars (Fitch, & L'Etang, 2020). However, the post-war period saw a shift toward corporate PR with more emphasis on building trust and managing reputations in democratic societies. The European perspective focuses on social responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and dialogic communication (Davies et al., 2021). Equally, Sriramesh and Verčič (2003) noted that European PR models prioritize stakeholder engagement and reflect collectivist tendencies in many countries. The region's diversity has also led to variations in practice, with countries like the UK emphasizing professionalism and accreditation, while Eastern Europe still grappling with the legacies of state-controlled media (Dragomir, & Horowitz, 2024).

In the Asian region, the practice of PR is heavily influenced by cultural norms, beliefs and values such as collectivism, social hierarchy and harmony. The countries like Japan, China, and India PR can be traced back to traditional communication practices such as social hierarchy in Japan emphasis collectivism, Confucianism in China, which emphasizes respect, relationships, and ethical behavior (Halff, & Gregory, 2014; Takamatsu et al., 2024), paid news in India motivated by need to sustainability of business and goodwill between entities and audience (Mazumdar, 2016). Thus, modern PR in Asia gained momentum during the post-colonial and industrialization periods, driven by the need for global trade and foreign investment. As such, Asian PR focuses on building strong relationships and respecting local culture by employing cultural interpreter model in which practitioners serve as bridges, helping global brands connect with local communities in a way that fits with local values and traditions (Rodríguez-Salcedo & Watson, 2021).

Furthermore, Australia's public relations practices reflect a blend of Western influences with indigenous communication practices. This evolution mirrors a unique socio-political environment for PR to thrive. The profession began gaining traction in the country in mid-20th century, driven by government campaigns and the corporate sector's need for reputation management (Watson, 2012). Australian PR places significant emphasis on social responsibility and community engagement drawing parallels with North American practices but with a localized focus on diversity and inclusivity (Macnamara, & Crawford, 2010; Fitch, 2016). The rise of digital media has significantly influenced public relations in Australia, driving the development of creative strategies to engage stakeholders across vast geographical area. Likewise, Public Relations in Africa is deeply rooted in traditional forms of communication, including storytelling, oral traditions, and communal gatherings (Anani-Bossman, & Tandoh, 2023). Historically, these practices were tools for consensus-building and conflict resolution. However, modern PR in Africa emerged during the colonial period, primarily as a tool for government communication and propaganda (Akpabio, 2009). Consequently, post-independence, PR in Africa evolved to address the challenges of nation-building, socio-economic development, and cultural preservation. African PR emphasizes interpersonal relationships, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement, reflecting the continent's collectivist and relational values. However, limited resources, political instability, and media

constraints have posed challenges to professionalization of PR in the region (Nhedzi, & Azionya, 2023).

In the Arab world, public relations practices are shaped by the region's rich culture and religious traditions which emphasize transparency and ethical behavior (Farid, Rahmah & Daulay, 2024). Modern PR in the region gained prominence with the rise of oil economies and globalization as countries and organizations in the region sought to manage their reputations on the global stage. Arabic PR reflects a mix of traditional values and modern techniques with a focus on relationships, regards for social hierarchy and religious authority (Kirat, 2005). Often PR in this region operates within a controlled media environment which influences PR and communication models, practitioner's roles and organizational strategies (Dhanesh, & Duthler, 2019). Although social media has impacted PR in the region, PR approaches adopted to amplify public engagement in this region are under the purview of the state (Zaid et al., 2022). Hence research objective RQ2: What are the factors influencing the adoption of Public Relations models in public and private sector practices in Nigeria.

Theoretical Underpinning of Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles in the 1970s, posits that individuals adjust their communication approaches in social interactions to accommodate others. These adjustments are driven by motives such as gaining social approval, reducing social distance, and aligning with the values of a group (Dragojevic, Gasiorok & Giles, 2015). The two primary strategies in CAT are convergence and divergence. Convergence occurs when individuals modify their communication to align with their conversation partner, often to foster solidarity or understanding. Divergence, in contrast, accentuates differences in communication style to reinforce distinct group identities or maintain social distance (Zhang, & Giles, 2018). These adjustments underscore the dynamic and context-dependent nature of communication, influenced by power, social identity, and intergroup relationships (Giles, 2016).

