



Qualitative Literature Review of Government Public Relations (GPR) Strategies and their Policy Outcomes

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Abstract

Government public relations (GPR) plays an important role in shaping public understanding, participation and acceptance of government policies, yet evidence on how specific communication strategies translate into policy outcomes remains fragmented, particularly in developing contexts. This study systematically reviewed empirical literature on GPR strategies and their documented outcomes, with particular attention to Nigeria and comparable developing countries. A qualitative literature review design was employed, drawing on 11 empirical studies identified from Google Scholar, AJOL, Web of Science and university digital research databases. A structured coding framework was used to map GPR strategies and reported outcomes, while the Theory of Value in Public Relations and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) provided the analytical lenses for interpreting the findings. Three dominant approaches emerged: publicity/press agency, hybrid/digital PR, and participatory/community-centric PR. Publicity-based strategies generated substantial visibility and awareness but showed limited evidence of translating exposure into acceptance or sustained public engagement. Hybrid and digital approaches expanded communication reach and speed but were constrained by inadequate digital capacity, infrastructure, resources, misinformation and predominantly one-way communication. Participatory and community-centric approaches demonstrated stronger evidence of sensitisation, participation and acceptance through dialogue, transparency and grassroots engagement, although they required greater institutional commitment and resources. The study concludes that GPR effectiveness depends less on communication reach alone than on the extent to which communication facilitates reciprocal relationships and citizen engagement. A Goal-Strategy-Outcome Model for Effective Government Public Relations is proposed to guide governments from informing and reaching citizens towards meaningful engagement, policy acceptance and participation.

Keywords: GPR, public relations strategies, policy outcomes, citizen engagement, public communication

Introduction

The success of public policy depends not only on the quality of government decisions but also on the quality of communication through which those decisions are explained, negotiated and experienced by citizens (Kondolele et al., 2025). In contemporary governance, governments operate in increasingly complex communication environments in which public awareness, trust, participation and acceptance can determine whether policy interventions achieve their intended outcomes (Grelle & Hofmann, 2024). This is coupled with the growing emphasis on citizen-centred governance, whereby government communication must respond not only to what governments seek to communicate but also to how citizens interpret, question and respond to public policies (Ayiku & Du Plessis, 2026). Therefore, government public relations (GPR) has become an important mechanism for managing the relationship between public institutions and their publics, extending beyond the dissemination of official information to include stakeholder



engagement, relationship building, public understanding and the management of citizens' perceptions (Dolea, 2012; Lee et al., 2023).

Research (e.g., Kaleli et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2020; Sjucho et al., 2026) suggests that governments employ a wide range of public relations strategies, including media relations, publicity, public information campaigns, community engagement, digital communication, stakeholder consultation and crisis communication. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies according to how they are designed and implemented. Publicity and media-based approaches can generate substantial visibility and awareness, but communication that remains predominantly one-way may provide limited opportunities for citizens to express concerns or influence the communication process (Eyo & Onyewuchi, 2025). On the other hand, participatory and community-oriented approaches create opportunities for dialogue, feedback and relationship building, potentially strengthening public understanding and acceptance (OECD, 2023). Thus, the critical issue is no longer simply whether governments communicate, but how the strategies they employ translate communication into meaningful policy outcomes.

In Nigeria, this question is especially significant because government communication occurs within a challenging environment characterised by public distrust, political contestation, misinformation and concerns about the transparency and effectiveness of public institutions (Roelofs, 2019). These conditions can create a gap between government policy intentions and citizens' perceptions of those policies. This implies that, the effectiveness of GPR cannot be adequately assessed by measuring publicity, media exposure or information dissemination alone; it must also be considered in relation to outcomes such as public understanding, trust, participation, acceptance and support for government interventions.

Existing Nigerian studies provide evidence of the use of publicity, media relations, digital communication, community engagement and other PR strategies across different policy and governance contexts (Nytse & Agbele, 2023; Garba et al., 2022; Chiakaan & Bamigboye, 2024; Chiakaan et al., 2021). However, the evidence remains fragmented across individual states, institutions, policy issues and communication settings, making it difficult to establish which approaches consistently produce favourable public outcomes and under what conditions. Against this background, this paper examined empirical evidence on government public relations strategies and their policy outcomes, with particular attention to studies from Nigeria and comparable developing-country contexts.

