

Comparative Analysis of the Significance of Public Relations Practice in Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical Sciences, Ondo

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Olatuyi Olusetu Abidemi

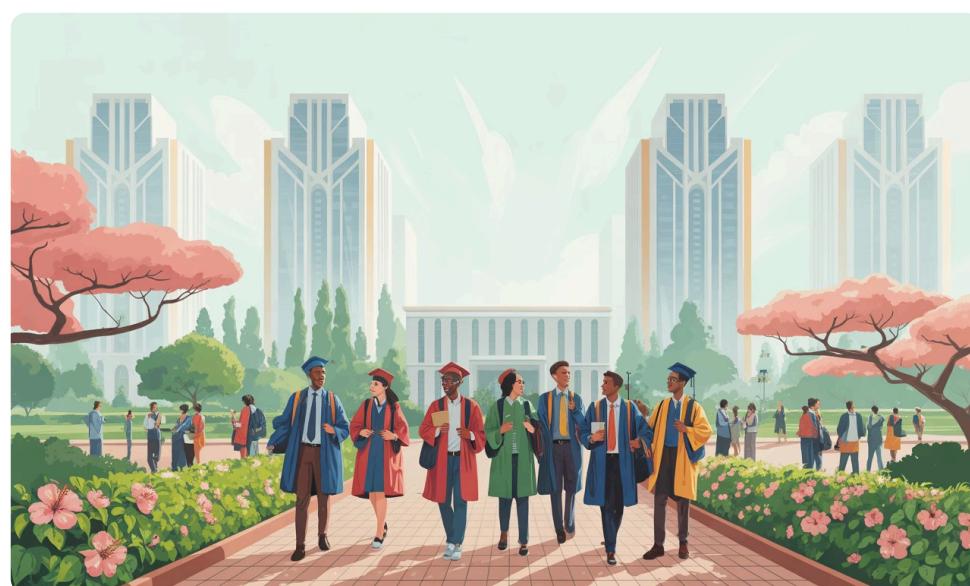
Direktorate of Information and Public Relations, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo

 olatuyiabidemi@gmail.com

Adesunloloro Babalola Raphael

Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Public Relations (PR) plays a crucial role in shaping the image and communication strategies of educational institutions. This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the significance of Public Relations practice in Nigerian universities, focusing on Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo (AFUED) and the University of Medical Sciences, Ondo (UNIMED). AFUED is a public university owned by the Federal government while UNIMED is specialized University of Medical science owned by the Ondo state government. The study is anchored on the Excellence Theory of Public Relations, which emphasises strategic communication and relationship management as key components of effective PR practice. Key variables examined include media relations, stakeholder engagement, crisis communication, and institutional reputation management. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 100 respondents using a judgment sampling technique. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings reveal that both universities recognise the importance of Public Relations, but differences exist in the implementation strategies and effectiveness of PR practices between AFUED and UNIMED. While both institutions utilise digital platforms for strategic communication, and AFUED's PR approach appears more community-centred, engaging in cultural and social activities, whereas UNIMED focuses more on professional and academic communication, particularly for students and faculty in the medical field. The study underscores the need for a more structured and strategic PR approach to enhance institutional reputation and stakeholders trust.

Methodology

Comparative analysis using self-administered questionnaire to 100 respondents with judgment sampling technique

Key Variables

Media relations, stakeholder engagement, crisis communication, and institutional reputation management

Main Finding

Both universities recognise PR importance but differ in implementation strategies and effectiveness

Keywords: Public Relations, Nigerian Universities, Institutional Reputation, Stakeholder Engagement, Media Relations

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Universities represent the pinnacle of formal education, equipping individuals with knowledge essential for societal contribution. "While basic education in Nigeria such as primary and secondary schools could be traced to the 1800s, the university education in Nigeria did not commence until 1948, when the first premier university was established in Ibadan, South West Nigeria. The history of higher education in Nigeria can be traced to Yaba Higher College, established in 1932, and agitation of Nigerians for a more comprehensive higher education provision led to the constitution of the Asquith and Elliot Commission on Higher Education. Their reports in 1943 favoured the establishment of universities in Nigeria. Consequently, in 1948, the University College Ibadan, was founded as an affiliate of the University of London. The University College continued as the only university institution in Nigeria until 1960 (Iruonagbe et al., 2015). In order for the new country to educate its citizens, and prepare for the take-off of a new country in Africa, the Nigerian government in April 1959, commissioned the Ashby Commission of inquiry to advise it on higher education needs for first two decades after the attainment of independence.

01

1932-1948

Yaba Higher College established in 1932, University College Ibadan founded in 1948 as affiliate of University of London.

02

1960-1980s

Expansion period with establishment of new universities across Nigeria, including University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960.

03

Current Era

198 universities comprising 45 federal universities, 54 state-owned and 99 private establishments requiring PR practitioners.

However, before the submission of the report on 2nd September 1960, the Eastern Region government had established its own university and named it the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1960. The recommendations of the Ashby report include: i. the Federal Government should give support to the development of new universities in Nigeria; ii. a university should be established in the North using the old site of the Nigerian College in Zaria as its base; iii. a university should be established in Lagos to handle courses in business, commerce and economics; iv. University College Ibadan should widen its curriculum and develop into a full university; v. a National Universities Commission should be set up to have undisputed control over the affairs of the universities, particularly in terms of finance, staff and courses. The Ashby report later gave birth to the establishment of various universities across the country as well as the establishment of the commission in charge of university administration in Nigeria. Currently, there are 198 universities in Nigeria comprising 45 federal universities, 54 states-owned and 99 by private establishments (Ogunode & Ayoko, 2023). As a result of the establishments of more universities in the country, the need for more public relations practitioners to manage the institutions has become very increasingly necessary due to the complexity of stakeholder management, considering the importance attached to managements of various publics that have one or two things to do within and outside the University system (Zannu et al., 2024).

The University community comprises various stakeholder groups such as students, faculty members, alumni, and regulators that contribute to its success and ensure its continuous existence as a citadel of learning (Ogunode & Ayoko, 2023). Therefore, in order for it to be more relevant (Babbili et al., 2022), achieve the vision of its founding fathers, and produce graduates that will be relevant to the society after their graduation, it must employ good communication strategies, such as information management via digital media like WhatsApp, emails, and maintaining a strong presence on social platforms like Facebook, Instagram and others. It must also engage in community relations with its host community (Kolade-Otitoju, 2025), and have good relations with both online and traditional media managers in order to achieve its goals and objectives. Dornyo and Adiku (2015) noted that over the years, public relations have been playing very important roles in society. Also, Mu'azu and Gapsiso (2025) emphasized that social media platforms have become integral to public relations strategies in Nigeria, transforming how organizations engage with their audiences. This is evident in its use by corporate organisations all over the world through publicity, sponsorship, event management as well as image and identity building to promote their products and services. It is in the light of this that universities, being an organisation operating within the society (Langrafe et al., 2020), have keyed into this strategy to solve most of their problems that are communication related.

