



Public Relations and Uyo Residents' Perception of the Activities of ECEWS/FHI 360 in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between public relations efforts and Uyo residents' perceptions of the activities of the Excellence Community Education Welfare Scheme (ECEWS) and Family Health International 360 (FHI 360) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated residents' recognition and exposure to the organisations' public relations activities, their interpretation of messages and perceived relevance of the activities, factors influencing their perceptions, and reported behavioural responses. Anchored in Social Perception Theory, the study adopted a survey research design. From an estimated population of 1,457,000 residents of Uyo Metropolis, a sample of 400 respondents was selected through multistage sampling involving clustering, purposive selection and convenience sampling across Etoi, Ikono, Ofot and Oku. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, and 396 completed copies were retrieved, representing a 99% response rate. Data were analysed using frequency distributions, weighted mean scores and Pearson's product-moment correlation. Findings showed that recognition and exposure were highest for radio and television health messages, health-service promotion, public campaigns and community outreach, while social media recorded comparatively low exposure. Respondents generally assessed the organisations' messages as useful, credible, trustworthy and clear and considered their activities relevant to community health needs. Trust in information sources (82%), message clarity (78%) and frequency of exposure (75%) were the most frequently reported influences on perception. Behavioural responses recorded a weighted mean score of 3.31, indicating a high level of perceived influence. Based on the above, the study concludes that accessible, credible and locally relevant public relations communication is important to how residents perceive and respond to NGO activities. Therefore, ECEWS and FHI 360 should sustain effective traditional and community-based communication, strengthen digital engagement, prioritise clear and trustworthy messages, and provide opportunities for community feedback and participation.

Keywords: public relations, residents' perceptions, ECEWS, FHI 360, non-governmental organisations

Introduction

Public relations (PR) has evolved beyond publicity, press agency and one-way information dissemination into a strategic communication function concerned with relationship management, trust, organisational legitimacy, dialogue and sustained stakeholder engagement (Grunig, 2006; Ledingham, 2001). Public relations scholarship emphasises the importance of building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics, recognising that organisational effectiveness depends partly on how stakeholders perceive and respond to



organisational activities (Ledingham, 2001). Effective stakeholder communication is particularly important for nonprofit and development-oriented organisations because their programmes often depend on community participation, institutional partnerships, public confidence and sustained support from funding organisations. Research on nonprofit organisations has similarly highlighted the importance of managing relationships with diverse stakeholders through appropriate communication channels and sustained two-way engagement (Mato-Santiso et al., 2021; Maxwell, 2014). Therefore, public relations in health- and development-oriented NGOs extends beyond announcing programmes to communicating in ways that enable community members to understand, evaluate and respond to organisational interventions.

The relevance of public relations is particularly evident in the activities of the Excellence Community Education Welfare Scheme (ECEWS) and Family Health International 360 (FHI 360), two organisations involved in health and development interventions in Nigeria. ECEWS is an indigenous Nigerian nonprofit organisation established in 2001 to improve the quality of life of vulnerable populations through healthcare, education and economic empowerment. According to the organisation's official profile, its activities include health interventions, educational initiatives, economic strengthening and partnerships with government agencies and international development organisations (Excellence Community Education Welfare Scheme [ECEWS], n.d.). FHI 360, an international development organisation that began working in Nigeria in 1975, supports health outcomes, health-system strengthening, education, nutrition and humanitarian assistance through collaborations with government institutions and local partners (FHI 360, n.d.). Its Nigerian interventions have included the Strengthening Integrated Delivery of HIV/AIDS Services (SIDHAS) project, which supported the delivery of HIV and tuberculosis prevention, treatment and care services (FHI 360, n.d.).

The activities of these organisations provide a relevant context for examining the relationship between public relations efforts and residents' perceptions of NGO interventions in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Health and development programmes require more than the provision of services; they also require effective communication that enables intended beneficiaries to understand the purpose, relevance and potential benefits of interventions. Residents may encounter organisational messages through radio and television, health facilities, public campaigns, community meetings, printed materials, social media and interactions with community leaders. These encounters may influence their awareness of organisational activities, assessments of message credibility, perceptions of programme relevance and willingness to participate in interventions. However, exposure to communication does not necessarily produce favourable perceptions, as residents may interpret messages in relation to their previous experiences, information needs, community expectations and trust in the organisations involved.

