



Issues in the Use of Public Relations to Promote Organisational Goals in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the issues surrounding the use of public relations (PR) in promoting organisational goals within tertiary education institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. Anchored in the Excellence Theory of Public Relations, the research adopts a descriptive survey design, targeting registered PR practitioners working in selected tertiary education institutions. Of the 30 identified members of the target population, 26 respondents completed a questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. The findings reveal that the strategic application of PR in promoting organisational goals is moderate, hindered by ethical and managerial challenges. Key ethical issues include a lack of transparency and conflicts of interest, while managerial challenges such as inadequate resource allocation, poor interdepartmental communication, and misconceptions about PR's role significantly undermine its effectiveness. The study recommends prioritising the integration of PR into strategic planning, enhancing training for management and staff, developing comprehensive PR frameworks, and improving funding and leadership support for PR activities in tertiary institutions, as proposed by the Excellence Theory of Public Relations.

Keywords: Public relations, organisational goals, tertiary education, Benue State, Excellence Theory.

Introduction

Public relations (PR) is an essential element of organisational strategy, aimed at creating and maintaining positive relationships between an organisation and its various stakeholders. As an integral part of communication within an organisation, PR contributes significantly to achieving

organisational goals. Scholars and practitioners alike have recognised that effective PR practice is directly linked to an organisation's overall success (Gilaninia, Taleghani, & Mohammadi, 2013). The scope of public relations is often misunderstood, with many people mistakenly associating it with tactics such as image manipulation, publicity stunts, or propaganda. This narrow view overlooks the strategic and multifaceted role that PR plays in enhancing organisational growth. Public relations, as Adjin-Tettey, Allotey, Ogoe, and Anyomi (2020) note, is a management function that focuses on evaluating public attitudes, identifying policies in alignment with public interest, and executing programmes to gain public understanding and support. In this light, PR is far more than a promotional tool; it is a vital mechanism that helps an organisation maintain ethical communication, manage crises, and build long-term relationships that support its mission and values. Effective PR practice, therefore, is crucial for promoting organisational goals, ensuring that communication strategies are aligned with the broader objectives of the organisation (Grunig & Toth, 2007).

As organisations evolve in an increasingly complex and competitive environment, PR practitioners must contend with a range of issues that can either hinder or support their efforts to promote organisational goals. One of the most critical challenges is the ethical dimension of PR practice. Ethical concerns, including the use of deceptive tactics or manipulation, can undermine the credibility of an organisation and harm its relationship with key publics. According to Rosenberg (2013), many organisations mistakenly associate PR with propagandistic efforts to create a false image or hide undesirable truths. However, ethical public relations should be based on transparency, honesty, and respect for public opinion, as these values foster trust and help organisations build positive, lasting relationships with their audiences.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of PR, many organisations still view it as a secondary function, only prioritising it during times of crisis. This perception limits the potential of PR to be a proactive tool for achieving organisational goals. Public relations professionals are often called upon to manage the fallout from organisational missteps or crises, but they should also play a central role in shaping the strategic direction of the organisation by proactively building relationships and engaging with stakeholders before issues arise (Mandela, 2024). Moreover, the integration of PR with other disciplines such as marketing, advertising, and sales adds complexity to its role in achieving organisational goals.

A further challenge lies in the lack of understanding within organisations about the true value of PR. Many businesses struggle to recognise the full potential of public relations, viewing it merely as a tool for handling media relations or managing crises. This limited understanding results in underinvestment in PR activities and a failure to leverage its capabilities in shaping long-term strategy (Al-Jenaibi, 2015). According to Okafor in Okunna (2002), public relations should be seen as a distinctive management function that structures understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organisation and its publics. This understanding is essential for ensuring that PR is viewed as a strategic function integral to the organisation's success. However, despite the recognised importance of PR in the modern business environment, many organisations

continue to regard it as a peripheral activity, reinforcing the misconception that PR is only necessary in times of crisis.

