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Public Relations Techniques and Reputation Management Among Selected Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria: An Empirical Assessment

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Abstract

This study assessed the public relations techniques employed by selected tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, in managing their institutional reputation. The study aimed to identify the PR techniques employed by the institutions, to evaluate the effectiveness of those techniques in enhancing institutional reputation, and to determine the challenges faced by PR units in the selected institutions. Employing a quantitative survey research design, a structured questionnaire was administered to 397 respondents across three institutions: Federal University, Lafia; Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia; and College of Education, Akwanga, via Google Forms, of which 385 completed responses were retrieved and used for analysis. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentages presented in tabular form. Findings reveal that social media and digital platforms are the most dominant PR techniques employed (37.14%), followed by press releases (18.44%) and community outreach (16.62%). PR activities were found to be generally effective, with 65.19% of respondents rating them positively, though challenges including inadequate funding (34.81%), limited technical skills (22.60%), and poor media relations (16.36%) significantly constrain PR performance. The study concludes that while PR practice in the selected institutions demonstrates measurable effectiveness, structural and resource-based limitations continue to undermine its full potential. The study recommends increased budgetary allocation to PR departments, investment in digital capacity, and stronger media partnerships as priority interventions for improving reputation management in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Keywords: ***Public relations, reputation management, tertiary institutions, strategic communication, Nasarawa State***

1. Introduction

Globally, the reputation of tertiary institutions has emerged as a critical determinant of their competitiveness, sustainability, and stakeholder confidence. In an increasingly interconnected academic environment shaped by international university rankings, cross-border student mobility, and the rapid spread of information through digital platforms, institutions that fail to actively manage their public image risk significant declines in student enrolment, research funding, faculty attraction, and institutional partnerships. Treadwell and Harrison (2022) observe that institutions investing in robust public relations strategies consistently outperform their peers in student recruitment, faculty retention, and public trust. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, universities allocate substantial resources

to strategic communication, media engagement, and academic branding as core components of institutional management, not peripheral administrative functions (Smith, 2022).

In Africa, the challenge of reputation management in tertiary education takes on a distinctly different character. African universities operate within contexts marked by chronic underfunding, political interference, infrastructural deficits, and recurring crises of governance and academic quality. These structural conditions create persistent reputational vulnerabilities that demand proactive and strategic public relations intervention. Studies from Ghana (Asikins & Akua, 2015; Boatemaa, 2011) and South Africa have demonstrated that tertiary institutions on the continent are increasingly recognising the strategic value of PR in managing stakeholder relationships, projecting institutional identity, and responding to reputational crises. However, the professionalisation of PR practice in African higher education remains uneven, with many institutions lacking the resources, skilled personnel, and strategic frameworks needed for effective reputation management.

In Nigeria specifically, tertiary institutions face a uniquely complex reputational environment. Recurring academic staff strikes, most notably those of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), have repeatedly disrupted academic calendars and generated sustained negative media coverage of the higher education sector. Compounding this are challenges of funding deficits, examination malpractice, student unrest, deteriorating infrastructure, and accusations of governance failure, all of which have contributed to declining public confidence in Nigerian universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education (Gbaden, Uliong & Jeremiah, 2023; Oyetayo & Abiodun, 2021). Despite these challenges, empirical research on how Nigerian tertiary institutions deploy public relations to manage and recover their reputations remains limited, with most existing studies focused on the Southwest geopolitical zone, leaving the North-Central zone significantly underrepresented in the literature (Bamisaye, 2019; Chiakaan, 2016).

1.1 Statement of Problem

Tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State operate in a reputational environment characterised by persistent and well-documented challenges. Federal University, Lafia has faced public criticism over inadequate infrastructure, delayed accreditation of programmes, and the pressure to establish academic credibility as a relatively young institution (Ahmed & Musa, 2023). Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia, has been dogged by concerns over governance deficits and funding shortfalls that have attracted negative media attention and undermined stakeholder confidence (Yakubu, 2023). The College of Education, Akwanga, has experienced recurring strikes, infrastructural decay, and underfunding, all of which have significantly weakened its public image and eroded trust among prospective students and the broader community (Salami & Bello, 2023). These reputational challenges are not isolated; they reflect a broader pattern of communication failure and inadequate reputation management that threatens the long-term viability of these institutions.