Although public relations and stakeholder engagement are recognised as important to nonprofit organisational relationships, understanding how community members interpret these activities remains essential to assessing their communication value (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016). Organisational visibility alone does not establish whether messages are considered credible, relevant or useful by the intended publics. Examining residents' perceptions therefore provides an opportunity to assess how public relations efforts relate to message interpretation, perceived organisational credibility and behavioural responses. Against this background, the study examined the relationship between public relations efforts and Uyo residents' perceptions of the activities of ECEWS and FHI 360, with particular attention to communication exposure, message



interpretation, perceived relevance, factors influencing perception and reported behavioural responses.

Statement of the Research Problem

Public relations activities undertaken by health- and development-oriented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should promote public awareness, facilitate understanding of interventions, establish trust and encourage meaningful community participation. For organisations such as the Excellence Community Education Welfare Scheme (ECEWS) and Family Health International 360 (FHI 360), achieving these outcomes is important because the success of their health and development programmes depends partly on how intended beneficiaries perceive and respond to their activities. However, the implementation of public relations activities does not necessarily guarantee that residents understand, trust or consider the communicated interventions relevant. Although ECEWS and FHI 360 undertake health-related and community development initiatives, the existence of these activities alone does not establish the extent to which residents of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, recognise their communication efforts, understand their messages or develop favourable perceptions of their interventions. Residents may interpret organisational messages differently depending on their previous experiences, the credibility of information sources, message clarity and the perceived relevance of the activities to their needs. Nevertheless, the extent to which these factors relate to residents' perceptions requires empirical examination rather than assumption.

This gap has important implications for NGO communication and programme implementation. Without evidence of how residents interpret organisational communication, NGOs may find it difficult to determine whether their public relations efforts achieve their intended relational and behavioural outcomes or identify the communication factors requiring improvement. Previous public relations scholarship has examined organisational relationships, stakeholder engagement and the importance of communication in building trust and legitimacy (Ledingham, 2001). However, these broader perspectives do not, on their own, establish how residents in Uyo perceive the specific public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360. In particular, the relationship between residents' exposure to these activities, their interpretation of messages, perceived relevance, factors influencing their perceptions and reported behavioural responses requires context-specific investigation. Consequently, this study examined the relationship between public relations efforts and Uyo residents' perceptions of the activities of ECEWS and FHI 360.

Research Questions

1. What public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 are recognised and encountered by residents of Uyo Metropolis?
2. How do Uyo residents interpret the public relations messages of ECEWS and FHI 360, and how relevant do they consider the organisations' activities to their community needs?
3. What factors influence Uyo residents' perception of the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360?
4. To what extent does residents' perception of ECEWS and FHI 360 influence their behavioural response to the organisations' activities?



Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between Uyo residents' extent of exposure to ECEWS/FHI 360 public relations efforts and their perception of the credibility of the organisations in Akwa Ibom State.

Literature Review

Existing studies from Nigeria and other settings, especially within Africa, highlight the importance of understanding communication within local health and development environments. Abah et al. (2025) examined community-level health communication practices and challenges in Akwa Ibom, Anambra and Kano States using a qualitative design. The study highlights the relevant evidence on how health information is communicated within Nigerian communities and the practical challenges associated with such communication. Similarly, Ilesanmi et al. (2021) investigated trust in COVID-19 risk communication among 691 respondents in Ondo State through a cross-sectional survey. Their findings showed that trust in the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control's communication was not universal, demonstrating that the availability and circulation of public health information do not automatically produce confidence in its source. Although the two studies address different health communication settings, they jointly underscore the need to examine both communication practices and recipients' assessments of the information they receive. Nevertheless, neither study directly establishes how residents perceive the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 in Uyo.