One of the most significant misconceptions about public relations is the perception that it is simply a tool for manipulating public opinion or crafting an idealised image of an organisation. This view tends to overshadow the more strategic functions of PR, such as fostering trust, engaging with stakeholders, and ensuring that the organisation remains responsive to public opinion (Bowen, 2003; Aliede, 2004). As Akande (2002) argues, public relations contributes significantly to an organisation's success by managing relationships with key groups, thus aligning the organisation's activities with the expectations of its stakeholders. However, the misperception that PR is primarily about image-making continues to hinder its integration into organisational strategy. This misconception is exacerbated by the fact that many organisations only prioritise PR when crises arise, reinforcing the idea that PR is reactive rather than proactive. This study examines issues in the use of public relations in promoting organisational goals in Benue State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Public relations (PR) plays a pivotal role in shaping organisational success, yet its full potential remains underutilised due to several challenges that hinder its effective application in promoting organisational goals. While PR is widely recognised for its ability to build and maintain positive relationships with key stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the broader community, the literature on its strategic use within Nigerian organisations remains sparse and fragmented. Existing studies have largely focused on the tactical aspects of PR, such as media relations and crisis management, without adequately addressing its broader strategic impact on organisational growth and goal achievement. Furthermore, the ethical challenges surrounding PR practice in Nigeria, including issues of transparency and manipulation, have been insufficiently explored.

There is a notable gap in understanding how PR can be integrated into the strategic framework of Nigerian organisations to foster long-term success and drive organisational objectives. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a comprehensive examination of the issues surrounding the use of PR in promoting organisational goals in the Nigerian context, hence the motivation for conducting the current study.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- i. To ascertain the extent of the strategic application of public relations in promoting organisational goals.
- ii. To identify the ethical issues militating against the use of public relations in promoting organisational goals.
- iii. To determine managerial issues hindering the use of public relations in promoting organisational goals.

Review of Literature

Concept of Public Relations

Public relations (PR) has been defined by various scholars, professional bodies, and institutions from diverse perspectives. The *Public Relations News* of New York, as cited by Okafor (2002), describes PR as a management function that assesses public attitudes, aligns organisational policies and procedures with public interests, and develops and executes plans to foster public understanding and acceptance. Black (1989) defines PR as "the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and complete information." Harlow, cited in Udeze and Okoro (2010), views PR as a distinctive management function that facilitates mutual communication, understanding, and cooperation between organisations and their publics while addressing problems and issues. Similarly, the British Institute of Public Relations conceptualises PR as "a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

The International Public Relations Association (IPRA), in its renowned "Mexican Statement" from the 1978 World Public Relations Congress, defines PR as "the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, advising organisational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action that serve both organisational and public interests." The Institute of Public Relations, United Kingdom, similarly defines it as a sustained and planned effort to foster goodwill and mutual understanding between organisations and their publics.

From the above, it can be deduced that public relations is fundamentally a strategic management function that focuses on fostering mutual understanding and positive relationships between organisations and their publics. It involves evaluating public attitudes, aligning organisational goals with public interests, and implementing planned programmes to build goodwill and acceptance. Every organisation, regardless of the services or goods it provides or its ownership structure, needs public relations. This is because every organisation interacts with specific publics, and organisations can only achieve their goals when they gain public patronage, which occurs when there is mutual understanding between the organisation and its target publics.

Public Relations and Organisational Goals

Every organisation has target goals, and public relations (PR) plays a crucial role in achieving these goals. While the actualisation of organisational goals depends on numerous factors, the effective application of PR at all levels remains key. Udowo, Akarika, and Ukpe (2023) opined that the greatest asset of any organisation is its public relations department/unit; therefore, PR should be a priority for any organisation. Adjin-Tettey, Allotey, Ego, and Anyomi (2020) observed that PR practitioners can provide the strategic direction needed to achieve organisational goals while ensuring that their programmes align with the organisation's mission. Thus, a strong relationship exists between PR and the success of organisational goals and missions. According to Awosemusi and Awofadeju (2023), PR is instrumental in crafting strategic plans that enhance efficiency, profitability, and the overall achievement of organisational goals when utilised effectively. In agreement, Grunig and Grunig (2000) assert that PR practitioners are integral to the management function of the organisations they serve; without PR practitioners, an essential component of management would be missing.

Baker (2020) further explains that PR permeates all aspects of business and management. PR practitioners play a pivotal role in measuring, evaluating, and interpreting the attitudes of various relevant publics. They assist management in defining objectives aimed at increasing public understanding and acceptance of the organisation's products and services, aligning these objectives with public interests, needs, and goals. Furthermore, they develop, execute, and evaluate programmes designed to earn public understanding and cooperation. Similarly, Umaru, Arabo, and Usman (2022) opine that PR extends across all aspects of management, serving as a distinctive function that establishes and maintains mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organisation and its publics. For an organisation to achieve its goals, its management must remain attuned to the values and attitudes of its various publics.