The theoretical foundation of CAT is rooted in social identity which posits that individuals' behaviors are shaped by a desire to affiliate with or differentiate from social groups (Elhami, 2020). Thus, CAT examines the role of power and prestige in communication dynamics wherein individuals in positions of higher power tend to adopt divergent strategies to assert control, while those in subordinate positions may converge to gain favor (Giles, et al., 1991). CAT also emphasizes the interaction between individual goals and the broader social context, suggesting that communication adjustments are shaped by the perceived social norms and goals of the participants (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005). The combination of social identity and power dynamics provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals, particularly PR practitioners, adjust their communication strategies to align with organizational agendas and power structures.

In the context of PR models in Nigerian organizations, CAT helps explain how communication evolves in response to changing social environments and dynamics of communication. It offers insights into the social and personal motivations behind communication behaviors in both public and private entities in Nigeria. However, some scholars argue that CAT oversimplifies communication complexities, particularly in diverse social contexts (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991b). While communication adjustments within an organization may

not always be driven by accommodation alone, they often involve compliance with management directives. As such, PR practitioners often adjust their communication to organizational core objectives which can compromise their ethical stance, due to organizational culture, leadership style, or management agendas. This highlights the tension between personal ethics and organizational objectives, a critical issue for PR professionals.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research approach to comparatively explore the adoption of public relations models in public and private organizations in Nigeria. On the premise that qualitative research sought to explore and understand people's experiences semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants involved in the study. Semi structured face-to-face interviews was conducted with participants to gain in-depth understanding of the prevalent PR models and factors influencing the adoption and effectiveness of PR models in public and private sector in Nigeria.

According to Ruslin et al. (2022) semi-structured interviews enable researchers to gather evidence on the studied phenomena. As such, the perceptions and opinions of PR practitioners as respondents in the study will elucidate PR models and its effectiveness in Nigerian organizations. In the same token, an interview guide was also deployed in the study to guide the interview process and ensure that participants did not stray off the topic of discussion. Similarly, the interview guide enables flexibility and adaptability of the interview process allowing the researcher probe questions for clarity according to interviewee responses (Adeoye-Olatunde, & Olenik, 2021).

Interview questions were pilot tested with eight PR practitioners who were not part of the main study to ensure clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the instrument of the study before conducting the main study. According to Shakir and Ur-Rahman (2022) pilot test is crucial in qualitative research because it helps identify ambiguity and subsequent adjustments or refinement of interview questions before the main data collection for the study. A total of 22 informants participated in the study, comprising 12 males and 8 females with 5 to 18 years of experience. The participants included 9 from public sector organizations, 9 from private sector organizations, and 2 from NGOs. All held roles in communication, media, marketing, publicity, or public relations within their respective organizations.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with specific knowledge and experience regarding PR models and their effectiveness within their organizations. Given that participants in the study were managers, communication directors, and executive-ranked practitioners, the purposive sampling technique adopted in the study ensured the collection of rich contextually relevant data that aligned with the objectives of the study. By focusing on PR practitioners directly involved in their organizations' communication activities, the study gathered insights from individuals well-positioned to discuss the PR models in use, enabling meaningful comparative analysis. Participants were duly identified as registered PR practitioners via their membership with state chapter of NIPR and this was done to ensure that only formally registered PR practitioners participated in the study.

Participants in the study were provided with consent form and given the option to participate voluntarily by signing before the interviews commenced. Interviews were conducted in

English at locations chosen by the participants, primarily their office premises, lasting 20–30 minutes over a two-month period. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, including both verbal and non-verbal cues, to accurately capture participants' expressions and provide rich data for analysis. Non-verbal cues such as "mmh," "umm," "Hmm", pauses, hesitations, giggles and smiles were intentionally included as they added depth to participants' perspectives. Hill et al. (2022) emphasize that verbatim transcription, including non-verbal cues such as hesitations, gestures, speech cut-offs, interruptions, and giggling enhances data authenticity by providing valuable context to participants' views because they are intentional utterance.

Transcribed data were sent back to participants for member checking before coding to validate the accuracy and credibility of their responses (Motulsky, 2021). The data were then coded and thematically analyzed using Atlas.ti 8 software. Codes were coined from participant views and not merely explaining their views. The coding process began with line-by-line coding of breaking down data into smaller segments (phrases) and assigning them labels as codes. After initial coding, similar codes were grouped into categories and the categorization of codes was geared at eliminating similar and related code after which the main themes were identified to align with the research objectives. The thematic analysis provided a nuanced understanding of the PR models adopted by Nigerian firms and their effectiveness, allowing for sector-wide comparisons. Data saturation was achieved after the 18th interview, as no new information emerged. Thus, to ensure thoroughness, four additional participants were interviewed, bringing the total to 22. According to Guest, Namey and Chen (2020) data saturation is a critical component of qualitative research, ensuring that the collected data are sufficient to effectively address the research objectives.