Research on nonprofit communication in other African settings reinforces the importance of message relevance and community engagement. Tsinga-Mambadja et al. (2024) surveyed 245 employees of nonprofit organisations in Gauteng, South Africa, and analysed the relationships among message content, support for community-related activities and communication outcomes. Their findings indicated positive relationships among these variables, with community-related support contributing to communication outcomes. This suggests that communicating an organisation's community commitments may be more meaningful when messages are connected to tangible activities. However, because the respondents were organisational employees rather than community beneficiaries, the findings primarily reflect organisational perspectives on communication effectiveness. While this large-scale study provides valuable evidence about organisational communication practices, digital presence and audience engagement metrics do not necessarily establish whether residents trust messages, consider programmes relevant or respond favourably to interventions. Together, these African studies demonstrate the importance of context and community-oriented communication while exposing the need to investigate communication outcomes from the perspectives of intended beneficiaries.

Another strand of literature examines the relationship between communication strategies and public engagement in digital environments. Klafke et al. (2021) employed content analysis and regression analysis to investigate interactions between nonprofit organisations and online users on Facebook. Their methodological approach demonstrated the value of examining actual communication and engagement behaviour rather than relying exclusively on organisational claims. Zhang et al. (2023), analysing 301,559 tweets from 100 large nonprofit organisations, found that different forms of interactivity and emotional expression had varying relationships with likes and retweets. Their findings caution against assuming that every interactive or emotionally framed message produces the same engagement outcome. Similarly, Ihm (2024) investigated nonprofit communication strategies through two surveys involving 375 and 74 organisations. The



study showed that organisations adapted their social media activities to different stakeholder networks and their potential for collective and connective action. These studies collectively indicate that communication effectiveness depends on the interaction between message characteristics, audience networks and communication objectives. Nevertheless, their emphasis on digital content, organisational strategies and observable online engagement leaves unresolved how residents interpret communication encountered through both traditional and digital channels in a specific local community.

The importance of examining communication as a relational process is also evident in broader nonprofit scholarship. Mato-Santiso et al (2021) identified the need for broader stakeholder perspectives, stronger two-way interaction, better integration of online and offline communication channels, and further theoretical and methodological development. This synthesis is important because it indicates that nonprofit communication research has not fully resolved how organisations should combine communication channels to maintain relationships with stakeholders who have different needs and expectations. Letiche et al. (2024), examining NGO stakeholder engagement in digital environments, further questioned whether online communication necessarily enables meaningful stakeholder relationships. Their analysis highlighted the limitations of communication environments dominated by organisational information provision, particularly where stakeholders have limited opportunities for reciprocal engagement. These contributions converge on the argument that visibility and information dissemination are insufficient measures of effective stakeholder relations. However, the systematic review identifies broad research priorities, while the digital engagement analysis focuses on the conditions of online communication; neither directly measures the combined influence of exposure, message interpretation, perceived relevance and behavioural response among residents in Uyo.

Additional evidence illustrates the complexity of translating communication into meaningful participation. Ihm's (2022) content analysis of individual posts on the social media pages of 100 large nonprofit organisations showed that users could employ organisational platforms to express opinions, influence others and develop networks beyond the organisations themselves. This finding challenges the assumption that organisations fully control how their messages are interpreted or circulated. In a related study, Tsinga-Mambadja et al. (2024) demonstrated that communication outcomes were associated with message content and support for community-related activities, suggesting that the substance of an intervention and the way it is communicated should be considered together. Although these studies examine different communication settings, both indicate that public engagement is shaped by factors extending beyond the initial message. Their limitations are equally important: digital posts and organisational communication outcomes cannot, on their own, explain how residents evaluate the credibility, usefulness and local relevance of NGO activities or whether those evaluations correspond with reported behavioural responses.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Perception Theory, drawing on Solomon E. Asch's work on impression formation (1946). The theory explains how individuals organise and interpret information about people, groups and organisations to develop an overall impression. Asch demonstrated that the perception of an individual is not determined by the simple accumulation of isolated characteristics but by the way different cues interact, with some characteristics exerting