Review of Related Studies

The strategic role of public relations in promoting organizational goals has been the focus of numerous studies worldwide. These studies have highlighted both the effectiveness and challenges of public relations as a management function and strategy for advancing organizational objectives. Geremew (2017) examined the practices and challenges of public relations within two government organizations in Ethiopian towns. The researcher employed a quantitative survey, using questionnaires to collect data from randomly selected respondents. A descriptive data analysis was conducted to present the findings, which revealed that the practice of public relations in the towns studied was severely underdeveloped and faced significant challenges in terms of effective performance and implementation. The study found that a key reason for this was the lack of clear identification of the core roles and functions of public relations. In another study, Al-Jenaibi (2015) investigated the gaps in PR strategies and the misunderstanding of PR roles in UAE companies, highlighting the importance of implementing effective PR strategies within these organizations. A sample of 100 PR practitioners was surveyed using a qualitative approach. The results revealed that PR practitioners in UAE organizations believed the key foundation for effective PR was strong communication and ethical transparency. By managing communication effectively and clearly defining the responsibilities of PR practitioners, organizations could foster healthy relationships both internally and externally.

Similarly, Gezihagne (2018) assessed the practice and challenges of public relations in government university public relations offices in Ethiopia. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data and analysis. The study primarily focused on internal publics and external stakeholders. A questionnaire was used as the primary data-gathering tool. The findings revealed that professional public relations practices in the government universities were in a difficult state, as the public relations offices were neither professionally structured nor well-organized, despite the recognition of their key role. PR practitioners lacked a thorough understanding of public relations, particularly its management function, which is crucial for fostering mutual understanding with both internal and external publics. Instead, the PR offices were often seen as platforms for staging debates rather than mediating issues. The main challenges identified included a lack of professionally skilled personnel, minimal resources, inadequate empowerment of the PR office, absence of capacity-building training, poor infrastructure, and insufficient support from leadership.

Furthermore, Adjin-Tettey et al. (2020) explored public relations as a strategic management function in selected organizations in Accra, Ghana. The study aimed to determine whether PR practitioners played a strategic role in the management of organizations, as well as how they contributed to achieving organizational goals, strategies, and policies. Additionally, the research examined the challenges hindering the effective practice of PR as a management function and explored top managers' perceptions of PR's role in organizational success. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with interviews conducted with eight PR practitioners and three top-level managers from sectors such as insurance, manufacturing, construction, and a public institution. The data collected were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that in one organization, PR was regarded as a top-management function, while in the other three organizations, it was positioned at the middle-management level. However, in all cases, PR practitioners were involved in organizational decision-making. The study also identified several barriers to the effective establishment of PR as an independent department or top-management function, including misconceptions about PR, the size and mission of the organization, and the personal capabilities of the PR practitioners. Despite these challenges, top managers recognized the importance of PR and viewed it as essential to organizational success.

In the same vein, Baker (2022) examined the role of public relations in the management of hospitals in Kenya, highlighting its importance as a key management function. The study employed a desk study methodology, reviewing relevant empirical literature to identify key themes and knowledge gaps. The findings indicated that the role of public relations in hospitals was not clearly defined. Despite hospitals engaging in various PR activities, there was a lack of a dedicated public relations department to effectively manage these activities. As a result, public relations practices were disorganized and approached in a haphazard manner. Furthermore, hospitals lacked a formal public relations plan and policy.

In Nigeria, Awosemusi and Awofadeju (2023) investigated the impact of effective public relations on organizational performance, focusing on Micmackin Nigeria Limited in Akure. The study's population consisted of approximately 105 participants, including both management and staff members from the company's headquarters. Data were collected using questionnaires and analysed descriptively. The findings revealed that public relations had a positive impact on organizational performance at Micmackin Nigeria Limited by supporting project goals, enhancing organizational relationships, and promoting the brand. However, the study also identified management interference as a major challenge hindering the effectiveness of public relations activities in achieving optimal organizational performance.