Core Stakeholders

- Students from different categories
- Faculty members and staff
- Alumni and regulators
- Host communities

PR Functions

- Information management through digital media
- Community relations engagement
- Media relations management
- Image and reputation building

In today's fast-paced higher education landscape, effective public relations has become a vital tool for universities seeking to stay ahead of the curve. Nigerian universities, in particular, face unique challenges in managing their public image amidst increasing competition, funding constraints, and societal expectations (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2019). For decades, public relations has played a crucial role in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance in Nigerian universities (Adeyemi et al., 2024). From humble beginnings as mere publicity and information dissemination, public relations has evolved into a strategic communication and stakeholder's engagement powerhouse. Contemporary public relations practices in Nigerian universities leverage digital media, crisis communication, and relationship management to build and maintain a positive image.

The importance of public relations in Nigerian Universities cannot be overstated. Effective public relations enhances good reputation and credibility (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Dike, 2025), fosters stakeholder engagement and support (Ogunode & Ayoko, 2023), promotes transparency and accountability (Adeyemi et al., 2024), and manages crisis and mitigates negative publicity (Babaleye & Adelakun, 2024). However, despite its importance, public relations in Nigerian universities faces numerous challenges. These include limited funding and resources, inadequate training and expertise (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2019), and ineffective communication strategies which hinder its effectiveness. Nevertheless, for Nigerian universities to excel and become globally competitive (Grunig, 1992), they must derive means by which they can effectively navigate complex societal expectations (Anavhe, 2024), including community engagement and outreach, social responsibility and sustainability, and cultural sensitivity and diversity (Zannu et al., 2024).

Recent studies have highlighted the impact of digitalization on public relations practices in Nigerian universities. For instance, social media engagement has become a crucial tool for universities to connect with stakeholders. Online reputation management (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020) has also become essential in maintaining a positive image. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in Nigerian universities, transforming public relations practices. The pandemic has underscored the importance of crisis communication and emergency preparedness in universities. This study, therefore, aims at contributing to the existing body of knowledge on public relations in higher education, using two universities, the Adeyemi Federal University of Education and the University of Medical Sciences located in the Ondo City as pilot study, to provide insights for university administrators, public relations practitioners, and policymakers on relevance of Public Relations practice in the University system.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The university like any organisation have its publics which according to Ogunoye and Abubakar comprises of two organs (Lucas, 2024); the external and the internal. The external organ comprises of the governing council headed by Chairman (Pro Chancellor), the Chancellor, National Universities Commission (NUC) Federal/State Ministry for Education. On the other hand, the internal organ comprises of senate, headed by the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar as the Secretary. This organ regulates academic and administrative activities of the university based on the NUC guidelines. Other publics of the university include the students from different categories, such as undergraduate, post graduate, part time students; parents and guardian; the community; financial sector such as banks and other businesses operating within the community. However, despite the administrative arrangement put in place, it is surprising to see that the university system is still contends with challenges that requires the intervention and expertise from the Public Relations Practitioners to resolve.

Ogunoye and Abubakar captured the challenges to include inadequate funding, insufficient lecturers, dearth of infrastructural facilities, brain-drain, incessant strike actions by the universities unions, institutional corruption, insecurity problems, weak administrators, poor capacity development of lecturers, political interference in the universities administration, universities autonomy dilemma, poor internally generated revenue (IGR) among others. These challenges, however, have been resolved by some universities administrators using their public relations department or consultants. These challenges often result in reputational risks that public relations strategies are well-positioned to address.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the significance (reputation management, stakeholder engagement, crisis response) of public relations in Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical Sciences, Ondo
2. To compare strategic communication approaches and stakeholder engagement practices of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical sciences, Ondo
3. To examine the challenges confronting public relations practice in Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical Sciences, Ondo.
4. To proffer viable solutions to challenges of public relations practice in Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical Sciences, Ondo

RATIONALE FOR COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

This comparative study between Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo (AFUED) and University of Medical Sciences, Ondo (UNIMED) is theoretically grounded and methodologically justified for several reasons:

Theoretical Justification:

1 The Excellence Theory of Public Relations posits that effective PR practices are universal principles that transcend organisational type, while acknowledging that implementation varies based on institutional context. By comparing institutions with different missions—teacher education versus medical sciences—this study tests whether PR excellence principles apply across diverse higher education contexts.

Contextual Significance:

2 Both universities operate within the same geographical and cultural environment (Ondo State), eliminating regional variables while highlighting how institutional mission shapes PR strategy. AFUED's federal ownership versus UNIMED's state ownership provides insight into how governance structures influence PR resource allocation and strategic priorities.

Stakeholder Differentiation:

3 The comparison reveals how PR strategies adapt to distinct stakeholder ecosystems:

- AFUED engages primarily with educators, students, and education policymakers
- UNIMED interfaces with medical professionals, healthcare institutions, and public health authorities

This stakeholder diversity allows examination of PR adaptability—a core component of excellence theory.

Practical Relevance:

4 Nigerian universities increasingly compete for resources, students, and reputation. Understanding how different institutional types achieve PR effectiveness provides actionable insights for the broader higher education sector.

Research Gap:

5 Previous studies have examined PR in similar institution types. This cross-sector comparison addresses the gap in understanding how institutional mission influences PR practice effectiveness within the same regulatory and cultural environment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How do Adeyemi Federal University of Education and University of Medical Sciences implement public relations strategies to manage their reputation and communication with stakeholders?
2. What are the similarities and differences in public relations practice between Adeyemi Federal University of Education Ondo and University of Medical Sciences Ondo City?
3. What are the challenges facing the practice of public relations in Adeyemi Federal University of Education Ondo and University of Medical Sciences Ondo?
4. What are the solutions to challenges encountered by public relations practitioners in Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical Sciences, Ondo?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study covers two universities in Ondo West Local Government area of Ondo state. Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical Sciences, Ondo. They are public universities established by the Federal and State government. The study is to look at the department designated as Information and Public Relations in the selected universities, and its effectiveness in using public relations techniques used in information management such as newsletters, press releases, magazines, online platforms and other related materials. Interviews were conducted with heads of the department while questionnaire was administered to other staff and students of the institutions. A semi structured interview was adopted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars globally have explored the vital role of public relations in the development of universities..." particularly in achieving the desired goals and objectives as enumerated by its founders. Dornyo and Adiku (2015) in their study of two private universities in Ghana examined the public relations practice and adopted a qualitative in-depth interview to find out from the communication practitioners of these institutions how they managed communication at their respective universities, the kinds of communicator roles they performed and the models of public relations they applied in their works. The results indicated that the public relations practitioners largely failed to strategically managed communications in their institutions. Media relations emerged as the dominant role these communicators performed. The over emphasis on media relations made the public relations managers of the two institutions mostly applied one-way public information model in their communication process to the detriment of the more acceptable two-way symmetrical model.