greater influence on the overall impression than others (Nakanishi & Midooka, 2022; Nauts et al. 2014). This perspective provides a useful basis for understanding how residents perceive the public relations activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Applied to the activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, the theory suggests that residents form impressions of these organisations through their exposure to communication messages, community outreach programmes, interpersonal interactions, media reports and personal experiences. These encounters may shape residents' assessments of the organisations' credibility, relevance, transparency and usefulness. The theory also explains why residents may perceive the same communication activity differently. Factors such as previous encounters with the organisations, information received from community members, cultural backgrounds and expectations of NGO programmes may influence how individuals interpret communication messages. For instance, residents who consider an organisation's messages clear, credible and relevant to their needs may develop favourable perceptions of its activities, whereas those who regard its communication as inadequate or disconnected from their concerns may develop less favourable impressions. Although Social Perception Theory places considerable emphasis on individual interpretation and impression formation, it offers a relevant analytical lens for examining residents' perceptions of NGO public relations activities. It helps explain how communication encounters and associated social cues contribute to the impressions residents form about ECEWS and FHI 360.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design to quantify residents' recognition and exposure to the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360, message interpretation, perceived relevance, influencing factors and behavioural responses. The population comprised residents of Uyo Metropolis, estimated at approximately 1,457,000 in 2025. Taro Yamane's formula was used to determine a sample size of 400 respondents, distributed equally across four clusters: Etoi, Ikono, Ofot and Oku, with 100 respondents allocated to each. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed, involving clustering, purposive selection of eligible adults aged 18 years and above who had resided in Uyo for at least three years and possessed direct or indirect experience or knowledge of the organisations' activities, and convenience sampling to recruit willing participants from homes, offices, churches, markets and other public spaces. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results

Table 1. *Residents' Recognition of the Public Relations Activities of ECEWS and FHI 360*

Recognised activity	Yes, n (%)	No, n (%)	Not sure, n (%)
Radio/TV health awareness	320 (81)	26 (7)	50 (13)
Community outreach	300 (76)	36 (9)	60 (15)
Information materials	240 (61)	66 (17)	90 (23)
Social media campaigns	210 (53)	76 (19)	110 (28)
School/youth engagement	250 (63)	56 (14)	90 (23)
Community leaders/groups	270 (68)	46 (12)	80 (20)
Public campaigns/events	310 (78)	26 (7)	60 (15)
Health service promotion	315 (80)	26 (7)	55 (14)
No exposure to any activity	40 (10)	266 (67)	90 (23)

Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers; therefore, some rows may not total exactly 100%.

Table 1 shows that residents recognised several public relations activities associated with ECEWS and FHI 360. Radio and television health awareness messages recorded the highest recognition, with 320 respondents (81%) answering yes, followed by health service promotion (315; 80%), public campaigns and events (310; 78%), and community outreach programmes (300; 76%). Recognition was comparatively lower for community-leader collaboration (68%), school and youth engagement (63%), informational materials (61%) and social media campaigns (53%). Social media also recorded the highest proportion of respondents who were unsure whether they recognised the activity (28%). Furthermore, only 40 respondents (10%) reported exposure to none of the listed activities, while 266 (67%) indicated that they had encountered at least one activity, as implied by their response to the final item. The findings suggest that residents' recognition was more pronounced for broadcast communication, health service promotion and public campaigns than for digital communication and informational materials.

Table 2. *Extent of Residents' Exposure to the Public Relations Activities of ECEWS and FHI 360*

Communication channel/activity	Weighted mean score (WMS)	Decision
Radio/TV health messages	3.32	High
Health service promotion	3.22	High
Public campaigns/events	3.10	High
Community outreach	3.05	High
School/youth engagement	Not reported	Above benchmark
Community-leader collaboration	Not reported	Above benchmark
Informational materials	2.64	Moderate
Social media campaigns	2.41	Low
Overall exposure	3.45	High

Note: *The benchmark for interpreting exposure was 2.50.*

Table 2 indicates that residents' overall exposure to the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 was high, with a WMS of 3.45. Radio and television health messages recorded a mean of 3.32, followed by health service promotion (3.22), public campaigns and events (3.10), and community outreach (3.05). Informational materials recorded a comparatively moderate mean of 2.64, while social media campaigns were the only listed channel below the 2.50 benchmark, with a WMS of 2.41. School/youth engagement and community-leader collaboration were reported to be above the benchmark, although their exact means were unavailable. The pattern suggests that exposure was concentrated in traditional broadcast media, community interactions and communication associated with health services. The comparatively low social media score indicates that digital channels did not achieve the same level of reported exposure as the more prominent channels.