The consequences of poor reputation management in these institutions are tangible and serious. Declining public confidence translates directly into reduced student enrolment, difficulty attracting and retaining qualified faculty, weakened capacity to secure grants and institutional partnerships, and vulnerability to negative media narratives that go unchallenged due to inadequate PR capacity (Olugbenga & Abiodun, 2021; Ibrahim, 2024). In a state where these three institutions collectively serve as the primary providers of tertiary education, reputational damage does not affect the institutions alone, it affects the educational aspirations of thousands of Nasarawa State students and the state's broader human capital development agenda.

Despite the urgency of this challenge, there is a significant gap in empirical research on the specific PR techniques these institutions employ to manage their reputations, the extent to which those techniques are effective, and the structural constraints that limit their PR capacity. Most existing studies on PR and reputation management in Nigerian tertiary institutions are concentrated in the South-west geopolitical zone, with the North-Central zone receiving minimal scholarly attention (Bamisaye, 2019; Chiakaan, 2016). The specific experiences of Nasarawa State institutions remain almost absent from the academic literature, leaving practitioners and policymakers without an evidence base for improving PR strategy and reputation management in the state's higher education sector. This study addresses that gap directly.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

i. To identify the PR techniques employed by the selected tertiary institutions for reputation management.

ii. To evaluate the effectiveness of those techniques in enhancing institutional reputation.

iii. To determine the challenges faced by PR units in the selected institutions.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of empirical literature on public relations practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with a specific focus on Nasarawa State, a context that has received limited scholarly attention. The findings also provide actionable, evidence-based insights for PR practitioners and institutional managers seeking to strengthen their communication and reputation management strategies. Furthermore, the study offers a comparative perspective across three distinct categories of tertiary institutions: university, polytechnic, and college of education, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how institutional type and context shape PR practice and effectiveness. Lastly, the study's findings are relevant to policymakers and regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) who have a stake in the reputational health of Nigerian tertiary institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising Public Relations and Reputation Management

Public relations has been variously defined across the literature. Cutlip et al. (2006) define it as the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends. Grunig and Hunt (1984) conceptualise PR as the management of communication between an organisation and its publics, emphasising the two-way symmetrical model as the most ethical and effective form of PR practice. In the educational context, Chiakaan and Chile (2015) describe institutional PR as encompassing all deliberate efforts by a tertiary institution to project a positive image, manage stakeholder relationships, and respond effectively to reputational threats.

Reputation management, as a construct, refers to the deliberate process by which organisations monitor, protect, and enhance how they are perceived by key stakeholders (Fombrun, 1996). Aula and Mantere (2008) argue that reputation is not merely a communication outcome but a strategic asset that influences stakeholder behaviour, including decisions about enrolment,

funding, partnership, and media coverage. In tertiary institutions, a strong reputation translates to competitive advantage in student recruitment, staff attraction, research funding, and government support (Cornelissen, 2021).

While these definitions share a common emphasis on strategic communication and stakeholder relationships, they differ in their conceptual focus. Cutlip et al. (2006) emphasise the management function and mutual benefit, reflecting a functionalist perspective. Grunig and Hunt (1984) foreground the symmetrical communication ideal, prioritising dialogue and equality between institution and public. Chiakaan and Chile (2015), writing from a Nigerian educational context, take a more pragmatic view, emphasising crisis response and image protection alongside relationship building. These differences reflect the evolution of PR theory from a one-way, persuasion-oriented model toward a more relational, dialogue-based framework; though in practice, Nigerian tertiary institutions have been found to operate closer to the earlier, one-way model (Chiakaan, 2016; Bamisaye, 2019).

2.2 PR Techniques in Tertiary Institutions

The literature identifies a range of PR techniques commonly employed by tertiary institutions. Ajala (2001) identifies press releases, media briefings, community relations, and event management as foundational PR tools in Nigerian institutional contexts. More recently, digital and social media platforms have emerged as dominant PR channels. Tayo (2022) found that Nigerian universities increasingly rely on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) to engage stakeholders, share achievements, and build public goodwill. Waters (2009) similarly demonstrated that social networking platforms have become essential tools for organisations seeking to build stakeholder relationships at low cost and wide reach. Liu and Du (2022) further demonstrated that consistent social media engagement plays a significant role in shaping and sustaining corporate reputation in the digital age, a finding with direct relevance to the institutional PR context.