In another study of 13 universities in Ethiopia, Gezihagne (2018) found that PR practice in 13 government universities was hindered by structural and professional limitations. The PR practitioners have not well understood the concept of Public relations especially its management function to create mutual understanding with the internal and external publics rather they are considered to stage the debate other than mediates. Lack of professionally skilled manpower, having minimal attitudes and lack of empowering the office, absence of adequate capacity building trainings, lack of infrastructure, inadequate assistance from the concerned leaders took the first line as challenges for the public relations practitioners. Anggreni (2018) in a study to find out the role and position of public relations in management of educational institution (university) in achieving its objectives using a qualitative descriptive research method with the study subjects were Mahendradatta University Public Relations and internal stakeholders discovered that not all public relations officers in Mahendradatta University, do their role as real public relations officers. They also do not have the same understanding about the role of a public relations. They only place public relations in same position as marketing.

Ghana Study (2015)

Two private universities showed PR practitioners failed to strategically manage communications. Media relations dominated with one-way communication model.

Ethiopia Study (2018)

13 government universities hindered by structural limitations. Lack of skilled manpower and inadequate capacity building identified as key challenges.

Indonesia Study (2018)

Mahendradatta University showed PR officers lack proper understanding of their roles, often confusing public relations with marketing functions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the Excellence Theory of Public Relations (Grunig et al., 2002; Kriyantono & Safitri, 2024). This theory emphasises the importance of symmetrical communication, stakeholder engagement, and organisational effectiveness. Also, we have Digital Reputation Management (DRM) framework (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Mehta, 2022) and Stakeholder Engagement Theory (SET) (Freeman, 1984; Chan, 2021). The Excellence Theory was coordinated by Grunig and his team (Grunig, 1992). It is a general theory of public relations (PR) that specifies how public relations is organised, managed and how it (PR) makes an organisation more effective. The theory, according to these scholars, also shows how the monetary value of public relations can be determined and the conditions and environments that make PR more effective in an organisation.

Scholars such as Grunig (1992) and Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier (2002) did further works on the theory and came out with a set of characteristics of an excellent public relations function which they grouped into four categories - empowerment function, communicator roles, integrated function and relationship with other functions, and models of public relations. The empowerment Public Relations Function involves the senior practitioners in the dominant coalition, managing communication programs strategically and building a direct reporting relationship between the public relations executive and the dominant coalition. According to Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier (2002), an organisation whose public relations function adheres to the empowerment principle can easily balance its needs with that of publics. This function helps organisations to effectively manage issues and minimise crises.

On the other hand, Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier (2002) claims a public relations unit is said to have a communicator role if it has top managers who know how to manage strategically and who assume a managerial role. These scholars believe that if the public relations manager is part of management, he or she will help the organisation make the right decisions. Excellent public relations units are organised as integrated functions and are separate from other management functions. An integrated public relations unit is able to quickly respond to issues and allocate resources to address problems without delay (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Of the four models of public relations, Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier (2002) claimed that excellent public relations units utilise the two-way symmetrical communication model instead of the public information, press agentry, or the two-way asymmetrical models. The two-way symmetrical model uses research to facilitate mutual understanding and communication. According to these scholars, this model helps PR managers to adjust the behaviours of dominant coalitions and bring the public and dominant coalition closer together.

According to Babaleye, Grunig research has helped to provide guides to practitioners. The framework of communication models and theories has therefore added new ideas not only to the practice of PR, but also to the body of knowledge of the study of PR as an academic process and profession. Based on the above principles, the present study sought to find out if the public relations units of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo and University of Medical Sciences are engaging in excellent public relations practices.

Expected Role of Public Relations in a University

The Public Relations Department in any university is expected to manage the communication activities of the university and its roles can be divided into sub groups or subsection as follows.

Strategic Communication: The survival of any organisation is dependent on the volume of information at its disposal and the ability to manage such information well to achieve its aims and objectives. This is one of the critical role of public relations. In fact the birth of public relations can be traced to provision of information to its numerous publics through various means. It is expected that all publics both internal and external are well informed about the activities of the university. The public relations department is expected to communicate using circulars, special releases, newsletters, new bulletin, magazines and social platforms to keep its community abreast of all information and necessary details. News about resumptions of academic activities, closure of school, policy statements and management decisions are processed and disseminated via some of the highlighted channels.



Strategic Communication

Managing information flow through newsletters, circulars, and social platforms to keep university community informed.

Stakeholder Engagement

Building mutually beneficial relationships with all critical stakeholders in win-win arrangements.

Media Relations

Maintaining cordial relationships with traditional and social media for positive image building.

Stakeholder Engagement: It is the major role of public relations practitioner to help institution to manage its relationship with critical stakeholders. Relationships have to be built by public relations to a usually mutually beneficial endpoint, couched and arranged in a win-win toga - and devoid of winner takes - all mentality. Both sides, the organisation and the public (internal and external) stand to benefit. It is instructive this symbiosis nails parasitic and vector relationship

Media Relations: This is another critical aspect of public relations. It is the role of the practitioners to have good and cordial relationship with all available media within the specific areas of operations. The media include both traditional media, (print and electronic) and social media. Media relations singles out one of the various publics - the media - and focuses on how to peacefully and friendly engage the core operators (publishers and journalists) in rapport and exchange of communication which ultimate aim is to build a lasting positive image, goodwill and reputation for an organisation. The media describes the media as the lamp and mirror through which an organisation can see itself and also get the reflection of how it is seen by its various publics.

Community Relations: This public relations activity is critical for a university's sustenance within its location. The cooperation of the host community is crucial for an organization's survival, as hostile communities can hinder progress. It is the role of the public relations officer to build and sustain mutual understanding, fostering the "town and gown" relationship where the university actively participates in community activities. This involves understanding community peculiarities, engaging with local leaders, and participating in events to enhance the university's reputation.