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Community outreach	3.05	High
School/youth engagement	Not reported	Above benchmark
Community-leader collaboration	Not reported	Above benchmark
Informational materials	2.64	Moderate
Social media campaigns	2.41	Low
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Table 4. Residents' Interpretation of ECEWS and FHI 360 Public Relations Messages

Interpretive dimension	Mean	Decision
Trustworthy–Untrustworthy	3.36	Positive
Clear–Unclear	3.34	Positive
Relevant–Irrelevant	3.30	Positive
Credible–Not credible	3.38	Positive
Easy–Difficult	3.29	Positive
Convincing–Not convincing	3.21	Positive
Useful–Not useful	3.44	Positive

Note: The decision benchmark was 2.50, as specified in the study.

Table 4 shows that all seven dimensions of message interpretation exceeded the 2.50 benchmark, indicating generally favourable evaluations of the public relations messages encountered by residents. Usefulness recorded the highest mean (3.44), followed by credibility (3.38), trustworthiness (3.36), clarity (3.34), relevance (3.30) and ease of understanding (3.29). Convincingness recorded the lowest mean (3.21), although it remained above the benchmark. The results suggest that residents generally considered the messages useful, credible, trustworthy and reasonably easy to understand. The relatively high usefulness score indicates that the communication was perceived as having practical value, while the lower convincingness score suggests that favourable assessments of information did not necessarily translate into equally strong persuasive effects. Overall, the findings indicate positive message interpretation, although they do not establish that every resident held favourable views or that the messages produced changes in attitudes or behaviour.

Table 5. Residents' Perceived Relevance of ECEWS and FHI 360 Activities to Community Needs

Relevance dimension	WMS	Decision
Addresses important health needs	3.34	High
Relevant to residents' well-being	3.32	High
Focuses on important local issues	3.31	High
Reflects real health challenges	3.26	High
Useful in addressing health concerns	3.37	High
Timely and appropriate	3.25	High

Note: The decision benchmark was 2.50.

Table 4 indicates that residents generally considered the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 relevant to community health needs, as all six dimensions exceeded the 2.50



benchmark. Usefulness in addressing health concerns recorded the highest mean (3.37), followed by addressing important health needs (3.34), relevance to residents' well-being (3.32), focus on important local issues (3.31), reflection of real health challenges (3.26), and timeliness and appropriateness (3.25). These findings suggest that residents viewed the activities favourably, particularly where communication addressed practical health concerns and issues affecting their well-being. However, the comparatively lower score for timeliness and appropriateness indicates that this dimension received a less favourable assessment than the others, although it remained positive. The results therefore suggest that perceived relevance was strongest in relation to the usefulness of the activities, while the timing of communication may warrant further attention.

Table 6. *Factors Influencing Residents' Perceptions*

Influencing factor	Reported influence (%)
Trust in information source	82
Clarity of messages	78
Frequency of exposure	75
Personal health-service experience	71
Education/message understanding	68
Community/opinion leaders	66
Social media/peer influence	61

Table 6 shows that trust in the information source was the most frequently reported factor influencing residents' perceptions, accounting for 82%, followed by message clarity (78%) and frequency of exposure (75%). Personal experience with health services accounted for 71%, while education and message understanding recorded 68%. Community and opinion leaders accounted for 66%, and social media and peer influence recorded the lowest percentage (61%). The findings indicate that source credibility, clarity and repeated exposure were particularly prominent considerations in how residents assessed the organisations' activities. The importance of personal health-service experience further suggests that perceptions were associated not only with communication messages but also with residents' encounters with health services. Community leaders, peers and social networks also featured in residents' assessments, although they recorded lower percentages than trust, clarity and frequency of exposure. These percentages represent the reported influence of each factor; they should not be interpreted as evidence that the factors independently caused particular perceptions or that the differences between them are statistically significant.

Table 7. *Distribution of Respondents by Perceived Extent of Behavioural Response (N = 396)*

Overall response category	Frequency	Weight	Weighted score
Very great extent	208	4	832
Great extent	122	3	366
Moderate extent	46	2	92
Little extent	20	1	20
Total	396	—	1,310

Note: The weighted mean is calculated by dividing the total weighted score by the number of respondents: $(1,310 \div 396 = 3.31)$.