Crisis communication is another critical PR technique, particularly relevant in higher education where institutional crises, including strikes, student unrest, and examination scandals, can cause rapid and lasting reputational damage. Coombs (2021) argues that the speed and transparency of an institution's crisis response are among the most critical determinants of whether it successfully protects its reputation or suffers lasting reputational harm.

The literature reveals a notable tension between the aspirational use of digital PR tools and the structural capacity of institutions to deploy them effectively. While Tayo (2022) and Waters (2009) document the growing dominance of social media in institutional PR, Hsu, Wang and Lee (2023) caution that effective digital PR requires specialised competencies that many institutions in developing contexts have yet to acquire. This tension is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where social media adoption is high but digital literacy and strategic capacity within PR departments remain limited (Gbadenet al., 2023). The present study examines whether this gap between tool adoption and strategic capacity is evident in the selected Nasarawa State institutions.

2.3 Challenges of PR Practice in Tertiary Institutions

The literature consistently identifies inadequate funding as the primary constraint on PR effectiveness in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Gbaden et al., 2023; Akinwale, 2019). Limited technical capacity, poor media relationships, and the absence of strategic communication plans are also widely reported. Krishnan (2007) demonstrated that media relations play a strategic role in building organisational reputation, and that institutions which maintain open and transparent communication with journalists are better positioned to manage their public

narrative. The digital skills gap is an increasingly relevant challenge, as Hsu et al. (2023) note that effective digital PR requires specialised competencies that many institutional PR departments in developing countries have yet to fully acquire.

Across the literature, there is broad consensus that funding inadequacy is the primary structural constraint on PR effectiveness in Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, the literature diverges on the relative importance of secondary constraints. Gbaden et al. (2023) and Bamisaye (2019) emphasise the management integration deficit and the exclusion of PR from strategic decision-making as equally significant. Asikins and Akua (2015) and Boatemaa (2011) similarly identify institutional marginalisation of PR as a critical limiting factor. Conversely, Krishnan (2007) and Hsu et al. (2023) point to skills gaps and poor media relations as the more pressing constraints. These varying emphases suggest that the hierarchy of PR challenges may be context-specific, varying by institution type, resource level, and geographic context, a finding this study is positioned to test empirically across three distinct institutional contexts in Nasarawa State.

2.4 Review of Empirical Studies

A review of empirical studies on public relations and reputation management in tertiary institutions reveals a growing but geographically uneven body of evidence. The studies reviewed below are assessed in terms of their methods, samples, key findings, and the gaps they leave that the present study addresses.

Chiakaan (2016) conducted a study evaluating the application of PR practice in selected tertiary institutions in Benue and Nasarawa States, Nigeria. Using a survey research design with a sample of 320 respondents drawn from academic and non-academic staff, the study found that PR is practised in these institutions but insufficiently professionalised, with most PR departments functioning primarily as information dissemination units rather than strategic management tools. The study recommended the professionalisation of PR practice and greater integration of PR into institutional governance. A key limitation of the study is its exclusive focus on staff perspectives, omitting students and alumni, groups whose perceptions are equally central to institutional reputation. The present study addresses this gap by incorporating students, non-academic staff, senior administrative staff, and alumni as respondent categories.

Bamisaye (2019) examined the relationship between public relations and institutional management at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, using a descriptive survey design with a sample of 200 respondents comprising staff and students. The study found that inadequate integration of PR into institutional management structures is the primary reason for the underperformance of PR departments, and that underfunding significantly constrains PR capacity. While this study provides valuable insights into PR practice at a single institution in Nasarawa State, its single-institution focus limits the generalisability of its findings. The present study extends this work by adopting a multi-institutional comparative design spanning three distinct categories of tertiary institutions: university, polytechnic, and college of education.

Gbaden et al. (2023) investigated public relations and the management of students in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria, using a survey design with 250 respondents. The study found that PR is poorly applied and significantly under-resourced in the sampled institutions, limiting its capacity to build harmonious stakeholder relationships. The study focused exclusively on student management as a PR function, without examining the broader spectrum of PR techniques or their effectiveness in reputation management. The present study

addresses this limitation by examining PR techniques comprehensively across three research dimensions: techniques employed, effectiveness, and structural challenges.