Oshie and Ushie (2021) conducted a study to assess whether public relations strategies were employed by Niger Mills Plc to communicate with its publics, and to determine the extent to which these strategies contributed to the company's achievement of its organizational goals. The research utilized a survey method, with structured interviews conducted with 15 staff members of the company. The findings revealed that Niger Mills Plc lacked clearly defined public relations strategies. Based on this, the study recommended the establishment of an in-house public relations department to enhance communication efficiency within the company. Similarly, Oparaugo (2021) explored the role of public relations in corporate image building and sustainability. The study

employed a literature review approach and concluded that public relations is a crucial tool for shaping and maintaining an organization's corporate image, influencing how the organization's publics perceive it. The research identified several key tools used by public relations officers in building and sustaining corporate image, including press releases, press conferences, sponsorships, house organs, and Annual General Meetings.

The review of related studies highlights the global challenges and gaps in the use of public relations (PR) to promote organizational goals, particularly in terms of unclear roles, underdeveloped structures, and organizational barriers such as insufficient resources and managerial interference. While these issues have been identified in studies from Ethiopia, UAE, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria, a notable gap exists in understanding how PR functions specifically within the context of Benue State, Nigeria. The lack of formal PR departments, poorly defined strategies, and inefficiency in communication observed in Nigerian organizations, as well as the impact of regional socio-economic factors, necessitate further research to explore how PR can be better utilized to achieve organizational objectives in this unique context.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in the Excellence Theory, a comprehensive framework in public relations that emerged from a 15-year research initiative on effective communication management, funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation. This extensive study led to the publication of three key books (Grunig, 1992; Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig et al., 2002). The theory integrates several mid-level public relations concepts, including the study of publics, strategic management, public relations models, evaluation methods, employee communication, roles in public relations, and considerations of gender, diversity, power, activism, ethics, social responsibility, and global public relations (Grunig, 2008b).

The Excellence Theory emphasises the significance of public relations to both organisations and society, highlighting the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the importance of maintaining positive relationships with stakeholder groups. According to the theory, an organisation must act in ways that address the needs and objectives of both its stakeholders and its management in order to be effective. If it fails to do so, stakeholders may exert pressure on the organisation or oppose its actions, potentially increasing the costs and risks associated with its policies and decisions (Grunig, 2008b). This theory applies to the study because it emphasises that public relations must be integrated into the strategic management process to be effective. If issues undermine the application of public relations in organisations in Benue State, those organisations cannot achieve their goals. However, with excellent strategic application of public relations, the actualisation of organisational goals becomes inevitable.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey design. The target population consists of registered public relations practitioners working in selected tertiary education institutions within Benue State. A population of thirty practitioners was identified, and a census sampling approach was employed, whereby all members of the population frame were surveyed, given the manageable size of the population. However, twenty-six members of the population completed the survey, which was

administered via a closed-ended questionnaire employing a four-point Likert scale. The collected data were analysed descriptively, using frequency distributions, simple percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation to derive the findings.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Information	Frequency (n=26)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	18	69.23%
Female	8	30.77%
Age Bracket		
18-25 years	2	7.69%
26-35 years	8	30.77%
36-45 years	7	26.92%
46+ years	9	34.62%
Working Experience		
1-5 years	11	42.31%
5-10 years	8	30.77%
11-15 years	5	19.23%
16+ years	2	7.69%
Highest Educational Qualification		
Diploma	2	7.69%
First Degree	13	50.00%
Masters	7	26.92%
PhD	4	15.38%
Academic Discipline		
Public Relations	3	11.54%
Mass Communication	17	65.38%
Languages	2	7.69%
Others	4	15.38%

The demographic data in the table reveal that the study participants are predominantly male, comprising 69.23% of the sample, while females account for 30.77%. This gender distribution suggests a higher male representation in public relations practices within the context of Benue State, Nigeria. The age distribution indicates that a significant portion of the respondents are relatively experienced professionals, with the largest group falling in the 46+ years age bracket (34.62%), followed by 26-35 years (30.77%) and 36-45 years (26.92%). This suggests that the majority of the public relations practitioners are middle-aged to senior professionals, potentially indicating a wealth of experience in the field. The age group 18-25 years represents a smaller proportion (7.69%), which may reflect a limited number of entry-level professionals in public relations within this demographic.

