



Public Relations Strategies for Promoting Road Safety: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Road traffic crashes remain a major public health and development concern, and road-user behaviour is central to crash risk. Communication interventions are widely used to influence this behaviour. However, the evidence on public relations (PR) strategies in road-safety promotion is scattered across disciplines. This study systematically reviewed the literature on PR strategies for promoting road safety. It examined the strategies employed, communication channels, target publics and road-safety issues, theoretical perspectives, reported outcomes, and gaps. The review followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Searches covered Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar and African Journals Online for studies published between 2016 and 2026. Of 118 records identified, 14 peer-reviewed empirical studies met the inclusion criteria; nine were conducted in Nigeria. Findings were synthesised using deductive thematic analysis. Public education, awareness campaigns, media relations, face-to-face enlightenment, stakeholder engagement and campaign publicity were the dominant strategies. Radio and television were prominent channels, complemented by motor-park seminars, interpersonal communication and, more recently, social media. Studies reported a recurring knowledge-behaviour gap, in which exposure to messages did not consistently result in compliance. Commercial drivers were the main target public, while pedestrians, passengers, motorcyclists, cyclists and institutional stakeholders were rarely examined. Theoretical grounding was inconsistent: several studies reported no framework, and PR-specific theories were scarce. The review concludes that although road-safety communication increasingly resembles PR practice, the literature lacks PR-specific theoretical frameworks. Future research should apply PR perspectives across diverse road-user groups and geographical settings.

Keywords: public relations, road safety, road-safety campaigns, strategic communication, compliance

Introduction

Road safety remains a major global public health and development concern, with road traffic crashes resulting in substantial loss of life, injury, disability and economic productivity (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). The problem affects road users across countries, most especially in low- and middle-income countries, where rapid urbanisation, increasing motorisation, weak transport systems and other structural challenges can heighten exposure to road traffic risks (Shadrach, 2024). Therefore, improving road safety requires coordinated interventions that extend beyond the provision of safer roads and vehicles to include measures that influence how people understand, perceive and respond to road-related risks.

Road safety is often approached from engineering, regulatory and enforcement perspectives, including road design, vehicle standards, traffic laws and policing (Ehsani et al., 2023). Although these measures are essential, road users remain an important component of the road-safety system because risky decisions and behaviours, including speeding, driving under the



influence of alcohol, distracted driving, non-use of seat belts or helmets and other forms of non-compliance, can increase the likelihood of crashes and the risk of injury (Kiwango et al., 2024; Rahmillah et al., 2023; Somoray et al., 2024). Thus, addressing such behaviours requires more than the existence of regulations; road users need to understand the risks associated with unsafe practices, recognise their responsibilities and be motivated to adopt safer behaviours. It is in this regard that communication interventions become necessary.

Communication can provide information about traffic regulations, increase awareness of risks, challenge unsafe practices, promote protective behaviours and encourage public support for road-safety initiatives (Shadrach, 2024; Akbari et al., 2021). However, effective road-safety communication extends beyond simply disseminating information. The credibility of the message, identification of appropriate publics, selection of suitable channels, consistency of communication, opportunities for engagement and the broader relationship between communicating organisations and their publics can influence how road-safety messages are received and acted upon (Johnson et al., 2023). These considerations have increasingly positioned public relations as a relevant strategic communication function in road-safety promotion.

Public relations extends beyond information dissemination to involve the strategic management of relationships between organisations and their publics, including communication, engagement and efforts to promote mutual understanding (Chiakaan et al., 2019; Chiakaan et al., 2023). In road safety, this orientation provides opportunities for government agencies, road-safety organisations, transport associations, communities, media organisations and other stakeholders to communicate with and engage different categories of road users. Public relations strategies such as media relations, public education, community engagement, stakeholder relations, advocacy, publicity and campaign communication can be employed to create awareness, facilitate dialogue, build trust, mobilise participation and encourage safer road-use practices. The relevance of these strategies is particularly important because road safety involves multiple stakeholders whose interests, responsibilities and behaviours are interconnected.