Asikins and Akua (2015) examined the use of PR as a management tool in tertiary institutions in Ghana, employing a mixed-methods design with 180 respondents, including administrators, PR officers, and students. The study found that PR units in Ghanaian tertiary institutions are frequently excluded from senior management decision-making, significantly limiting their strategic impact. The study is significant for providing a comparative West African perspective, but its Ghanaian context limits direct applicability to the Nigerian setting, where institutional structures, funding models, and communication environments differ considerably. The present study contributes a specifically Nigerian, North-Central perspective to this regional conversation.

Peace (2024) assessed public relations strategies and institutional image management at the University of Benin, using a survey design with 310 respondents drawn from students and staff. The study found that PR strategies, when consistently applied, generally succeed in creating and sustaining a positive institutional image, and that stakeholder trust is significantly enhanced by proactive and regular PR communication. A limitation of the study is its focus on a single, relatively well-resourced federal university in the South-South geopolitical zone, making it difficult to generalise findings to less-resourced institutions or those in other geopolitical contexts. The present study provides a complementary perspective from three institutions in the North-Central zone operating under different resource constraints and institutional histories.

Overall, these empirical studies reveal several consistent patterns: PR in Nigerian and West African tertiary institutions is generally underfunded and under professionalised; PR departments are frequently marginalised from strategic management decision-making; and digital and social media tools are increasingly central to institutional PR practice. However, the studies also reveal important gaps; most are single-institution studies, most are concentrated in Southern Nigeria or West Africa more broadly, and none specifically examines the comparative PR practice and reputation management of multiple institutions in Nasarawa State. The present study addresses these gaps by providing the first multi-institutional, comparative empirical assessment of PR techniques and reputation management across three distinct categories of tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theories:

i. The agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) posits that media and organisational communication shape what publics think about by giving prominence to certain issues. Applied to this study, institutions that consistently foreground achievements, community engagement, and positive narratives through their PR channels actively set the agenda for how they are perceived.
ii. The Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) holds that the manner in which information is presented shapes audience interpretation and response. PR practitioners who frame institutional information strategically, emphasising strengths, contextualising challenges, and presenting crises as manageable, are more likely to sustain positive public perception.
iii. The Impression Management Theory (Goffman, 1959) explains that organisations, like individuals, actively manage the impressions they make on others. When

structural constraints such as low funding and limited technical capacity undermine this impression management effort, reputational damage becomes more likely.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design. Survey research is appropriate for studies seeking to describe or assess phenomena across large, geographically distributed populations through systematic data collection (Ohaja, 2003). The target population comprised students, academic staff, non-academic staff, senior administrative staff, and alumni of three tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State: Federal University, Lafia (population: 18,750); Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia (population: 15,500); and College of Education, Akwanga (population: 16,250), giving a total target population of 50,000. Population figures were obtained from the Academic Planning Units and Registries of the respective institutions for the 2024/2025 academic session.

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula:

$$\mathbf{n = N / 1 + N (e)^2}$$

Where N = 50,000 and e = 0.05 (5% margin of error), yielding a minimum sample size of approximately 397 respondents.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that respondents had direct institutional affiliation and firsthand experience of their institution's PR activities. Specifically, respondents were recruited through verified institutional WhatsApp groups and staff and student association platforms associated with each institution. Eligibility was limited to individuals who were currently enrolled as students, actively employed as staff, serving in senior administrative roles, or were verifiable alumni of one of the three institutions at the time of data collection. The 397 questionnaires were allocated as follows: 132 copies to Federal University, Lafia; 133 copies to Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia; and 132 copies to College of Education, Akwanga. Of these, 385 completed responses were retrieved: 147 (38.18%) from Federal University, Lafia; 128 (33.25%) from Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia; and 110 (28.57%) from College of Education, Akwanga; representing an overall response rate of 96.98%, which exceeds the 70% threshold recommended for survey research (Babbie, 2013).

Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire administered electronically via Google Forms. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B contained 17 substantive items organised around the three research questions. The instrument was validated by research supervisors before administration, and reliability was established through a test-retest approach using the Guttman split-half coefficient on a pilot sample of 40 respondents outside the main study population, yielding a coefficient of 0.81, which indicates a high level of internal consistency and reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

3.1 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for social science research. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were treated with strict confidentiality. The online administration of the questionnaire via Google Forms ensured that respondents could withdraw

at any point without consequence. Informed consent was implied by the completion and submission of the questionnaire.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Position in Institution

Position	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	182	47.27
Academic Staff	101	26.23
Non-Academic Staff	57	14.81
Senior Administrative Staff	30	7.79
Alumni	15	3.90
Total	**385**	**100**

Source: Online Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows that students constituted the largest respondent group (47.27%), followed by academic staff (26.23%), non-academic staff (14.81%), senior administrative staff (7.79%), and alumni (3.90%). The distribution reflects the composition of the institutional population and ensures that multiple stakeholder perspectives are represented in the findings.