Event Planning and Management: The PR department typically coordinates special events in universities, often working with committees. Public relations scholars (Zannu et al., 2024) define special events as planned activities by an organization, person, or group with specific objectives, programs, and budgets involving stakeholders, distinct from daily routines. Examples include convocation ceremonies, matriculation, annual general meetings, commissioning, induction, founder's day anniversaries, and end-of-year activities.

Crisis Communication: Public relations practitioners are responsible for managing information and effective communication during crises or critical incidents affecting institutions, stakeholders, or reputation. Researchers in crisis management (Adeyemi et al., 2024) define a crisis as "a perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders and can seriously impact on organization's performance and generate negative outcomes." Universities, like all organizations, experience crises (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2019), and PR manages these. Types of university crises include academic (grading scandals, academic freedom), administrative (financial mismanagement, leadership changes), and campus safety (violence, natural disasters).

Event Management

Coordinating special events like convocation, matriculation, commissioning ceremonies, and founder's day celebrations.

Crisis Communication

Managing information during crises including academic scandals, administrative issues, and campus safety incidents (Adeyemi et al., 2024).

Community Relations

Building town-gown relationships through participation in community cultural activities and engagement with local leaders (Zannu et al., 2024).

ADEYEMI FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, ONDO

Adeyemi Federal University of Education is one of the newly converted College of Education to a University of Education in Nigeria. The university was a College of Education until October, 2023 when the Federal Government announced its conversion. The College was established in the year 1963 but was officially opened on the 22nd of May, 1964 by the defunct government of Western Region of Nigeria with 93 students comprising of 69 male and 24 female. However, historical records, indicated that in the year 1965, the now defunct Ransome Kuti and Olunloyo College of Education which were in the then Western Region was merged with the institution to become Adeyemi College of Education. The institution was named after Reverend Canon Moses Craig Akinpelumi Adeyemi who was a renowned educationist and notable personality in Ondo Community.

The university is one of the university or college located in Ondo town in Ondo state in South West Nigeria and it was in affiliation with the renowned Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State for its degree programme which commenced in 1982. At a particular point in history it could boast of over 15 thousand students comprising NCE, Degree and post graduate diploma in Education students.

Directorate of Information and Public Relations

The Information and Public Relations Directorate came into existence as a Unit in 1992 during the tenure of Prof. Babatunde Ipaye (1991-1999), the 12th Provost of the College, to keep staff and students of the College abreast of happenings in the College and boost the administrative machinery. The Unit has been solely under the Office of the Provost now Office of the Vice Chancellor since its establishment in January 1992. The first Information Officer was Mr. Ajiboye. He was followed by Mr. R. O. Ajana and Mr. Olusola Moses Akinfolarin (1999 - 2017). In September 2019, the nomenclature of the unit was changed to a directorate. Thus giving rise to the Directorate of Information and Public Relations; and its Officers from the Administrative Officer Cadre to Information Officer Cadre with effect from 2nd October, 2019. The Directorate is currently headed by a Director.

The vision of the Directorate is to operate a vibrant communication outfit that will furnish the University community with day-to-day issues and current affairs of the University through publication of magazines, newsletters, special releases and online media as well as to relate with its various publics in a mutually understanding way in order to boost the university image. The strategic plan of the Directorate of Information and Public Relations is to position Adeyemi university of Education, Ondo, Nigeria as a Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education not only in

Nigeria but also in Africa and beyond in the minds of its various publics. The Directorate create positive mental image of the university in the minds of Nigerians, Africans and people of other nations as the first global institution in teacher education through online media visibility. Directorate of Information and Public Relations has improve the Communication Climate of the university for Optimal Productivity in teaching, learning, research and service delivery through purposeful engagement with all stakeholders (Ogunode & Ayoko, 2023) such as students, staff and the host community in order to position the university as the foremost University of Education in Africa.

For easy administration, the Directorate is divided into three units. Editorial/Advertising/Online Digital Media Unit: This unit handles the coverage of newsworthy events, production of news releases, magazines, special releases, bulletins which are used to keep the university community and the larger public informed about events and other activities in the University. The Directorate uploads news, and photographs in the photo gallery on the University website through the Management Information System Unit. The Directorate has online arm that ensures that the University has an active social media presence. The online unit created and maintains Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp and Twitter now X handles. It uploads all University's news and pictures on these platforms. It engages in buying of media spaces in both print and electronic media. It utilised the national dailies, local dailies, television and all local radio stations in Akure, Ilesa, Ado Ekiti and Ondo cities as indicated by Management. The Directorate has video and still cameras for recording of university activities.

Editorial/Advertising/Online Digital Media Unit

Handles newsworthy events coverage, news releases, magazines, bulletins, and maintains social media presence across platforms.

1

2

Media Relations/Public Relations Unit

Organises press conferences, coordinates media personnel, and manages community relations including cultural events participation.

Media Relations/Public Relations unit: The Directorate engages in Media Relations and Public Relations activities. The Directorate organizes press conferences, issuing press releases, coordinating the invited media men for University activities and ensuring the welfare of media personnel while in the university. In areas of Community Relations, the Directorate participated in events organised by the community which could be social or cultural such as Odun Oba, Ekimogun day and other activities of the community. **Protocol/Events Management unit:** As a Directorate, it handles events and activities procedurally as it has been involved in university activities providing services in events organised by the university and faculties. The University of Medical Sciences, Ondo

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES, ONDO

The University of Medical Sciences, Ondo was established in 2014 through the visionary leadership of His Excellency, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko, the former Executive Governor of Ondo State. With the signing of the bill to establish the Ondo State University of Medical Science into law, the Nigeria's first specialised health and medical sciences university was born.

The Public Relations Unit

The Public Relations Unit of the University of Medical Sciences, Ondo could be described as one that was given birth to ten years ago when the university was established. It had a chequered history due to the fact that the unit was not properly constituted in terms of staffing. Staff recruited were staff who could perform jobs like placing adverts, take photographs and other duties related to public relations. However in the last eight months, a professional with masters in Mass Communication was employed to handle all public relations activities of the University. His employment into the department impacted positively on the image of the school as he introduced innovative ways such as digital media that increased the visibility of the institution. Although the department was not compartmentalised, it performed all public relations functions which include community relations, crisis management, media relations and event planning and management.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The survey method was employed for this study. Since the research focuses on the significance of public relations in universities, gathering opinions, ideas, and thoughts from students and staff members was essential. The survey method facilitates data collection through structured questionnaires administered to the selected population.