Table 1

Participants Demographic

Informants	Gender	Experience	Sector	Organizations/Institution	Position
Key Informant 1	Female	10 Years	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	Public Relations Officer
Key Informant 2	Male	8 Years	Private	Telecommunications	Marketing Representative
Key Informant 3	Male	5 Years	Private	Hospitality (Hotel & Golf Resort)	Publicity Director
Key Informant 4	Male	12 Years	Private	Telecommunications	Marketing Executive Officer
Key Informant 5	Male	15 Years	Public	Government Ministry	Publicity Secretary
Key Informant 6	Female	10 Years	Public	Media Print	Public Relations Officer
Key Informant 7	Female	18 Years	Private	Financial Institutions (Bank)	Customer Relations Officer
Key Informant 8	Male	8 Years	Public	Radio	Media Relation Officer

Key Informant 9	Female	12 Years	Private	Telecommunication	Marketing/Promotions Manager
Key Informant 10	Female	6 Years	Private	Consultancy Firm	Brand Manager
Key Informant 11	Male	7 Years	Public	Tertiary Educational Institution (University)	Public Relations Officer
Key Informant 12	Female	5 Years	Private	Educational Institution (International Schools)	Media and Marketing Manager
Key Informant 13	Male	9 Years	Private	Tertiary Educational Institution (Polytechnic)	Marketing & Communication Director
Key Informant 14	Male	12 Years	Public	Public Utility (Water Corporation)	Publicity Secretary
Key Informant 15	Male	7 Years	NGO	Non-governmental Organization	Media and Publicity Manager
Key Informant 16	Male	5 Years	Public	Public Utility (Power Authority)	Public Relations Director
Key Informant 17	Male	14 Years	Public	Government Ministry	Public Relations Officer
Key Informant 18	Female	15 Years	Private	Financial Institution (Bank)	Communications Director
Key Informant 19	Male	6 Years	Private	Tertiary Educational Institution (University)	Public Relations Officer
Key Informant 20	Male	18 Years	Public	Public Transportation	Information Director
Key Informant 21	Male	8 Years	Public	Television Station	Marketing Manager
Key Informant 22	Female	5 Years	Private	Hospitality	Marketing Manger

Findings

In The first research objective of the study explored the prevalent Public Relations models adopted by public and private sector organizations in Nigeria. Thematic analysis of the data identified two main themes describing Public Relations models adopted by Nigerian firm's namely linear communication model which is equated to Press Agency/Publicity Model and Symmetrical Model of Public Relations respectively.

Linear Communication Model

Participants from the public sector in the study stated that one-way linear form of communication was prevalent in their establishment, and this was attributed to the fact that they were merely carrying out directives from their superiors or management of their respective organizations. Similarly, the one-way communication that is prevalent in public entities in Nigeria focuses solely on disseminating information with little room for audience feedback.

According to KI-6:

"Naturally, we follow the public information model because our job is to inform and educate our audience through our services and so communication both internal and external originates strictly from top management... Uhhh... and since we have a centralized communication system any feedback must follow a process designed by the organization regardless of whether you're an employee, manager, or even as a PR officer like me".

Also, KI-14 also stated thus:

"My office receives hundreds of complaints, but all correspondence is channeled directly to the general manager's office and so after due consideration by the management, board or directors, decisions are communicated to us with instructions to comply or for drafting messages and dissemination to our respective audiences as intended and directed by my boss and the management".

Symmetrical Model

Contrary to public sector organizations, practitioners from private sector organizations in the study stated that the prevalent PR model in their organizations was the Symmetrical Model of Public Relations. Since most private entities are profit-oriented, a two-way communication approach is essential for fostering open dialogue between the organization and its stakeholders. As such, the model aims to achieve mutual understanding and shared benefits. According to participants in the study, the model of communication and PR as practiced in the respective entities involved in the study enables participation in decision-making, which is necessary to ensure that both the organization and its stakeholders (internal and external) benefit from the process.

According to KI-2:

"With increasing business competition in the sector, constant communication with our clients is essential because they have choices and so we must engage with them, listen to their needs and assure them that we prioritize them otherwise we lose them.... {Smirke}.... So, our participatory approach to communication and public relations is rooted in our business policies by personalizing our services just like we want clients to personalize us too".