Conceptualizing Government Public Relations (GPR)

Government public relations (GPR) is a distinct area of public relations concerned with how public institutions communicate, engage and build relationships with citizens and other stakeholders. Despite increasing scholarly attention, the concept has not historically been associated with a single universally accepted definition (Lee et al., 2023). Dolea (2012) asserts that GPR involves the use of public relations by public institutions to advance their missions and achieve organisational goals. Importantly, the author distinguishes between an instrumental view of public relations, in which communication is primarily used to improve organisational efficiency, and a strategic view that regards PR as a management function concerned with building and maintaining relationships. This suggests that GPR extends beyond the dissemination of government information to encompass the strategic management of relationships between government and its publics.

Similarly, Achor and Okoye (2015) assert that GPR involves the effective application of public relations principles, techniques and strategies by government to facilitate governance and



inform the public about government policies, issues, events and problems, while promoting mutual understanding and trust between government, citizens and other publics. This is significant because it connects the informational function of GPR with broader relational outcomes. Thus, government communication is not merely intended to make citizens aware of government activities but also to facilitate understanding, trust and effective government–public relations. Corroborating this view, Olabanjo et al. (2019) conceptualise public relations at the grassroots level as a means of managing relationships between government institutions and their publics through communication and attention to citizens’ views, with the objectives of creating awareness, mutual understanding and goodwill. This submission reinforces the relational character of public relations in local governance, while also showing that existing PR practices had not meaningfully translated into greater public awareness of local government and traditional council activities.

Dong et al. (2023) identify a range of GPR functions, including public information, crisis and disaster communication, national image building, citizen and community engagement, and communication associated with democratic processes. These functions indicate that GPR operates across both routine and exceptional circumstances and involves multiple forms of interaction between government institutions and their publics. GPR can therefore be understood not simply as a mechanism for communicating government policies but as a strategic management function through which government institutions provide information, facilitate public understanding, engage stakeholders and manage relationships in pursuit of public-sector and governance objectives. This supports the submission by Gbaden and Bamigboye (2024), who illustrate that government PR can combine information dissemination with stakeholder engagement, trust-building and efforts to influence public acceptance of government interventions. Thus, GPR strategies are not limited to traditional media publicity but may involve multiple communication channels and stakeholder relationships depending on the policy issue and the publics involved.

Theoretical Framework

This study is first anchored on the Theory of Value in Public Relations, which was pioneered by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) research team as part of the landmark Excellence Study (Grunig et al., 1992). Grunig et al. (1992) argue that truly effective corporations or government entities are those capable of identifying and achieving objectives that are vital both to their internal operations and to the public interest within their operating environment. Within this review, the theory provides a normative benchmark for evaluating whether government communication operates as an organic, trust-building dialogue or as a mechanical, top-down transmission of messages.

The second theory that guided the study is Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which was developed by Howard Giles in the 1970s. The theory proposes that individuals adjust their communication strategies during social interactions to align with or differentiate themselves from others based on psychological and social motives (Giles et al., 1973). In the context of public-sector communication, the theory helps explain how government messaging succeeds or fails. When state institutions adopt accessible language, local networks and empathetic messaging that align with citizens’ values, they practise convergence and may foster policy acceptance. However, reliance on elite, bureaucratic media broadcasts can create a divergent stance that may deepen public scepticism and widen the trust gap.

Research Methods

This study employs a systematic qualitative literature review approach to analyse empirical research on government public relations (GPR) strategies and their outcomes. The review draws

directly from a corpus of empirical studies compiled from Google Scholar, AJOL, Web of Science and several university digital research databases, capturing research across diverse developing contexts, including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Indonesia, that investigate GPR and citizen perceptions. A structured coding framework was applied to systematically extract and map two core variables: the specific GPR strategies deployed by government bodies and their documented real-world outcomes. These findings were then evaluated through theoretical triangulation using the Theory of Value in Public Relations and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to explain why certain GPR approaches generate public trust, while others result in scepticism.