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive design seeks to describe, investigate, and interpret conditions and relationships that exist or the attitudes of individuals toward events and ideas. The descriptive design was chosen to effectively capture the significance of public relations in Nigerian universities, specifically using Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, and the University of Medical Sciences, Ondo, as case studies.

Population of The Study

The study population comprised students and staff of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, and the University of Medical Sciences, Ondo, who are directly or indirectly impacted by public relations activities within their institutions. The students and staff forms a major stakeholders and publics of these two institutions, hence the need to capture both institutional and beneficiary perspectives on PR impact.

Sample Size

A total of 100 respondents were selected for the study, with 50 respondents drawn from each university. These number of respondent were selected based on the population size, resources limitation and pilot mission of the study.

Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select the study sample. Firstly, two universities were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study. Secondly, a stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from both students and staff. Finally, 50 respondents were randomly selected from each university, comprising individuals from different faculties and administrative units to provide a comprehensive perspective on public relations.

Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was in-depth interviews and structured questionnaire. The in-depth interview was conducted with the heads of the units or department of public relations to elicit their experience and the challenges facing the practitioners. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: the first section collected demographic information, while the second section contained questions assessing the significance of public relations in the universities under study. Some of the question raised in the questionnaire were drawn from various key points highlighted by the interviewee (Heads of the Department Public Relations)

Methods of Data Collection

A quantitative research approach was used for data collection, enabling objective analysis and comparison of responses.

Reliability and Validity Of Instrument

Reliability, or measurement consistency, was ensured through a questionnaire pre-test and adjustments for clarity. A pilot study involving five Public Relations Unit staff and fifteen students from the Federal University of Technology, Akure (not in the main study), assessed reliability. Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.81, indicating high internal consistency and instrument reliability.

Validity measures how well the instrument captures its intended subject. Public relations experts and academics reviewed the questionnaire for content validity. Comparisons with existing literature on public relations in higher education further reinforced the study's validity.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews with Heads Public Relations, University of Medical Sciences, Ondo

The Public Relations Unit at the University of Medical Science, designated under the Vice Chancellor's office, aligns with findings by Umaru et al. (2022) regarding Nigerian universities restructuring PR departments. Headed by a Principal Assistant Registrar for eight months, he recounted the department's evolution since 2015. Initially, it lacked proper structure, with only one Public Relations Officer and a photographer, and the PR functions were limited to publicity and media relations. He noted, "At one point, the department lacked a professional PR officer, and a photographer temporarily took on communication duties. They had several hands who served as Public Relations officers but since the department was not properly structured, the university did not get it right and the PR functions was limited to publicity and media relations."

Early publications like UNIMED ECO were unsustainable due to structural and staffing limitations. Upon assuming office, the current head introduced the "VAPI" strategy: Visibility, Awareness, Patronage, and Information.

Visibility entails constant coverage of university activities, packaging them as news for internal and external publics, and projecting departmental events. Awareness is created for identified publics through the constant production and online distribution of the weekly newsletter, 'UNIMED weekly'. Patronage, expected from stakeholders, prospective students, parents, and guardians, is generated from this visibility and awareness. According to the PRO, this strategy has increased course enrollment, leading to a higher student volume. With increased patronage, the university anticipates a need for information. The department provides vital information for student success on campus and liaises with other departments to provide details on school fees, accommodation, and other essentials for student well-being.

To achieve these goals, the department was restructured to include graphic artists, content creators, and social media managers, enhancing its capacity and the institution's image.

Challenges

The PRO identified major challenges: insufficient funding for PR activities and a lack of understanding by the Chief Executive Officer regarding the significance of public relations.

Interview with the Director of Information and Public Relations, Adeyemi Federal University of Education

The Information and Public Relations Directorate of Adeyemi Federal University of Education, established in 1999 when it was a college of education under the Provost's office, transitioned to a university in 2023, with the Directorate now reporting to the Vice Chancellor. The directorate is divided into three units: Editorial, Public Relations, and Protocol, each headed by an officer reporting to the Director. The Editorial unit covers newsworthy events, processes them for news, and disseminates information to both internal and external publics via digital and traditional media. This unit also manages all media relations, including media buying, press conferences, and invitations for coverage. The Public Relations unit handles stakeholder relationships, encompassing community relations, crisis management, student engagement, and interactions with government institutions (Ministry of Education, NUC) as well as hotels, religious, and traditional institutions. The Protocol unit assists in event management, ensuring university programs (matriculation, orientation, convocation, seminars, and conferences) conform to acceptable standards. To enhance the institution's image, the Directorate ensures quarterly publications of online newsletters, magazines, and news releases for public consumption.

Challenges

Like every other organisation, the financial constraint remain a major problem, secondly the society and the world has gone global, and therefore there is the need to invest in digitalisation of all the processes in the directorate as well as the university. The directorate is also battling with shortage of staff caused by the "JAPA" syndrome - a situation in which many Nigeria are relocating abroad in search of greener pasture - and retirement of old staff. The inability of the university management to recruit more staff for the directorate remains a major challenge.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data obtained from the questionnaire were systematically organised, coded, and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, which include frequencies, mean, simple percentage and standard deviation. The results were presented in tables and figures, with discussions and interpretations based on statistical findings.

Response Rate

Data was collected from a sample of 100 respondents, 50 questionnaires was administered to each of the Tertiary Institution. The responses rate is 93 percent that is out of the 100 questionnaires administered 93 were completed and returned

School	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
UNIMED	45	45%
AFUED	48	48%
TOTAL	93	93%

SOURCE: Field Survey (2025)

Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

Section A of the questionnaire purposed to gather data was made up of demographic characteristic of the respondents. This section shows the basic information about the respondents. Several questions on respondent's basic information were asked. It was divided into six questions which is the respondents Gender, Age, Status, Institution, Faculty and Level

Gender

Table 1 reveals the gender distribution of the respondents. Out of the 93 respondents who participated and returned the research survey, 35 were male, constituting 37.6% of the research population. The remaining 58 were female, making up 62.4% of the respondents. This indicates a gender disparity, as female respondents outnumbered male respondents in the study.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	35	37.6%
Female	58	62.4%
Total	93	100%

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Institution

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents across two institutions. 45 respondents (45%) were from UNIMED, while 48 respondents (48%) were from AFUED. This nearly equal representation suggests a balanced institutional participation in the study. More students participated in the study as the number of student participants in the study exceeded that of staff members, indicating that students formed the majority of the respondent population.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Institution

School	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
UNIMED	45	45%
AFUED	48	48%
TOTAL	93	100%

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Age

Table 3 present the age distribution of the respondents. The largest age group was 18-30 years, with 40 respondents (43.01%), followed by the 30-50 age group, with 35 respondents (37.63%). The smallest group was 51 years and above, with 18 respondents (19.35%). This indicates that the majority of the respondents were younger, with fewer participants in the older age category.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18-30	40	43.01%
30-50	35	37.63%
51- Above	18	19.35%
Total	93	100%

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Status

Table 4 illustrate the occupational status of the respondents. 25 respondents (40.86%) were academic staff, 38 respondents (26.88%) were administrative staff, and 30 respondents (32.26%) were students. This distribution shows a significant representation of academic staff, followed by students and administrative staff, suggesting diverse participation across different institutional roles.