In the same token KI-7 supported this notion stating thus:

"From a business perspective, customers are always right... {Laughter}... Yes, because

an unsatisfied customer is bad for business and so we owe them a duty of care by actively listening and engaging in open conversations, rather than simply issuing instructions or information for them to follow. So internally with our employees and externally without clients, our transactional communication ensures prompt responses that benefit us and our esteemed customers, and it makes them loyal to us”.

Factors Influencing the Adoption of Public Relations Models

The second objective focused on factors influencing the adoption and effectiveness of Public Relations models in public and private sector practices in Nigeria the analysis of the data revealed two main themes Bureaucracy and Brand positioning.

Bureaucracy

In public sector organizations in Nigeria, bureaucracy and hierarchical setups significantly influence the adoption of public relations models. Informant in the study stated that decisions are made at the top, and PR model and activities are strictly decided and controlled by top management with little to no room for flexibility or prompt responses. As such, the bureaucratic setup of public organizations is geared at passing information down rather than engaging in open conversations with publics. As a result, communication tends to be slow and formal, thus making PR less effective in building trust and involving people. According to KI-5

“As public servant, we are bounded by the civil service code which is why even in my capacity I cannot say or do more than what I am directed and instructed to do, say or put out there...aah...So we have to follow the formal structure here and that is the system that is in place for us all”.

In the same token KI-11

“Here information and communication go through multiple layers of approval before reaching us or the public and even as a PR officer, I can’t put anything out without due consultation with management. So, I must follow directives in disseminating approved messages that align with the organization’s mission to project a positive image for the institution”.