Data Presentation

S/N	Author(s)	Year	Country	Main Focus	Method	Outcome
1	Geremew	2017	Ethiopia (Harar and Dire Dawa towns)	Practices and challenges of public relations within two government organizations	Quantitative design using questionnaires distributed via simple random sampling with descriptive data analysis	PR practice was significantly underdeveloped and hindered by a lack of clear understanding of the strategic functions and roles of public relations.
2	Kaleli, Otslulah, and Mutisya	2021	Kenya (Central Government Ministries, Nairobi)	The role of public relations tools in sensitizing the public about government projects	Descriptive survey design utilizing a census of 162 state corporations targeting PR department heads through questionnaires and interviews, analyzed via SPSS and thematic analysis	All four core PR tools (media relations, community relations, sponsorships, and community events) had a positive and significant influence on public sensitization.
3	Anyijuka	2016	Uganda (Kampala - Microfinance Support Centre Limited)	The role of public relations in promoting government development programmes	Mixed-methods approach collecting data through questionnaires, key informant interviews, and secondary sources	PR practices like campaigns, lobbying, propaganda, and CSR were instrumental in program promotion, though institutional PR units remained underdeveloped.
4	Niswaty, Aswita, and Akib	2023	Indonesia (South Sulawesi - Regional Office of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights)	The role of public relations in improving information services	Descriptive qualitative design involving interviews with five informants and document analysis, processed through data condensation and presentation	Public relations plays a critical role in enhancing information services through expert advising, communication facilitation, problem-solving, and communication engineering.

5	Kede, Sultan, and Karnay	2021	Indonesia (Banggai District)	Interplay between government policies and the contribution of public relations during the COVID-19 public crisis	Descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach using observation, interviews, and documentation analyzed via the Miles and Huberman model	Local governments utilized hybrid communication channels combining new media and conventional platforms, where PR played a pivotal role in managing public perception.
6	Irawanto et al.	2022	Indonesia (Hulu Sungai Utara Regency)	The role of Public Relations in disseminating government programmes through social media	Qualitative data collection from key informants via interviews, observation, and documentation	Public relations played a significant communication role, but effectiveness was restricted by limited digital skills, poor infrastructure, and budget constraints.
7	Eyo and Onyewuchi	2025	Nigeria (Uyo)	Comparative exploration of public relations models adopted in Nigerian organizations across public and private sectors	Semi-structured interviews involving 22 purposively selected PR officers, analyzed thematically using Communication Accommodation Theory	Public organizations predominantly used the Press Agency/Publicity Model hindered by bureaucratic structures, whereas private entities favored the Two-Way Symmetrical Model.
8	Ahmed, Rabi'u, and Igyuve	2024	Nigeria (Selected States)	Evaluating public relations strategies of the Ministry of Education in promoting inclusive education for people with special needs	Descriptive survey design utilizing a structured questionnaire analyzed via descriptive statistical methods	While the Ministry utilized diverse PR tools, low commitment and depth of implementation resulted in only modest and minimal success.
9	Nwafor, Omoevah, and Umuze	2022	Nigeria (Anambra State)	Evaluation of how the state government managed COVID-19-related crises using public relations strategies	Library research method relying entirely on secondary sources to assess communication actions and inactions	The government successfully utilized press releases, briefings, announcements, town hall meetings, and multi-platform media to disseminate critical information.
10	Ejiogu, Clinton-Ogu, and Uwalaka	2024	Nigeria (Owerri Metropolis, Imo State)	Influence of public relations strategies on public acceptance of Imo State	Survey design utilizing questionnaires administered to a sample size of 384 selected through multi-stage sampling	High public exposure and awareness of government PR strategies did not significantly translate to project acceptance, revealing public

				government projects		indifference and a strategy-sentiment gap.
11	Omachi, Asemah, and Ekhareafu	2024	Nigeria (Ankpa LGA, Kogi State)	Public relations strategies in community engagement and their influence on community participation	Focus group discussions (FGD) with 100 participants analyzed using thematic analysis	Transparency, proactive engagement, and effective social media use positively influenced community participation, though misinformation and resource limitations remained barriers.

Result

The review covers 11 empirical studies published between 2016 and 2025. Five are from Nigeria, three from Indonesia, and one each from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. Six themes emerged from the coding describing common GPR strategies in developing nations:

The Publicity/Press Agency Approach

The data suggest that, within government public relations (GPR), publicity-based strategies such as press releases, briefings, announcements, campaigns and institutional media broadcasts are among the most commonly used approaches, generating high visibility without a corresponding level of public conviction. Eyo and Onyewuchi (2025) found that Nigerian public organisations predominantly employed the Press Agency/Publicity Model, constrained by bureaucratic structures, whereas private organisations favoured the Two-Way Symmetrical Model. Anyijuka (2016) similarly found that campaigns, lobbying and propaganda were used to promote government programmes in Uganda, even though institutional PR units remained underdeveloped. The approach does deliver on its immediate informational function, as Nwafor et al. (2022) showed that press releases, briefings and announcements were used to disseminate critical COVID-19 information in Anambra State. However, its limitations are particularly evident in Ejiogu et al. (2024), where high public exposure to and awareness of Imo State government PR strategies did not significantly translate into project acceptance, indicating a strategy–sentiment gap that the authors associated with public indifference.