Regarding professional experience, the data show a strong concentration of respondents with 1-5 years of experience (42.31%), followed by those with 5-10 years (30.77%) and 11-15 years (19.23%). This indicates that a majority of public relations practitioners in the study are relatively early in their careers, with a fair representation of those with moderate experience. In terms of educational qualifications, the largest group holds a First Degree (50.00%), followed by

respondents with a Master's degree (26.92%) and a PhD (15.38%). This educational profile suggests that public relations practitioners in Benue State are well-educated, with a strong presence of university graduates and postgraduates. The academic discipline data show that most practitioners are from Mass Communication (65.38%), with smaller proportions from Public Relations (11.54%), Languages (7.69%), and other fields (15.38%). This indicates that Mass Communication graduates dominate the public relations landscape in the region, which aligns with the academic background most commonly associated with the field of public relations.

Table 2: Extent of the Strategic Application of Public Relations

S/N	Item	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	μ	Σ
1	Public relations strategies are actively applied in my institution to support the organization's objectives.	30% (9)	30% (9)	10% (3)	13.33% (4)	2.23	0.89
2	Public relations efforts are frequently integrated into the organization's decision-making processes in my institution.	23.33% (7)	33.33% (10)	13.33% (4)	13.33% (4)	2.23	0.91
3	My institution consistently uses public relations to promote its key goals and values.	23.33% (7)	26.67% (8)	16.67% (5)	20% (6)	2.47	0.95
4	Public relations strategies are often used in my organization to achieve short-term or immediate goals.	6.67% (2)	13.33% (4)	36.67% (11)	30% (9)	3.03	0.85
5	Public relations strategies are often used in my organization to achieve long-term goals.	30% (9)	40% (12)	6.67% (2)	10% (3)	1.97	0.96

The table assesses the extent of public relations application in promoting organisational goals. Items 1 and 2 show moderate application, with 30% of respondents disagreeing that public relations supports organisational objectives and decision-making. Item 3 indicates slightly better application, with a mean score of 2.47. Item 4 reflects a higher level of agreement, showing that public relations is frequently used for short-term goals, with a mean of 3.03. Item 5 reveals less use of public relations for long-term goals, with a mean of 1.97 and significant disagreement. The standard deviations range from 0.85 to 0.96, indicating low variability in responses. The results imply that public relations strategies in the institutions are applied to a moderate extent in supporting organisational goals.

Table 3: Ethical Issues Undermining the Application of Public Relations in Promoting Organizational Goals

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	μ	σ
1	Lack of transparency in providing information by management hinders the effectiveness of public relations in my organization.	26.67% (8)	26.67% (8)	13.33% (4)	20% (6)	2.40	0.99
2	The manipulation of information for organizational gain is a common ethical issue in public relations in my organization.	30% (9)	26.67% (8)	13.33% (4)	16.67% (5)	2.30	1.03
3	False representations prevent public relations from being fully effective in achieving organizational goals.	33.33% (10)	16.67% (5)	20% (6)	13.33% (4)	2.23	1.08
4	Conflicts of interest between public relations professionals and management affect the use of public relations in promoting the organization's goals.	20% (6)	33.33% (10)	13.33% (4)	20% (6)	2.47	0.98
5	Confidentiality breaches affect the application of public relations in promoting the goals of my organization.	33.33% (10)	30% (9)	13.33% (4)	10% (3)	2.10	1.07

The table highlights several ethical issues undermining the application of public relations in promoting organisational goals. The most significant challenges identified by respondents include a lack of transparency (mean score = 2.40) and manipulation of information (mean score = 2.30), indicating moderate agreement that these issues hinder the effectiveness of public relations. False representations (mean score = 2.23) and conflicts of interest (mean score = 2.47) are also seen as considerable ethical concerns, with respondents agreeing that they affect public relations efforts, but to a slightly lesser extent. Confidentiality breaches (mean score = 2.10) were viewed as a relatively less critical issue, but still recognised as an obstacle to effective public relations. The standard deviations (ranging from 0.98 to 1.08) suggest that while there is some variation in responses, there is general agreement on the ethical challenges impacting public relations in organisations.