Table 4: Status Distribution of Respondents

Status	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Academic Staff	25	40.86%
Administrative Staff	38	26.88%
Students	30	32.26%
Total	93	100%

Source: Field Survey (2025)

DATA ANALYSIS TABLE

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	MEAN (X)	SD	DECISION
1.	Our University has a very vibrant Public Relations department	25 (27%)	30 (32%)	15 (16%)	12 (13%)	11 (12%)	93	2.89	0.85	Agree
2.	The Public Relations department provides timely and accurate information about the University	28 (30%)	32 (34%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	11 (12%)	93	2.97	0.82	Agree
3.	The Public Relations unit has qualified staff that are managing the information and communication needs of the university	30 (32%)	31 (33%)	14 (15%)	10 (11%)	8 (9%)	93	3.00	0.84	Agree
4.	The Department is well managed and equipped to cope with all communication needs of the University	26 (28%)	33 (35%)	16 (17%)	9 (10%)	9 (10%)	93	2.91	0.83	Agree
5.	The Public Relations unit provides timely information on students' enrolment, resumptions, and other vital information for students on campus	27 (29%)	35 (38%)	13 (14%)	10 (11%)	8 (9%)	93	3.00	0.80	Agree
6.	The staff of the University rely on information from the Public Relations Unit for issues on welfare, promotion, and other information that will improve their performance	25 (27%)	32 (34%)	14 (15%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	93	2.5	0.85	Disagree
7.	The Public Relations Unit is an organ that builds relationships with critical stakeholders such as community leaders and other related agencies in the University	29 (31%)	30 (32%)	15 (16%)	10 (11%)	9 (10%)	93	2.93	0.82	Agree
8.	In the period of crisis in the Institution, the Public Relations unit manages it effectively by giving accurate and necessary information to the public	30 (32%)	31 (33%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.94	0.84	Agree
9.	During crises, the Public Relations Unit issues press releases, conducts on-the-spot assessments, and organizes press conferences to address issues	27 (29%)	34 (37%)	14 (15%)	10 (11%)	8 (9%)	93	2.98	0.81	Agree

10.	The University employs the use of social media and other digital media channels to transmit information to all its publics	32 (34%)	30 (32%)	13 (14%)	9 (10%)	9 (10%)	93	3.00	0.82	Agree
11.	The University uses Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X) for disseminating and receiving information	30 (32%)	29 (31%)	15 (16%)	10 (11%)	9 (10%)	93	2.94	0.83	Agree
12.	The Public Relations Unit responds to inquiries on social platforms promptly and appropriately	28 (30%)	31 (33%)	14 (15%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.91	0.84	Agree
13.	Messages on digital platforms are tailored toward the needs of students, staff, and the general public	29 (31%)	32 (34%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.94	0.83	Agree
14.	The University has a remarkable presence in community activities and always participates in community works	30 (32%)	31 (33%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.94	0.84	Agree
15.	The University participates in community cultural programs like <i>Odun Oba</i> , <i>Ekimogun Day</i> , and other festivals through congratulatory messages and attendance by Principal Officers	27 (29%)	32 (34%)	14 (15%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.91	0.83	Agree
16.	The Public Relations Unit has access to 24-hour internet services	30 (32%)	31 (33%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.94	0.84	Agree
17.	The University Community has access to internet services to access digital information	28 (30%)	30 (32%)	15 (16%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.91	0.83	Agree
18.	All corporate events are managed and organized by the Public Relations Unit of the University	30 (32%)	31 (33%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.94	0.84	Agree
19.	The Public Relations Officer in the University provides necessary support and services for all events and programs	29 (31%)	32 (34%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.94	0.83	Agree
20.	The Public Relations Unit provides all the necessary media (both online and offline) coverage for all events of the University	30 (32%)	31 (33%)	12 (13%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.94	0.84	Agree
21.	News about University events like seminars, conferences,	28 (30%)	31 (33%)	14 (15%)	10 (11%)	10 (11%)	93	2.91	0.84	Agree

Notes: N = 93 (total respondents); SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; SD = Standard Deviation; N= Neither agree or Disagree

DISCUSSION OF FINDING AND ANALYSIS

The first item assessed the vibrancy of the Public Relations (PR) department in the universities. With a mean score of 2.89, respondents generally agreed that their universities have an active PR unit. The standard deviation of 0.85 suggests a moderate variation in responses, likely reflecting differences in exposure to PR activities among students and staff. In AFUED, PR efforts may be more focused on education-related outreach and community engagement, whereas in UNIMED, the PR unit might concentrate more on partnerships with healthcare institutions and research dissemination. This finding aligns with the account given by the Public Relations officer interviewed at UNIMED, who explained that as the unit head, he introduced a VAPI agenda standing for Visibility, Awareness, Patronage, and Information as a strategic move to showcase the department's vibrancy and relevance. As the officer stated, "The VAPI agenda was introduced to prove that the unit is not dormant. It helps us drive visibility and actively engage both internal and external stakeholders."

Timeliness and Accuracy of Information

The second item measured the efficiency of the PR department in providing timely and accurate information. With a mean of 2.97 and a standard deviation of 0.82, respondents agreed that information is generally well-managed, although individual experiences may vary. In both universities, effective information flow is essential for academic planning, staff updates, and crisis management. While AFUED **emphasises** academic calendar updates and teacher training announcements, UNIMED's PR unit engaged more in disseminating research findings and medical program schedules.

Qualification of PR Staff

This item examined the competency of PR personnel in managing the universities' communication needs. A mean score of 3.00 indicates overall agreement, suggesting that staff are perceived as qualified. The standard deviation of 0.84 implies some level of divergence, possibly due to varying interactions with PR officials. AFUED prioritises PR expertise in academic public engagement, while UNIMED requires specialised PR personnel familiar with healthcare communication and research advocacy.