The analysis suggests that GPR built primarily on publicity treats communication as the delivery of a completed message, thereby producing awareness without establishing a mechanism through which government can hear and respond to how citizens receive that message. Because limited feedback flows back to government, a feedback vacuum may emerge and, as an inference from the evidence, citizens may remain indifferent or sceptical. Viewed through the Theory of Value in Public Relations, this represents a limitation in achieving the mutual benefit that Grunig et al. (1992) place at the centre of effective public relations: while the government's objective of informing the public may be achieved, the public's interest in being heard is insufficiently addressed, thereby limiting the creation of shared value. From the perspective of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), this reflects divergence. Formal and bureaucratic communication may fail to sufficiently adapt to citizens' language, preferred channels and concerns, thereby creating psychological distance between government and its publics. This helps explain why exposure does not necessarily develop into conviction and why trust gaps may persist even where governments communicate frequently.



The Hybrid/Digital PR Approach

The review also suggests that hybrid GPR, which combines social media with conventional channels and multi-channel information campaigns, extends communication reach and speed but is undermined by weak institutional capacity and predominantly one-way use. Kede et al. (2021) found that local governments in Banggai District, Indonesia, used hybrid channels that combined new media and conventional platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, with PR playing a pivotal role in managing public perceptions. Nwafor et al. (2022) likewise associated Anambra State's communication efforts with the use of multi-platform media alongside briefings and town halls. However, the same body of evidence exposes the vulnerabilities of this approach. Irawanto et al. (2022) found that the dissemination of government programmes through social media in Hulu Sungai Utara was constrained by limited digital skills, inadequate infrastructure and budgetary limitations, while Omachi et al. (2024) found that although effective use of social media supported community participation, misinformation remained a significant barrier. The analysis suggests that digital channels change how far and how quickly a government message travels, but not necessarily the nature of the communication itself.

A government that uses social media primarily to post updates may reproduce the Press Agency/Publicity Model at greater speed, while citizens without access to devices, connectivity or adequate digital literacy may be excluded, potentially deepening the communication inequalities that public communication seeks to address. Because digital platforms are also open and interactive spaces, they are exposed to misinformation, which governments that do not actively engage in dialogue may find difficult to counter effectively. From the perspective of the Theory of Value in Public Relations, hybrid GPR creates greater value when digital channels are used to build relationships, for example, by answering questions, clarifying concerns and responding to rumours. When used primarily as broadcast tools, however, they provide greater reach without necessarily producing the mutual understanding that the theory identifies as a basis for public relations value. From the perspective of CAT, digital platforms create opportunities for convergence because they enable governments to communicate with citizens through familiar spaces, accessible language and more immediate forms of interaction. However, such convergence is realised only where the necessary institutional capacity exists and meaningful dialogue actually occurs. Where digital skills and infrastructure are inadequate, or where posting replaces interaction, the approach may reproduce divergence through a new medium. Hybrid GPR can therefore be understood as an unstable middle category whose outcomes depend less on the technology itself than on how government institutions deploy it.

The Participatory/Community-Centric Approach

The data suggest that participatory GPR, built around community relations, community events, town hall meetings and transparent, proactive grassroots engagement, produces the strongest participatory outcomes in the corpus because it shifts communication from transmission towards relationship building. Kaleli et al. (2021) found that community relations and community events, alongside media relations and sponsorships, each had a positive and significant influence on public sensitisation about government projects in Kenya. Nwafor et al. (2022) documented town hall meetings as part of the Anambra State government's crisis communication, while Omachi et al. (2024) found that transparency, proactive engagement and effective social media use positively influenced community participation in Ankpa LGA, Kogi State. The analysis suggests that these strategies work because they are interactive and locally grounded: face-to-face and community-based formats allow government to explain policies within their local context,



hear objections as they arise and demonstrate openness through visible transparency, thereby reducing the social distance between institutions and citizens.