Table 7 shows that 208 respondents reported that the organisations' activities influenced their behavioural responses to a very great extent, while 122 reported a great extent of influence. A further 46 respondents indicated a moderate extent, and 20 reported little extent. Together, the first two categories accounted for 330 respondents, representing approximately 83.3% of the sample. The total weighted score of 1,310 produced an overall weighted mean of 3.31, indicating



a high level of perceived influence under the study's interpretation framework. The behavioural dimensions covered participation in programmes, acceptance of promoted health services, acting on information received, sharing messages, willingness to engage and responding positively to campaigns. These findings suggest that residents generally perceived the organisations' communication activities as relevant to their responses. However, the overall weighted mean summarises the reported extent of influence and does not independently establish that every behavioural dimension was equally strong or that communication directly caused observable behavioural change.

Test of Hypothesis

The study tested the relationship between residents' exposure to the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 and their perceived credibility of the organisations' communication.

Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between residents' exposure to the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 and their perceived credibility of the organisations' communication.

Table 8: Pearson Correlation Test of Exposure and Perceived Credibility

Statistical parameter	Reported value
Pearson correlation coefficient (r)	0.999
Degrees of freedom (df)	2
Critical value at $\alpha = 0.05$	0.950
Decision	Reject H_0 , subject to verification

Table 8 presents a reported Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.999, indicating an exceptionally strong positive linear relationship between exposure and perceived credibility in the analysed data. The study reported two degrees of freedom and a critical value of 0.950 at the 0.05 significance level. On the basis of these reported values, the null hypothesis was rejected because the calculated correlation exceeded the critical value. The result suggests that higher exposure was associated with higher perceived credibility in the analysed scores. However, the statistical result requires verification before a definitive conclusion is drawn. In particular, the analysis was reportedly based on only four paired category scores, which would yield two degrees of freedom for a conventional Pearson correlation. The underlying observations, construction of the paired scores, coding and statistical output should therefore be checked to confirm that the correlation was calculated appropriately and that the reported significance decision is valid. The correlation also establishes neither causation nor a direct relationship between perceived credibility and behavioural response. Accordingly, the result should be interpreted as evidence of an exceptionally strong reported association between exposure and perceived credibility, subject to confirmation of the analysis.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question examined the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360 that residents recognise and encounter in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Findings revealed that recognition was highest for radio and television health awareness messages (81%), health service promotion (80%), public campaigns and events (78%), and community outreach (76%). Overall exposure was high (WMS = 3.45), while social media recorded the lowest exposure mean (2.41), indicating greater reported encounters through traditional media and community-based activities. These findings align with Abah et al. (2025), who highlighted the importance of community-level health communication, while Klafke et al. (2021) and Zhang et al. (2023) demonstrate that digital



communication and audience engagement vary across contexts. The findings also reinforce Ilesanmi et al. (2021), whose study showed that the circulation of health information does not automatically guarantee public trust. From the perspective of Social Perception Theory, repeated encounters with communication messages and outreach activities provide cues through which residents form overall impressions of the organisations (Asch, 1946). However, exposure alone does not establish understanding, trust or favourable evaluation. The findings therefore suggest that ECEWS and FHI 360 should maintain effective traditional and community-based channels while strengthening accessible digital communication to reach diverse audiences.

The second research question examined how residents interpreted ECEWS and FHI 360 messages and assessed the relevance of their public relations activities to community needs. Findings revealed favourable evaluations, with usefulness recording the highest interpretation mean (3.44), followed by credibility (3.38), trustworthiness (3.36) and clarity (3.34). Perceived relevance was also high, particularly in addressing health concerns (3.37) and important health needs (3.34), although the lower convincingness score (3.21) suggests that positive evaluations did not necessarily translate into equally strong persuasive effects. These findings align with Tsinga-Mambadja et al. (2024), who established positive relationships among message content, support for community-related activities and communication outcomes, while contrasting with Ilesanmi et al. (2021), whose findings showed that trust in public health communication was not universal. Furthermore, Letiche et al. (2024) emphasised the importance of two-way interaction and meaningful stakeholder engagement beyond information dissemination. From the perspective of Social Perception Theory, residents combine cues such as usefulness, credibility, clarity and relevance to form overall impressions of the organisations (Asch, 1946). However, favourable impressions do not automatically produce persuasion or behavioural change. The findings therefore suggest that ECEWS and FHI 360 should strengthen locally relevant, clear and credible communication while creating opportunities for dialogue and feedback to improve the persuasive value of their public relations activities.