Despite the growing relevance of public relations to road safety, existing related literature on road-safety communication is dispersed across several fields. Existing road-safety literature has examined campaigns, mass-media interventions, public education and community engagement primarily as road-safety, behavioural-change or public-health interventions, without necessarily conceptualising these activities within a public relations framework (Bunn et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2023; Leavy et al., 2022). This fragmentation makes it difficult to establish a consolidated understanding of the specific public relations strategies that have been employed in road-safety promotion, the publics and road-safety issues they address, the channels through which they are implemented, the theoretical perspectives informing them and the outcomes associated with their application. Therefore, a systematic synthesis of the existing literature is necessary to bring together the available evidence and identify patterns across studies. Against this background, this study systematically reviews the literature on public relations strategies for promoting road safety, with the aim of providing answers to the following questions:

1. What public relations strategies have been employed in promoting road safety?
2. What communication channels have been used to implement these strategies?
3. What road-safety issues and target publics have been addressed?
4. What theoretical perspectives have informed public relations strategies for road-safety promotion?
5. What outcomes have been reported from the application of these strategies?

6. What methodological and knowledge gaps exist in the literature?

Conceptual Clarifications:

Public Relations Strategies

Scholars Andersson (2024), Lee and Kim (2021), and Grunig and Hunt (1984), and professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR, n.d) have conceptualised public relations from different perspectives, but their submissions broadly converge on PR as a strategic and planned communication and management function concerned with building trust, achieving mutual understanding and developing beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics. Strategy denotes a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal (Shadrach, 2023). By extension, PR strategies can be described as planned approaches and communication activities employed to achieve PR objectives, including relationship building, reputation management, stakeholder engagement, crisis management and two-way communication (Eke & Adeyemi, 2024). In this sense, PR strategies constitute a specific component of the broader field of strategic communication, which encompasses the purposeful use of communication by organisations to achieve defined goals across different contexts and communication functions. PR may therefore form part of strategic communication, but the two concepts are not synonymous. Thus, PR strategies are distinguished by their emphasis on planned, sustained and often reciprocal relationships with identified publics.

Road Safety

Road safety refers to the conditions, measures and practices designed to prevent road traffic crashes, reduce the risk and severity of injuries and deaths, and protect all road users (Bachani et al., 2017; Bunn et al., 2022; WHO, 2026). It encompasses the coordinated efforts of governments, road-safety agencies, transport organisations, communities and road users to create safer road environments and promote responsible use of roads. While road safety involves infrastructural, vehicle-related, regulatory and enforcement measures, the behaviour of road users remains an important dimension of road-safety outcomes (Addo et al., 2026). Compliance with traffic regulations and adoption of safe road-use practices can reduce exposure to road-traffic risks and minimise the likelihood and severity of crashes (Fouda et al., 2018). Thus, road safety is not only a matter of providing safe roads and enforcing traffic laws but also involves communicating appropriate knowledge, attitudes and practices to road users.

Methodology

Review Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) design. The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework, which provides a transparent and systematic approach to identifying, screening, assessing and reporting relevant studies. The review, therefore, sought to systematically consolidate the available evidence and identify patterns relating to the public relations strategies employed, communication channels used, target publics, road-safety issues addressed, theoretical perspectives and reported outcomes.

Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted using combinations of the following search strings: “public relations” AND “road safety”; “public relations strategies” AND “road safety”; “communication” AND “road safety compliance”; “mass media” AND “road safety awareness” AND education; “stakeholder engagement” AND “road safety”; and “communication” AND “road safety” AND advocacy. Additional keywords, including “public education”, “awareness”,



“behaviour” and “compliance”, were also used in combination with the core search terms to identify relevant studies.