Management and Equipment of the PR Department

Respondents were asked whether the PR department is well-managed and equipped to handle communication needs. The mean score of 2.91 indicates agreement, while the standard deviation of 0.83 shows moderate variability. The adequacy of PR resources impacts the effectiveness of information dissemination and crisis management. While AFUED focuses on digital communication with educators and students, UNIMED requires advanced PR tools to manage interactions with medical professionals and the public.

Timeliness of Student-Related Information

This item evaluated whether PR provides timely information on student enrollment and resumption. The mean score of 3.00 reflects general agreement, with a standard deviation of 0.80, indicating relatively low variability. In AFUED, PR prioritises updates on teacher training programs and curriculum schedules, while in UNIMED emphasises medical program requirements and hospital training schedules.

PR as an Information Source for Staff

This item assessed whether university staff depend on the Public Relations Unit for information regarding welfare, promotions, and performance-related concerns. With a mean score 2.50, respondents predominantly disagree, suggesting that PR is not their primary source of such information. The standard deviation of 0.85 still indicates moderate variability in responses, reflecting differing experiences across institutions. At Adeyemi Federal University of Education (AFUED), welfare and promotion details are usually sourced from administrative offices rather than PR channels. This could suggest gaps in PR communication regarding staff-related policies. In University of Medical Sciences (UNIMED), medical professionals and academic staff rely more on faculty deans, human resource departments, or regulatory bodies for career-related updates rather than PR announcements.

PR's Role in Stakeholder Engagement

The role of PR in building relationships with external stakeholders, such as community leaders, was examined. A mean score of 2.93 and a standard deviation of 0.82 indicate agreement, though experiences vary. AFUED engages more with local educators and government agencies, while UNIMED's PR outreach focuses more on partnerships with hospitals, research institutes, and healthcare regulators.

PR's Role in Crisis Management

This item evaluated whether the PR unit effectively manages crises. With a mean of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 0.84, respondents agreed on the PR unit's effectiveness, though with some variability.

Crisis Communication Strategies

The ability of PR to issue press releases and conduct crisis communication was analysed. The mean score of 2.98 suggests agreement, while the standard deviation of 0.81 indicates moderate consistency in responses. While AFUED focuses on educational disruptions and student protests, UNIMED PR addresses medical ethics concerns and public health crises.

Digital Media Usage

Both universities leverage social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter) for strategic communication with mean scores of 3.00 and 2.94 respectively.

Community Engagement

Universities maintain active presence in community activities including cultural programs like Odun Oba and Ekimogun Day with mean scores around 2.94.

Event Management

PR units effectively manage corporate events, provide media coverage, and support university programs with consistent mean scores of 2.94.

Alumni Relations

Strong relationships with alumni associations and influence on fundraising activities show positive agreement with mean scores between 2.88-2.94.

Use of Digital Media for Communication

The role of social media and digital platforms in university PR was assessed. A mean score of 3.00 reflects strong agreement, with a standard deviation of 0.82. Both universities leverage digital platforms.

Specific Social Media Platforms Used

The extent to which Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter (X) are used for communication was evaluated. The mean score of 2.94 suggests agreement, though with some differences in usage patterns (SD = 0.83). AFUED and UNIMED use these platforms for student engagement and academic discussions.

Responsiveness of PR on Social Media

Respondents assessed the promptness of PR responses to inquiries on digital platforms. The mean score of 2.91 indicates agreement, with a standard deviation of 0.84. AFUED's and UNIMED's PR team addresses academic inquiries and student concerns. PR team might handle queries related to research collaborations and public health initiatives.

Content Relevance on Digital Platforms

The appropriateness of digital messages for students, staff, and the public was examined. A mean score of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 0.83 suggest that messages are generally well-tailored. AFUED's PR may focus on educational content, while UNIMED's content may emphasise medical research and healthcare policies.

University's Community Engagement

The mean score of 2.94 suggests that both universities have an active presence in community activities, with a standard deviation of 0.84. This suggests a generally positive perception among respondents regarding the institutions' involvement in societal outreach and development initiatives.

Participation in Cultural Programmes

Respondents evaluated whether the universities engage in community cultural events. The mean score of 2.91 indicates agreement, with a standard deviation of 0.83. AFUED involves more in traditional education-related events, while UNIMED's participation is linked to health awareness and medical outreach programmes.

PR unit Internet Access

The availability of internet access for the Public Relations (PR) unit plays a crucial role in ensuring effective communication, media engagement, and information dissemination. With a mean score of 2.94, respondents agreed that the PR units in both universities have access to internet services, though the standard deviation of 0.84 suggests some variability in responses.

In Adeyemi Federal University of Education (AFUED), internet access enables the PR team to efficiently update students and staff about academic schedules, policy changes, and institutional developments. PR officials rely on digital platforms to distribute newsletters, engage with media outlets, and ensure that accurate information reaches the public. Furthermore, the internet facilitates crisis management, allowing PR professionals to swiftly issue statements and clarify misinformation when necessary.

At the University of Medical Sciences (UNIMED), internet access is equally vital but serves a broader function. As a medical institution, UNIMED's PR unit depends on internet connectivity for real-time updates on health policies, medical research advancements, and collaborations with healthcare institutions. Digital connectivity enables PR personnel to share crucial public health information, engage in online reputation management, and promote institutional achievements in research and healthcare training. However, potential challenges such as unstable internet connectivity or limited technical infrastructure might impact the efficiency of online communication in both universities.

University Community's Access to Digital Information

Access to internet services for students and staff is a critical factor in ensuring smooth academic operations, digital learning, and information exchange. With a mean score of 2.91, respondents generally agreed that the university community has access to digital information, though the standard deviation of 0.83 indicates some inconsistencies in accessibility.

At AFUED, digital information access is crucial for students and lecturers, supporting e-learning tools and online academic resources. The PR unit ensures timely updates on lectures and course registrations via digital channels. Internet infrastructure, financial constraints, or digital literacy levels may influence accessibility.

Conversely, UNIMED's medical education makes digital information access even more critical; students depend on online medical databases, research journals, and telemedicine platforms. The PR unit provides relevant health-related content and institutional updates. High data costs, poor network coverage, or restricted academic database access can limit resource utilization.

PR's Role in Corporate Event Management

The PR unit's management of corporate events significantly enhances university reputation and visibility. Respondents agreed on PR's important role (mean score 2.94, standard deviation 0.84).