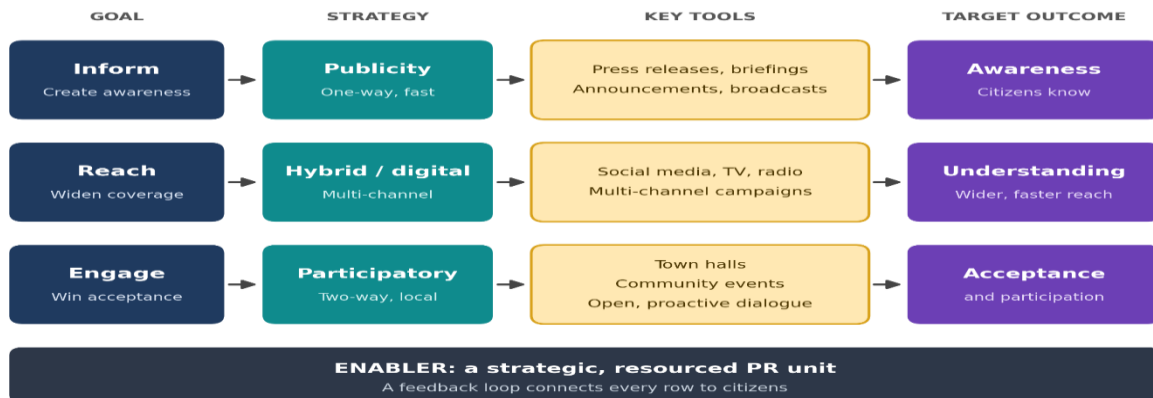
The approach however, has limitations. It requires staff, time and financial resources, as well as sustained institutional commitment, as suggested by the modest outcomes reported by Ahmed et al. (2024), where low commitment and limited depth of implementation constrained the effectiveness of an otherwise diverse set of PR tools. Moreover, the reviewed studies primarily measure sensitisation, participation and acceptance rather than long-term compliance or institutional trust directly. These outcomes should therefore be interpreted as indicators that participatory GPR may contribute to, rather than as direct evidence of sustained compliance or institutional trust. Viewed through the Theory of Value in Public Relations, participatory GPR comes closest to the mutual-benefit orientation described by Grunig et al. (1992), because government objectives, such as policy uptake, and citizens' interests, such as having a voice and obtaining clarity, are pursued through two-way exchange. The Two-Way Symmetrical Model identified by Eyo and Onyewuchi (2025) in the private sector further illustrates how this orientation can operate in practice. From the perspective of CAT, participatory GPR represents convergence in its fullest form: the message, setting, language and messenger can be adapted to local realities, creating conditions for greater acceptance than publicity alone may provide, as illustrated by the limited relationship between exposure and project acceptance reported by Ejiogu et al. (2024).

Conclusion/Implication

This study sought out to review government public relations (GPR) strategies and their outcomes across selected empirical studies in developing contexts, using the Theory of Value in Public Relations and Communication Accommodation Theory to explain why some approaches build public trust while others breed skepticism. The review found that publicity-based GPR delivers high visibility but little acceptance, hybrid and digital GPR extends reach but is undermined by weak capacity and one-way use, and participatory, community-centred GPR produces the strongest participation, so that GPR is reliably effective at informing citizens but inconsistent at persuading or involving them. The implication is that governments should position PR as a strategic, resourced, and genuinely two-way function, using publicity and digital channels for speed and scale while investing in participatory engagement and feedback mechanisms that convert awareness into acceptance, and should measure success by acceptance and participation, not by reach alone.

The review led to the development of Goal-Strategy-Outcome Model for Effective Government Public Relations which provides a structured, multi-tiered framework designed to transform how public institutions communicate with citizens. The model is illustrated below:

Goal-Strategy-Outcome Model for Effective Government Public Relations



The Goal-Strategy-Outcome Model for Effective Government Public Relations operates across four columns: Goal, Strategy, Key Tools, and Target Outcome spanning three progressive tiers supported by a foundational base: the first tier aims to Inform by using one-way publicity tools like press releases to build basic awareness; the second tier seeks to Reach wider demographics through hybrid digital campaigns and media channels to foster understanding; and the third tier strives to Engage citizens through local, relational town halls and proactive dialogue to secure true policy acceptance and participation. Underpinning these tiers is a foundational enabler a strategically resourced PR unit functioning as an independent management function rather than an afterthought coupled with a dynamic feedback loop that connects citizens to every level to ensure communication remains an interactive, two-way symmetrical conversation.

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AI Use Disclosure: AI Use Declaration:

Claude AI was used to refine and recreate the model based on the researcher's manually designed version. The authors retain full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.