The third research question examined the factors influencing residents' perceptions of the public relations activities of ECEWS and FHI 360. Findings identified trust in the information source as the strongest factor (82%), followed by message clarity (78%), frequency of exposure (75%), personal health-service experience (71%), education and message understanding (68%), community and opinion leaders (66%), and social media and peer influence (61%). The prominence of trust aligns with Ilesanmi et al. (2021), whose findings demonstrated that confidence in public health information sources cannot be taken for granted, while Zhang et al. (2023) showed that communication characteristics have varying relationships with online engagement. Similarly, Ihm (2022, 2024) highlighted the role of social networks and stakeholder relationships in nonprofit communication. The present findings extend these studies by identifying the relative prominence of source trust, message clarity and personal and social experiences in residents' perceptions of NGO activities. Social Perception Theory provides an explanation for this pattern, as individuals combine cues relating to source credibility, message accessibility, repeated exposure and personal experiences to form overall impressions of organisations (Asch, 1946). However, the reported percentages indicate the relative prominence of these factors rather than their independent causal effects. The findings therefore suggest that ECEWS and FHI 360 should prioritise credible information, clear and accessible messages, consistent communication



and constructive engagement with community leaders, while recognising that residents' perceptions are shaped by multiple interacting influences.

The fourth research question examined the extent to which residents' perceptions of ECEWS and FHI 360 were associated with behavioural responses to their public relations activities. The findings produced an overall weighted mean of 3.31, indicating a generally high level of reported behavioural response, including participation in activities, service acceptance, action on information received, message sharing and willingness to engage with the organisations. These findings align with Tsinga-Mambadja et al. (2024), who identified positive relationships among message content, support for community-related activities and communication outcomes, and Ihm (2022), whose study demonstrated how audiences could use nonprofit social media platforms to express opinions, influence others and share information. They also reinforce the 2021 systematic review of stakeholder management in Public Relations Review and Letiche et al. (2024), which emphasised the importance of reciprocal communication and meaningful stakeholder engagement. From the perspective of Social Perception Theory, residents who perceive organisational messages as credible, clear and relevant may be more willing to participate, accept services or share information (Asch, 1946). However, the weighted mean reflects reported responses rather than independently verified behavioural change, and the exceptionally high correlation between exposure and perceived credibility ($r = 0.999$) requires verification before substantive conclusions are drawn. Moreover, this correlation does not directly establish a relationship between perception and behaviour. The findings therefore suggest that ECEWS and FHI 360 should strengthen credible, relevant and interactive communication while assessing whether favourable perceptions translate into sustained participation and observable behavioural outcomes.

Conclusion

The study establishes that public relations efforts are important instruments in shaping how residents interpret, value and respond to NGO activities. In Uyo Metropolis, ECEWS and FHI 360 activities were widely recognised and encountered, especially through radio/television health communication, health-service promotion, public campaigns and community outreach. Residents interpreted the messages positively and considered the activities relevant to community health needs. Trust and clarity emerged as especially important influences, while perception was associated with a high level of behavioural response. The study therefore concludes that effective NGO public relations is not simply a visibility exercise; it is a relationship-building process in which accessible channels, credible information, clear messages, community relevance and stakeholder experience interact to shape public response.



Recommendations

1. ECEWS and FHI 360 should retain traditional media particularly radio and television as the backbone of health communication, while strengthening digital communication with interactive.
2. Message design should prioritise clarity, simplicity, accuracy and practical usefulness, and programmes should remain community-driven by giving residents opportunities to identify priority health concerns, give feedback and participate in communication planning.
3. Trust-building should remain a core PR objective, with credible health professionals, respected community leaders and other trusted spokespersons integrated into communication, and communication claims should be consistently matched with residents' actual service experiences to protect credibility.
4. ECEWS and FHI 360 communication should be evaluated continuously through feedback, perception and behavioural indicators so that message content and channel selection can be adjusted where necessary.

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None.