PR's Support for University Events

PR unit involvement in university events extends beyond coordination to strategic communication and media representation. Respondents acknowledged this role across both institutions (mean score 2.94, standard deviation 0.83).

Media Coverage of University Events

A key PR unit function is providing media coverage for all university events, informing internal and external audiences. Respondents agreed on active event coverage (mean score 2.94, standard deviation 0.84).

AFUED relies on its PR department to document and publicize academic programs, guest lectures, and community engagement initiatives. Leveraging print, broadcast, and digital media ensures adequate visibility, reinforcing its reputation for educational excellence. Measuring output-based indicators like press releases, media mentions, or social media engagement would offer more concrete measures of PR vibrancy and effectiveness.

At UNIMED, media coverage includes public health initiatives, research breakthroughs, and collaborative projects, beyond academic activities. Effective media engagement ensures recognition locally and internationally. However, challenges like media bias, resource constraints, and competition for media attention may hinder PR efforts.

Publicity of University Events

The PR unit's ability to generate widespread publicity for university events is crucial in shaping public perception and attracting potential partners. With a mean score of 2.91 and a standard deviation of 0.84, respondents acknowledged the PR department's role in effectively promoting institutional events. However, while the rating indicates mild agreement, it remains unclear whether either university's PR unit uses structured media monitoring tools or performance metrics such as social media engagement analytics, audience reach statistics, or media impressions to evaluate the impact of their publicity efforts. Incorporating such tools could improve accountability and provide valuable insights for enhancing communication strategies.

At AFUED, PR specialists utilise various media channels, including newspapers, television, and social media, to create awareness about key events. Publicity efforts are particularly important for activities such as accreditation visits, conferences, student achievements, and faculty research presentations.

In UNIMED, the PR team ensures that medical conferences, scientific symposiums, and hospital outreach programs receive adequate exposure. Effective publicity enhances the university's image as a leading institution in medical education and research. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on media partnerships, public interest, and available funding for promotional activities.

PR's Role in Alumni Engagement and Fundraising

The final set of items assessed the PR unit's influence on alumni engagement and fundraising efforts. With mean scores ranging between 2.88 and 2.94, respondents generally agreed that PR plays a significant role in these areas.

At AFUED, PR specialists focus on maintaining strong relationships with alumni through newsletters, social media updates, and alumni events. Effective engagement fosters a sense of belonging among graduates, encouraging them to contribute to the university's development. The PR unit also supports fundraising campaigns by highlighting the institution's achievements and funding needs.

Similarly, in UNIMED, alumni engagement is essential for maintaining professional networks within the healthcare sector. The PR department plays a vital role in keeping alumni informed about new research initiatives, medical advancements, and opportunities for collaboration. Fundraising efforts in UNIMED may involve seeking donations for medical research, scholarships, and infrastructure development. The challenges faced in this regard include competition for donor funding, alumni disengagement, and economic factors affecting donation rates.

SUMMARY

This comparative analysis reveals that both AFUED and UNIMED demonstrate similar PR effectiveness despite serving fundamentally different institutional missions and stakeholder ecosystems. This finding underscores the adaptability and robustness of core public relations principles, showcasing their successful application in diverse higher education environments. It suggests that while the specific manifestations of PR activities may vary, the underlying mechanisms for building and maintaining reputation, facilitating communication, and engaging stakeholders (Freeman, 1984) remain consistent across institutions with distinct focuses. The study examined how these Nigerian universities utilise PR to manage their image, interact with stakeholders, and address communication challenges. Data analysis confirmed that both universities have functional PR departments that contribute to institutional development, with respondents generally agreeing that PR units effectively manage information dissemination, crisis communication, and digital engagement. For example, both institutions exhibit a vibrant online presence on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

However, the study also identified areas for strategic refinement, particularly regarding the extent to which staff rely on PR for welfare and career-related information. While PR is actively used for promoting events, student enrolment, and institutional achievements, its role in internal staff affairs appears more limited. Additionally, the study highlighted nuanced differences in PR practices: AFUED's approach is more community-centred, engaging in cultural and social activities (Zannu et al., 2024), whereas UNIMED focuses primarily on professional and academic communication tailored for students and faculty in the medical field. These distinct strategic orientations ultimately contribute to their respective, yet similarly effective, PR outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study significantly advances the understanding of PR excellence theory (Grunig, 1992; Grunig et al., 2002) by demonstrating how core principles of effective public relations can be successfully adapted and applied across varied institutional missions and stakeholder ecosystems within higher education. The findings emphasise that a robust PR function is essential for enhancing institutional visibility, fostering communication between the university and its stakeholders, and managing crises. Effective PR strategies contribute critically to the reputation of both AFUED and UNIMED, ensuring that information is disseminated accurately and promptly, regardless of their specific mandates.

For Nigerian higher education PR practice, this research highlights that while institutional mission inherently shapes the specific focus and communication channels of PR strategy, the underlying principles of effectiveness and excellence remain consistent. PR practitioners must tailor their approaches to their institution's unique context (Ogunode & Ayoko, 2023), whether it's a community-focused university or a specialised medical institution, while adhering to universal standards of transparency (Adeyemi et al., 2024), stakeholder engagement, and strategic communication (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2019).

Despite these successes, areas for future development remain in staff engagement, crisis management strategies, and the comprehensive integration of PR for institutional fundraising and alumni relations. Furthermore, the effectiveness of PR in both universities continues to be influenced by access to digital resources, adequately trained personnel, and robust strategic communication planning. Funding, as revealed in interviews with Public Relations helmsmen, represents an ongoing challenge for supporting these activities. The study recommends that while PR units in Nigerian universities are functional, they should expand their scope to fully integrate staff welfare, alumni engagement, and fundraising initiatives. A more holistic approach is needed to ensure all key stakeholders - staff, students, and community members - are strategically considered in public relations planning and activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

01

Strengthen Internal Communication

PR units should improve engagement with staff by providing regular updates on welfare, promotions, and professional development opportunities.

02

Enhanced Digital PR Strategies

Universities should invest in digital media and ensure PR teams are well-equipped to manage online inquiries efficiently and allocate more resources to PR departments.

03

Community and Alumni Engagement

AFUED and UNIMED should strengthen PR efforts to foster better relationships with alumni and local communities for increased institutional support.

04

Crisis Communication Training

PR staff should undergo regular training to enhance crisis management skills, ensuring timely and effective responses to institutional challenges.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Olatuyi Oluseto Abidemi

 olatuyiabidemi@gmail.com

Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria

Adesunloro Babalola Raphael

Wesley University, Ondo, Nigeria

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