Table 4: Managerial Issues Militating Against the Use of Public Relations in Promoting Organizational Goals

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	μ	σ
1	Management does not allocate sufficient resources to support public relations activities in my organization.	13.33% (4)	6.67% (2)	30% (9)	36.67% (11)	3.03	0.94
2	There is a lack of understanding among top management about the role of public relations in achieving organizational goals.	16.67% (5)	20% (6)	16.67% (5)	33.33% (10)	2.80	1.07
3	The organization's leadership fails to effectively communicate the importance of public relations to other departments.	10% (3)	23.33% (7)	33.33% (10)	33.33% (10)	2.90	1.05
4	Management often prioritizes other functions over public relations in decision-making processes.	6.67% (2)	6.67% (2)	36.67% (11)	36.67% (11)	3.17	0.85
5	There is poor collaboration between public relations professionals and senior management in my organization.	16.67% (5)	20% (6)	30% (9)	20% (6)	2.67	1.06

The table reveals significant managerial issues hindering the effective use of public relations in promoting organisational goals. The item with the highest mean score, 3.17, indicates that respondents strongly agree that management often prioritises other functions over public relations in decision-making processes. The second-highest mean score of 3.03 suggests that insufficient resource allocation for public relations is a pressing concern, as most respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement. Items 2 and 3, addressing the lack of understanding of public relations' role and communication failures between leadership and departments, have moderate mean scores (2.80 and 2.90), showing a recognition of these challenges but not as strongly felt as the resource and prioritisation issues. Finally, Item 5 on poor collaboration between public relations professionals and senior management has the lowest mean score of 2.67, indicating less consensus on its significance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the strategic application of public relations (PR) in promoting organisational goals is moderate within the institutions studied in Benue State. This finding aligns with existing literature, which suggests that while PR plays a crucial role in organisational success, its application is often low due to various internal challenges. Geremew (2017) highlighted the underdevelopment of PR practices in government organisations, similar to the moderate application observed in this study. Furthermore, the studies by Gezihagne (2018) and Al-Jenaibi (2015) support the finding that PR's strategic impact is often diminished by many organisations, thereby undermining the effective actualisation of organisational goals.

The second objective, which examines the ethical issues undermining the effectiveness of public relations, reveals that a lack of transparency and conflicts of interest are significant barriers in the

studied institutions. These ethical challenges are consistent with those identified in related research, such as Al-Jenaibi's (2015) study, which emphasises the importance of ethical transparency for effective PR. The study also supports the findings of Baker (2022), who noted the lack of clear role definitions and ethical standards within PR practices in hospitals, leading to disorganised PR activities. The lack of transparency and conflicts of interest found in this study suggest that ethical violations are common impediments to PR's success in promoting organisational goals. The ethical concerns in the institutions studied align with global studies that indicate the detrimental effects of these issues on the credibility and effectiveness of PR efforts.

Finally, the study highlights significant managerial issues that affect the effective use of public relations in promoting organisational goals, particularly inadequate resource allocation, poor communication between departments, and a lack of understanding of the role of PR. These managerial challenges are similar to those identified in previous studies, such as Gezihagne (2018), who found that PR offices in government universities in Ethiopia lacked the necessary resources and leadership support for effective PR practices. Similarly, Awosemusi and Awofadeju (2023) emphasised the negative impact of management interference on PR activities in Nigeria. The findings of this study also resonate with Adjin-Tettey et al. (2020), who noted that misunderstandings about PR's role and misconceptions about its importance were key barriers to its effective practice. The challenges identified in the Benue State tertiary institutions suggest that there is a gap in the application of the Excellence theory of public relations. Thus, the actualisation of the goals of the institutions is significantly undermined.

Conclusion

The study established that, despite the importance of public relations in promoting organisational goals, the strategic application of public relations by tertiary institutions in Benue State is moderate. This is due to several ethical and managerial issues, with a key factor being the prevalent misconception about the purpose of public relations within organisations among management staff. This misconception leads to inadequate funding for public relations and ineffective collaboration with management. Therefore, it is crucial for institutions to address these managerial and ethical barriers to unlock the full potential of public relations in advancing organisational goals.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Tertiary education institutions in Benue State should prioritise the integration of public relations into their strategic planning processes. This involves recognising PR as a vital management function and allocating sufficient resources for its effective implementation.
2. Regular training sessions and workshops should be conducted for the management and staff of tertiary education institutions to foster a deeper understanding of the strategic importance of PR in achieving organisational goals.
3. Organisations should develop and implement a comprehensive public relations framework that outlines roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes. This framework will help clarify the purpose of PR and ensure its alignment with organisational goals, thereby reducing misconceptions and enhancing effectiveness.

4. The management of organisations, particularly tertiary education institutions in Benue State, must demonstrate a commitment to fostering an environment where public relations can thrive. This includes, among other measures, improving funding for public relations activities.

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