Information Sources

The databases used to source for the data included Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar and African Journals Online (AJOL). Scopus and Web of Science provided broad multidisciplinary coverage, while PubMed was considered relevant to the public-health dimensions of road safety. ScienceDirect provided access to research across social science, health and transportation-related disciplines, while Google Scholar was used to identify additional relevant scholarly publications that may not have been retrieved through the other databases. AJOL was included to improve the representation of African scholarship in the review. The search covered studies published within the predetermined publication period and was conducted on 2016-2026.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed empirical publications that addressed road safety and examined communication or public relations strategies relevant to road-safety promotion. Studies published between 2016 and 2026 were considered eligible. Studies were excluded if they were unrelated to road safety, focused exclusively on engineering, vehicle or infrastructural interventions without a relevant communication component, or were editorials, opinion articles, commentaries, conference abstracts or other non-empirical publications.

Study Selection

The study selection process followed the stages recommended by the PRISMA 2020 framework: identification, screening, eligibility assessment and inclusion. At the identification stage, records (n=118) retrieved from the selected databases were compiled and duplicate records were removed (n=92). The titles and abstracts of the remaining records were subsequently screened against the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies (n=14) that appeared potentially relevant were retrieved and used. At the eligibility stage, the full texts were examined to determine whether they met all the inclusion criteria. Studies that did not satisfy the eligibility requirements were excluded, with reasons for exclusion recorded. The studies that met all the criteria were retained for the final synthesis. The PRISMA flow diagram below illustrates the process:

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Public Relations Strategies for Promoting Road Safety: Identification of studies via databases (2016–2026)

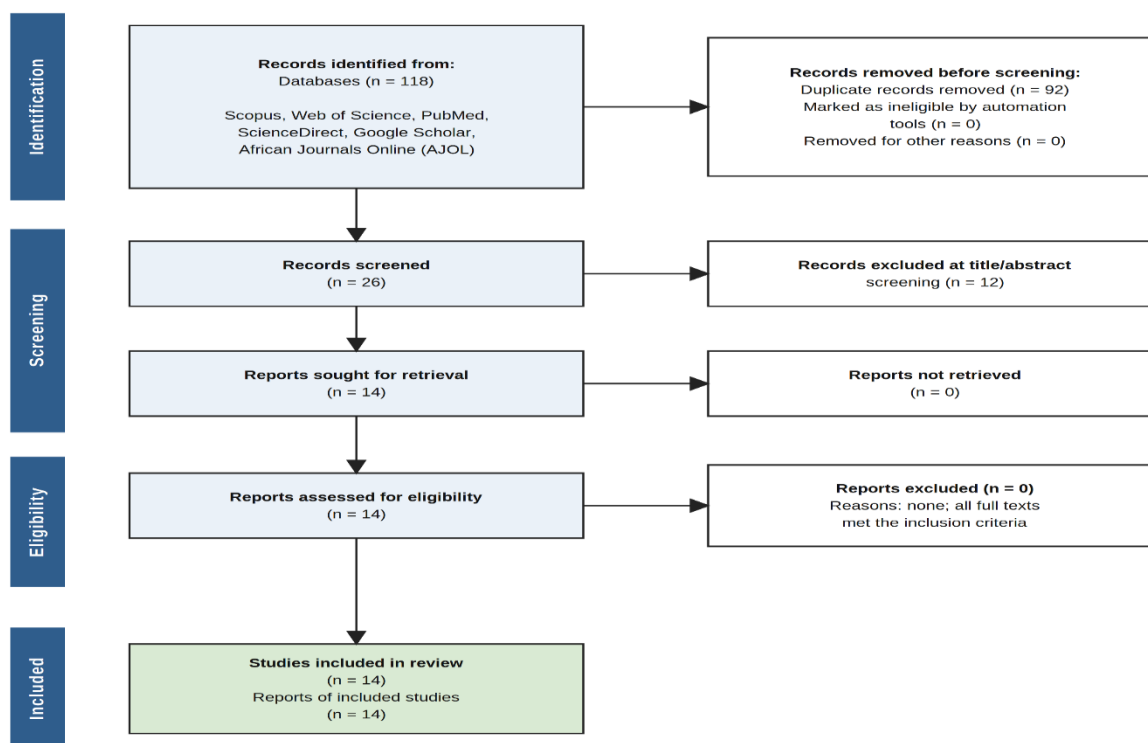


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (databases and registers only). Adapted from Page et al. (2021), BMJ 372:n71. Search period: 2016–2026. Eligibility: peer-reviewed empirical studies on road safety and communication/PR strategies.