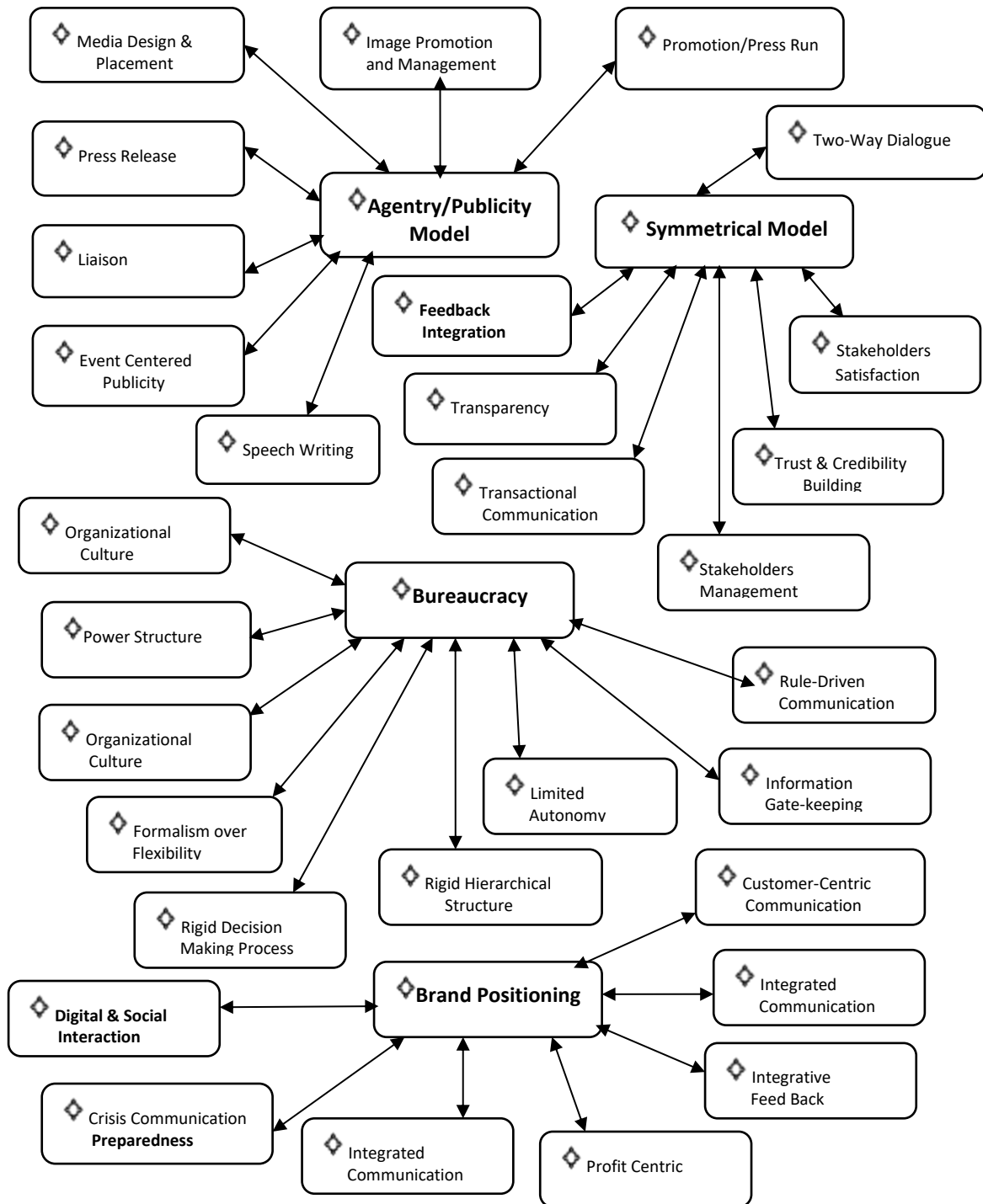
Brand Positioning

Unlike public institutions where practitioners are constrained by hierarchical structures and approval processes which impacted the PR and communication models in their respective organization. Private organizations adopted PR models that enabled the exercise of greater autonomy in PR decision-making. This allows for proactive engagement with stakeholders (customers, employees, investors and the media thereby making their PR efforts more dynamic and responsive to the demands of the organization and the needs of its various publics. Accordingly, KI-9 stated thus:

“In a competitive business environment, creativity and quick decision making is essential for success...Umm...Although, I sometimes disagree with our Senior Management because I believe I must take strategic action when necessary for the company’s benefit. For instance, there was a period our clients complained about unauthorized charges and increasing bills, I immediately addressed the issue on Twitter rather than waiting for managerial approval the next day. Since it was a technical issue acting fast helped prevent further misconception about our services even if it meant stepping beyond my formal job scope”.

Similarly, KI-22

“In today’s competitive marketplace, building a strong brand requires open and honest communication with clients and customers. For example, when our company faced backlash over poor service and product defect, we didn’t just issue a press release, we engaged directly with customers, gathered feedback, and implemented changes to address the issue and prevent any crises and so the transactional communication approach we use not only builds trust but also reinforces our brand’s credibility and reputation which is why we prioritize dialogue over mere publicity.”



Discussion

This study compares the adoption of public relations (PR) models in public and private organizations in Nigeria. It highlights a theoretical and practical disparity with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which views communication as dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by mutual adaptation. In contrast, the study found that PR models, especially in public organizations, tend to be rigid and static. The first research objective examined prevalent PR models in both sectors. Findings showed that public organizations primarily use the Press Agency/Publicity Model (a linear communication approach), while private organizations favor the Symmetrical Model (two-way dialogic communication setup). The second objective explored factors influencing PR model adoption. Bureaucracy was a key determinant in the public sector, whereas brand positioning played a significant role in private organizations. Existing studies, such as Umaru, Arabo, & Usman (2022), while affirming PR's role in both sectors as important in image projections and reputational management, it also highlighted its limited involvement in decision-making. This aligns with the study's finding that public organizations follow bureaucratic, one-way communication processes with minimal stakeholder engagement, leading to procedural delays and inefficiencies. Similarly, Amin, Khan, & Jamaluddin (2020) noted that PR strategies in public institutions often rely on the assumptions of PROs and management, lacking structured communication plans and sufficient funding. In contrast, private organizations adopt flexible, two-way communication, granting PR practitioners autonomy to act in the organization's best interest. The study further found that PR adoption in the public sector is heavily influenced by organizational agendas and corporate politics which shape communication styles as well as administrative roles and functions of PR. This supports Eyo and Hasan's (2021) assertion that PR autonomy depends on management business priorities (internal) and client demands (external). As such, public sector PR remains static, with decisions dictated by management rather than evolving to meet stakeholder needs. On the other hand, private organizations, however, integrate PR more dynamically, prioritizing financial and reputational growth. Findings from the study is consistent with Akerele-Popoola et al. (2023), the study revealed that while both public and private sectors organization in Nigeria use PR, private organizations leverage new media for brand building and relationship management. In contrast, government institutions focus more on reputation management with limited emphasis on sustained public engagement.