4.2 Research Question One: What PR Techniques Are Employed by the Institutions?

Table 2: PR Techniques Employed by the Institutions

PR Technique	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Social media and digital platforms	143	37.14
Press releases and media announcements	71	18.44
Community outreach and partnerships	64	16.62
Academic branding and campaigns	58	15.06
Image restoration and crisis management	49	12.73
Total	**385**	**100**

Source: Online Survey, 2025

Table 2 reveals that social media and digital platforms are the most dominant PR technique employed by the selected institutions, accounting for 37.14% of responses. Press releases and media announcements ranked second (18.44%), followed by community outreach and partnerships (16.62%), academic branding and campaigns (15.06%), and image restoration and crisis management (12.73%).

4.3 Research Question Two: How Effective Are the PR Techniques?

Table 3: Respondents' Rating of PR Technique Effectiveness

Rating	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	106	27.53
Effective	145	37.66
Neutral	80	20.78
Ineffective	35	9.09
Very Ineffective	19	4.94
Total	385	100

Source: Online Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows that 65.19% of respondents rated the PR techniques employed by their institutions as effective or very effective, while 20.78% were neutral and only 14.03% considered them ineffective or very ineffective. This indicates a generally positive assessment of PR effectiveness across the three institutions.

4.4 Research Question Three: What Challenges Do the Institutions Face?

Table 4: Challenges Facing PR Practice in the Institutions

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inadequate funding	134	34.81
Limited technical skills	87	22.60
Poor media relationships	63	16.36
Low digital literacy	55	14.29
Lack of strategic planning	46	11.95
Total	**385**	**100**

Source: Online Survey, 2025

Table 4 reveals that inadequate funding is the most significant challenge facing PR departments in the selected institutions (34.81%), followed by limited technical skills (22.60%), poor media relationships (16.36%), low digital literacy (14.29%), and lack of strategic planning (11.95%).

Discussion

PR Techniques Employed

The finding that social media and digital platforms constitute the most dominant PR technique (37.14%) reflects a broader shift in institutional communication practice in Nigeria. This is consistent with Tayo (2022), who observed that Nigerian universities are increasingly deploying platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) to engage stakeholders and promote institutional achievements. Waters (2009) similarly demonstrated that social networking platforms have become essential tools for building stakeholder relationships at low cost and with wide reach. The predominance of social media over traditional techniques such as press releases suggests that the selected institutions have adapted to evolving communication trends, recognising the importance of digital presence in shaping public perception.

However, the finding that PR activities are conducted primarily on a quarterly or occasional basis, clustering around major events such as matriculation, graduation, and convocation, suggests that PR communication remains largely reactive and event-driven rather than continuous and strategic. This aligns with Heath (2005), who argued that educational institutions tend to allow special events to dominate their PR calendar at the expense of sustained proactive communication. The relatively low emphasis on crisis management and misinformation correction (12.73%) further suggests that these institutions prioritise positive image promotion over defensive or reactive communication strategies, a gap identified by Nwosu (2021) as a common weakness in Nigerian tertiary institution PR practice.

These findings are consistent with the agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which posits that by consistently foregrounding achievements, community engagement, and positive institutional narratives through dominant channels, organisations actively shape what their publics think about. The selected institutions are clearly using social media as their primary agenda-setting tool.

Effectiveness of PR Techniques

The finding that 65.19% of respondents rated PR techniques as effective or very effective suggests that PR practice in the selected institutions is generally succeeding in its core objective of projecting a positive institutional image. This supports the conclusion of Peace (2024), who found in a study at the University of Benin that PR strategies generally succeed in creating a positive institutional image when consistently applied. The finding that 57.40% of respondents reported high or very high PR impact on stakeholder trust aligns with Fawkes (2014), who argued that institutions which actively engage their stakeholders through consistent PR activity are better positioned to manage reputational risks.