Data Presentation

Results

Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies

S/N	Author(s)	Yr.	Country	Focus	Theoretical foundation	Methods	Key findings
1	Abdul-Wahab, I.	2016	Nigeria	Effectiveness of FRSC training and road-safety education among commercial drivers	Not explicitly reported	Mixed methods; survey and FGD; n=2,000 commercial drivers; ANOVA, Fisher's <i>t</i> , Pearson correlation and stepwise regression	Drivers' educational background, duration of road-safety education, behaviour and knowledge significantly influenced attitudes towards road-safety education. Continuous enlightenment through radio, television and motor parks was recommended.
2	Nwadinigwe, Osarenren & Otuagoma	2018	Nigeria	Impact of FRSC road-safety education on commercial drivers' knowledge and behaviour	Not explicitly reported	Descriptive survey; n=320; questionnaire; ANOVA and multiple regression	FRSC education influenced drivers' behaviour towards traffic codes and safe driving but did not significantly influence their knowledge.
3	Nwadinigwe, Osarenren & Otuagoma	2019	Nigeria	Drivers' perception of road-safety education and compliance with traffic rules	Not explicitly reported	Descriptive survey; n=320; stratified/simple random sampling;	Road-safety education influenced compliance with traffic rules, while driving experience also significantly affected compliance.



						questionnaire; two-way ANOVA	
4	Ngondo & Klyueva	2019	Russia	Fear appeals in road-safety advertising and social-marketing campaign messages	Extended Parallel Processing Model (EPPM)	Content analysis of road-safety PSAs	Threat messages substantially outweighed efficacy messages. The authors recommended stronger response-efficacy messages and clearer behavioural recommendations.
5	Paricio Esteban, Puchalt López & Femenia Almerich	2020	Spain	Public relations and road-safety/drug-use campaigns in audiovisual media	Agenda-setting perspective	Mixed methods; campaign/media-content analysis and assessment of campaign exposure, coverage and impact	Media relations and audiovisual campaigns were important for road-safety promotion, but campaign continuity, coverage and media impact required improvement.
6	Esse, C.	2021	Cameroon	Road-safety communication, press representation and government awareness strategies	Communication for social change / strategic communication perspectives	Content analysis of 60 newspaper articles, campaign posters/flyers; interviews with road users	Media awareness alone was insufficient. Effective road-safety communication should combine media, citizen education, social marketing and behaviour-change approaches, with messages targeted to specific publics.
7	Macauley, S. U.	2021	Nigeria	Public perception and effectiveness of FRSC public-enlightenment programmes	Social Cognitive Theory	Survey; n=399; multistage sampling; questionnaire	45.5% of motorists reported high exposure. Motor-park seminars were perceived as particularly influential, while the overall perceived influence and effectiveness of the programmes recorded a mean of 2.9.
8	Amah, Oladele & Asemah	2022	Nigeria	Influence of FRSC Ember Months' campaign on motorists	Social Judgment Theory	Survey research; motorists in Benin City	45% of motorists reported low exposure to the campaign; television was the major channel, while many respondents considered the campaign less effective. The study recommended broader use of social, outdoor and print media.
9	Ucheobi et al.	2021	Nigeria	FRSC communication campaign on speed-limiting devices among commercial drivers	Not explicitly reported	Survey; n=384 commercial drivers; questionnaire	Face-to-face communication was particularly effective. The campaign encouraged installation of speed-limiting devices, although its effectiveness was not uniform across all drivers.
10	Nnabuiife, Ekwenchi & Ojiakor-Umenze	2023	Nigeria	FRSC communication messages and road-safety awareness/knowledge among commercial truck drivers	Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)	Mixed methods; survey and in-depth interviews; n=210 truck drivers in five South-Eastern cities	FRSC communication messages generated considerable awareness and knowledge among truck drivers, although behavioural and environmental factors continued to affect road-safety practices.
11	Devlin, A.	2023	Australia	Analysis of the <i>Drink Driver, Selfish Prick</i> campaign from a PR perspective	PESO model / PR campaign framework	Qualitative campaign-content analysis	The campaign integrated stakeholders, paid/earned/shared/owned media, publicity, imagery and other PR elements. The analysis regarded the campaign as effective in educating motorists about drink-driving risks.