Implication of the Study

The practical implication of the study lies on the premise that findings of the study revealed that public sector participants and their respective organizations involved in the study primarily use the Press Agency/Publicity PR Model, and a one-way communication approach which was focused mainly on generating publicity and shaping a favorable image through persuasion and manipulation (Eyo, 2025). And as such, feedback mechanisms were structured and controlled and thus serving mainly to refine organizational goals rather than fostering open dialogue with respective publics. Likewise, the hierarchical power structure of Nigerian public organizations reinforces this top-down communication model, where internal communication primarily involves instructions to employees, and external communication is aimed at informing stakeholders with minimal feedback opportunities (Eyo, 2025). Thus, bureaucracy limits PR practitioners' strategic involvement, reducing flexibility and responsiveness. As a result, public sector PR remains rigid, prioritizing information dissemination over stakeholder engagement. Consequently, there is the need for structural and public policy reforms to address these systematic challenges without which, public

organizations risk maintaining outdated communication models that hinder public trust and PR participation in decision making process.

Likewise, from a theoretical standpoint, the theoretical implication of the study anchors on the fact that findings of the study contravene the CAT's premise that communication is dynamic and context-driven (Giles, 2016). While CAT assumes PR adaptation is based on social context and relationships needs and necessity (Giles, & Soliz, 2014), however, the study reveals contrary findings in the sense that public sector communication remains static due to bureaucratic constraints. In contrast, private organizations align more with CAT's principles by adopting flexible, interactive communication strategies that prioritize stakeholder engagement. This contrast highlights a fundamental gap between CAT's theoretical assumptions and the reality of PR practices in Nigeria's public sector, where bureaucratic rigidity limits the adaptability and bidirectional nature of communication.

Limitation of Study

This study was conducted in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with participation limited primarily to PR practitioners due to the city's cosmopolitan nature and the presence of organizations that actively use PR in their operations. While the findings contribute to existing literature on PR and communication models in Nigeria and support Excellence Theory, they also highlight the influence of organizational culture and power dynamics on PR practices. This reinforces the notion that cultural and contextual factors shape the generic application of PR (Eyo, 2025). Furthermore, given the inductive qualitative approach deployed in the study, the study's findings may not be broadly generalized due to the limited sample size. Thus, future research can be expanded to other states and regions in Nigeria, incorporating a larger pool of participants to provide a more comprehensive and representative analysis of prevalent PR models and their contextual adoption. As Nigeria operates under a multi-party democratic system with varying governance structures across states, potential regional disparities in PR practices are likely (Eyo & Onyewuchi, 2024). As such, further studies can also explore these differences to determine how PR models vary between public and private entities across different regions.

Conclusion

This study provides a comparative analysis of PR model adoption in Nigeria's public and private sectors, highlighting key theoretical and practical disparities. While private organizations adopt flexible, two-way PR and communication model that aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), public organizations remain bound to a bureaucratic, one-way Press Agency/Publicity Model. This rigid communication approach is reinforced by hierarchical structures and limited stakeholder engagement which hampers PR effectiveness in the public sector. The study underscores the need for structural and policy reforms to enhance PR's strategic role in decision-making and ensures it evolves beyond mere publicity, reputation management and meaningful public's engagement. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on PR practice in Nigeria, particularly within the framework of Excellence Theory and organizational communication dynamics. While the study's scope was limited to Uyo, its insights offer a foundation for further research into regional PR disparities across Nigeria. Addressing these gaps provides nuanced understanding of how PR can be optimized to bridge communication gaps, enhance stakeholder relationships, and improve overall organizational effectiveness in Nigeria.

The adoption of public relations models in Nigeria is vastly underexplored, particularly in the comparative context of public and private sector organizations. While PR is globally recognized as a strategic function essential for reputation management and stakeholder engagement, its implementation in Nigeria is inconsistent, lacking professionalism and alignment with best practices. Public sector organizations tend to be bureaucratic and reactive in their communication, while private sector entities are generally more strategic and adaptive. However, the extent to which these organizations adopt and operationalize PR models remains unclear. This study critically examines these variations, identifies gaps in professional practice, and proposes a framework for enhancing PR effectiveness across sectors. By providing an empirical foundation for understanding PR adoption, this study fills a critical gap in existing literature and offers a comparative analysis of sector-specific best practices, inefficiencies, and influencing factors. The study significantly contributes to PR practices in Nigeria by providing insights that align PR functions with global standards, making it a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and educators seeking to refine curricula, enforce industry standards, and elevate PR's role beyond operational communication to a core component of organizational strategy. Ultimately, this research seeks to reposition PR as a vital tool for effective governance and corporate success in Nigeria.

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