However, the finding that only 57.66% reported consistent PR messaging, with 28.31% noting only occasional consistency, raises concerns about communication coordination across departments. Cornelissen (2021) notes that a coherent and unified communication identity is essential for sustaining a strong corporate image, and that inconsistent messaging erodes public confidence. The 17.66% who reported poor alignment between PR efforts and institutional goals further supports Asikins and Akua (2015), who found that PR units in tertiary institutions are frequently not adequately involved in strategic management decision-making.

These findings align with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which holds that the manner in which information is presented shapes audience understanding. Where PR messaging is consistent and strategically framed, it succeeds in constructing a favourable institutional image. Where it is inconsistent or poorly coordinated, its framing effect is weakened, and public confidence erodes.

Challenges of PR Practice

The identification of inadequate funding as the primary challenge (34.81%) is consistent with a well-established pattern in the literature on Nigerian tertiary institution PR. Gbaden et al. (2023) found that PR is poorly applied and under-resourced in Nigerian public institutions, significantly limiting its capacity to build harmonious stakeholder relationships. Bamisaye (2019) similarly found in a study of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, that inadequate funding and poor integration of PR into institutional management are the primary reasons for PR department underperformance. The finding that only 32.73% of respondents rated their PR department's resources as sufficient further confirms the severity of this constraint.

The challenge of limited technical skills (22.60%) and low digital literacy (14.29%) is particularly significant given the dominance of social media as the primary PR channel. As Hsu, Wang and Lee (2023) note, effective digital PR requires specialised competencies that many institutional PR departments in developing countries have yet to fully acquire. Poor media relationships (16.36%) further constrain the institutions' ability to manage their public narrative, consistent with Krishnan (2007), who demonstrated that institutions maintaining open and transparent communication with journalists are better positioned to manage their reputation.

These findings are consistent with Impression Management Theory (Goffman, 1959), which explains that when structural constraints such as low funding, limited technical capacity, and poor media access undermine an organisation's impression management efforts, reputational damage becomes more likely. Addressing these constraints is therefore not merely an administrative matter but a reputational imperative.

Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the use of purposive sampling, while appropriate for the study's objectives, limits the statistical generalisability of the findings to other tertiary institutions beyond the three sampled. Second, data were collected exclusively through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms, which may have excluded respondents with limited internet access. Thirdly, the study relied on self-reported data, which is subject to social desirability bias; respondents may have assessed their institution's PR practices more favourably than objective evidence would support. Lastly, the online distribution method resulted in a small number of alumni responses (3.90%) that were not part of the original sampling frame, introducing a minor degree of sampling inconsistency. Future studies should consider triangulating survey data with qualitative interviews of PR officers and institutional managers to provide deeper contextual insight into the findings reported here.

5. Conclusion

This study assessed the public relations techniques employed by three selected tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State in managing their institutional reputation. The findings demonstrate that social media and digital platforms have become the dominant PR tools in these institutions, reflecting a broader adaptation to contemporary communication trends in Nigerian higher education. PR techniques are generally perceived as effective by the majority of respondents, with measurable positive impact on stakeholder trust and institutional image. However, the effectiveness of PR practice is significantly constrained by inadequate funding, limited technical skills, poor media relationships, and insufficient strategic planning. The study concludes that while PR departments in the selected institutions are making meaningful contributions to reputation management, their full potential remains unrealised due to structural and resource-based limitations that require urgent institutional attention.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

i. Increase budgetary allocation to PR departments. Institutional management should treat PR funding as a strategic investment rather than an administrative overhead. Dedicated PR budgets should be established and protected from general institutional spending cuts.

ii. Invest in digital capacity and staff training. PR officers should receive regular training in digital communication, social media management, and content creation. Institutions should partner with professional bodies such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) to provide structured capacity development programmes.

iii. Develop and implement strategic communication plans. PR departments should move beyond event-driven communication toward year-round, proactively planned communication strategies that address stakeholder engagement, crisis preparedness, and reputation monitoring on a continuous basis.

iv. Strengthen media relations. Institutions should cultivate regular, transparent, and mutually beneficial relationships with journalists and media organisations. Designated media liaison officers should be empowered to manage press relations professionally and proactively.

v. Integrate PR into institutional decision-making. PR directors should be included in senior management meetings and strategic planning processes to ensure that

communication considerations are embedded in institutional decision-making from the outset.

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