12	Shadrach	2024	Nigeria	FRSC communication strategies and adoption of road-safety precautionary measures among commercial drivers	Not explicitly reported	Survey; n=118 commercial motorists at Jalingo Main Park; questionnaire; descriptive statistics	Radio, television and stickers were major communication channels. Despite high exposure, poor attitudes and unsafe practices such as speeding, overloading and drug driving persisted.
13	Wurjanti, W.	2025	Indonesia	Public responses to the #JalanBerkeselamatan road-safety campaign on TikTok	Social Judgment Theory	Qualitative content analysis of campaign videos and digital sentiment analysis of social-media comments	Most responses fell within the latitude of non-commitment, suggesting that clearer, emotionally resonant and educational messages may improve public engagement.
14	Oladele & Aduradola	2026	Nigeria	Traffic communication strategies and compliance among road users	Not explicitly reported	Cross-sectional survey.	Examines the relationship between traffic communication strategies and road-user compliance, providing recent Nigerian evidence on communication-based road-safety interventions.

Thematic synthesis

The literature reveals a broad but uneven body of evidence on communication-based approaches to road-safety promotion. Consistent with the deductive thematic framework, the synthesis is organised around PR strategies, communication channels, target publics and road-safety issues, and theoretical foundations.

PR strategies

The reviewed studies demonstrate that road-safety promotion has relied predominantly on public education, awareness campaigns, media relations, face-to-face enlightenment, stakeholder-oriented engagement and campaign publicity. In Nigeria, Abdul-Wahab (2016), Nwadinigwe et al. (2018, 2019), Macauley (2021), Amah et al. (2022), Ucheobi et al. (2021), Nnabuike et al. (2023) and Shadrach (2024) show the prominence of FRSC-led education and enlightenment programmes. These interventions have generally sought to increase knowledge, influence attitudes and encourage compliance among motorists. However, the evidence indicates a recurring knowledge-behaviour gap. For example, Nwadinigwe et al. (2018) found that road-safety education influenced behaviour but did not significantly influence knowledge, while Shadrach (2024) reported high exposure to FRSC messages alongside persistent unsafe practices. This suggests that exposure to PR messages does not automatically translate into behavioural compliance.

The international literature extends the range of strategies beyond conventional enlightenment. Paricio Esteban et al. (2020) demonstrates the importance of media relations in road-safety campaigns, while Ngondo and Klyueva (2019) highlight the use of fear appeals in road-safety advertising. Esse (2021) argues for combining media communication with citizen education, social marketing and behaviour-change approaches. Devlin (2023) similarly demonstrates the application of PR campaign elements, including stakeholder considerations and the PESO framework. Collectively, these studies suggest a movement from simple information dissemination towards more integrated campaign approaches. Nevertheless, much of the literature evaluates individual campaigns or communication activities rather than examining PR as a



coordinated relationship-management process involving research, planning, stakeholder engagement, communication and evaluation. This represents an important conceptual limitation in the existing literature.

Communication channels

The literature identifies a combination of traditional, interpersonal and digital channels. Radio and television remain prominent in the Nigerian studies, particularly in FRSC public enlightenment programmes. Abdul-Wahab (2016) recommended the sustained use of radio and television, while Amah et al. (2022) found television to be a major source of exposure to the Ember Months campaign. However, studies also identify motor-park seminars, face-to-face communication, stickers, newspapers, billboards and social media as complementary channels. Ucheobi et al. (2021), for instance, found face-to-face communication particularly effective in promoting compliance with speed-limiting-device requirements.

The evidence, therefore, challenges the assumption that mass media alone is sufficient for road-safety promotion. Esse (2021) found that media awareness without complementary forms of engagement was inadequate, while the Nigerian studies indicate the continued relevance of interpersonal communication in reaching commercial drivers. More recent work, such as Wurjanti (2025), demonstrates the increasing use of TikTok and other digital platforms for road-safety campaigns. However, the literature remains relatively fragmented in its assessment of how traditional and digital channels can be strategically integrated. There is also limited evidence comparing channel effectiveness across different categories of road users. Thus, the literature establishes the value of multi-channel communication but provides less systematic evidence on how PR practitioners should select and combine channels according to audience characteristics, communication objectives and behavioural outcomes.

Target publics and road-safety issues

The dominant target public across the reviewed studies is motorists, particularly commercial drivers. Nigerian research by Abdul-Wahab (2016), Nwadinigwe et al. (2018, 2019), Macauley (2021), Ucheobi et al. (2021), Nnabuife et al. (2023) and Shadrach (2024) concentrates heavily on drivers and their knowledge, attitudes, exposure and compliance. The road-safety issues addressed include traffic-rule compliance, speeding, speed-limiting devices, drink/drug driving, seat-belt use and other precautionary practices. This concentration is understandable because commercial drivers are frequently exposed to road-use risks and represent an important group for road-safety interventions. However, the literature reveals a relatively narrow conception of the road-safety public. Pedestrians, passengers, motorcycle riders, cyclists, transport unions, community leaders and other institutional stakeholders receive considerably less attention. Similarly, although some studies address specific behaviours, there is limited evidence of audience segmentation in which communication strategies are deliberately differentiated according to demographic, occupational, geographic or behavioural characteristics. Paricio Esteban et al. (2020) and Esse (2021) provide stronger evidence of audience and media considerations, but this remains underdeveloped across the literature. The evidence, therefore, suggests that road-safety PR research should move beyond a predominantly driver-centred approach towards stakeholder-based and audience-segmented communication.

Theoretical foundations

The theoretical foundation of the literature is inconsistent and relatively underdeveloped. Several studies do not explicitly identify a theoretical framework, suggesting that much road-safety communication research remains predominantly descriptive or evaluation-oriented. Where



theories are employed, they include the Extended Parallel Process Model (Ngondo & Klyueva, 2019), Social Cognitive Theory (Macauley, 2021), Social Judgment Theory (Wurjanti, 2025), Theory of Planned Behaviour (Nnabuike et al., 2023), and PR campaign frameworks such as the PESO model (Devlin, 2023). These theories provide different explanations for how communication may influence road-safety outcomes: fear appeals emphasise threat and efficacy perceptions; Social Cognitive Theory highlights learning and behavioural modelling; Social Judgment Theory focuses on audience predispositions; and the Theory of Planned Behaviour explains behavioural intention through attitudes, norms and perceived behavioural control.

The diversity of theoretical approaches is useful because road-safety communication involves cognitive, affective, social and behavioural processes. However, there is limited theoretical continuity across studies, and PR-specific theoretical perspectives are particularly scarce. The literature consequently provides considerable evidence about communication activities but less theoretical explanation of how PR relationships, stakeholder engagement, dialogue and organisational responsiveness contribute to sustained road-safety behaviour. This is a significant gap given that the present review is specifically concerned with public relations strategies rather than communication exposure alone.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review examined public relations strategies employed to promote road safety. It demonstrates that road-safety promotion increasingly relies on communication-based interventions, including public education, awareness campaigns, media relations, face-to-face engagement, stakeholder-oriented activities and digital communication. This suggests that, although many studies examine activities that are compatible with public relations practice, such as media relations, public education, advocacy, campaign management and stakeholder engagement, explicit application of PR theories remains limited. The literature is also theoretically fragmented, with greater reliance on behavioural and communication theories than on PR-specific perspectives. This limits understanding of how relationship building, dialogue, stakeholder participation and organisational responsiveness contribute to sustained road-safety outcomes. Future studies should examine the application of PR-specific theoretical frameworks and strategies in road safety across diverse categories of road users and geographical settings.

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