SSR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (SSRJAHSS)

Volume 1, Issue 2, 2024 Journal homepage: https://ssrpublisher.com/ssrjahss ISSN: 3049-0391 (Online)

Email: office.ssrpublisher@gmail.com

Exploring the Integrative-Relational Approach to the Practice of Governmental Public Relations in Nigeria

Ebenezer Adebisi Olawuyi

Department of Communication and Language, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Received: 27.10.2024 | **Accepted:** 22.11.2024 | **Published:** 27.11.2024

***Corresponding author:** Ebenezer Adebisi Olawuyi

Abstract **Original Research Article**

The underutilisation of the basic tenets of governmental public relations in driving governance has led to the increasing erosion of public confidence in government and its institutions. In effect, it has undermined the capacity of governments at all levels to mobilise citizens across different fault lines on issues of national consensus. The deepening ethno-religious divide in Nigeria, is one that should be of concern to everyone, but more importantly for the PR professionals who work for government because it challenges their roles as boundary spanners and members of the dominant coalition. The 21st century leadership role of public relations, particularly in facilitating seamless government-citizenship engagements requires that practitioners adopt an integrative-relational approach; one that provides an inclusive platform for both state and non-state actors to actively engage with their stakeholders. The position of this paper is that given the challenge of governance in Nigeria, PR professionals who work for government should demonstrate attributes such as leadership, smart and innovative thinking, uncommon courage, technical competence, futuristic, out-of-the-box strategy, exit advocacy option, and deployment of influence resources. These qualities are necessary in providing an integrative-relational dimension that would give meaning to the practice of governmental public relations in Nigeria.

Keywords: Integrative-relational, PR in government, Governance in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Public relations is a cheaply abused profession in Nigeria, which is why almost everyone claims mastery of some sort. PR is a profession that "is often either misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted" (Henslowe, 1999, p. 1). This may be the reason why many organisations are transforming their PR departments into corporate communication management to avoid the popular perception of the profession as "one of opprobrium" (Moloney, 1997). This anomaly, notwithstanding, PR dominates our lives whether we know it or not. Henslowe (1999, p. 1) notes that PR is always there and it is used at all times, often without realising it, and in many different ways, depending on one's particular needs at the time. If used properly, it can inform, educate, reassure, evoke sympathy, arouse interest in or an acceptance of situations. In short, PR cannot be avoided, or ignored.

It is important to restate that the primary task of a PR professional is to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of mutual understanding between an organisation and its various stakeholders. Thus, within the context of government, the deployment of PR should serve as the bridge between the government and the citizens, ensuring transparency, trust, and effective communication. It is worthy of note that governments were among the first institutions to need, and to practice, PR as a way of maintaining appropriate relationships with their citizens. Therefore, it is instructive to note that the chief duty of PR in government is the adoption and application of the core values of the profession in promoting good governance to achieve "…equity, participation, pluralism, transparency, accountability and the rule of law, in a manner that is effective, efficient and enduring" (United Nations Office on Drugs and crimes in Olawuyi, 2014) in the running of government institutions.

Today, Nigeria, gropes in the dark alley of economic recession, insurgency, kidnappings, cattle rustling and herdsmen attacks. The unity and stability of the nation seem to be fleeting with each passing day due to the socio-political challenges that confront it. In the midst of these troubles, self-inclined individuals and their forces of division gnaw at the soul of the nation, attempting to tear it apart. It is increasingly difficult to forge a nation, by deliberately, emphasising fault lines, chief among which is ethnic and clannish mentalities. Chinua Achebe, in the book *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* attributes Nigerians' inability to create a nation to their lack of shared history prior to the perceived colonial misadventure of creating the artificial country. In his words:

> Great Britain was handed the area of West Africa that would later become Nigeria, like a piece of chocolate cake

> at a birthday party. It was one of the most populous regions on the African continent, with over 250 ethnic groups and distinct languages. The northern part of the country was the seat of several ancient kingdoms, such as the Kanem-Bornu – which Shehu Usman dan Fodio and his jihadists absorbed into the Muslim Fulani Empire. The Middle Belt of Nigeria was the locus of the glorious Nok Kingdom and its world-renowned terra-cotta sculptures. The southern protectorate was home to some of the region's most sophisticated civilisations. In the west, the Oyo and Ife kingdoms once strode majestically, and in the Midwest the incomparable Benin Kingdom elevated artistic distinction to a new level. Across the Niger River in the East, the Calabar and the Nri kingdoms flourished. If the Berlin Conference sealed her fate, then the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates inextricably complicated Nigeria's destiny. Animists, Muslims, and Christians alike were held together by a delicate, some say artificial lattice (Achebe, 2012, pp. 1-2).

Nigeria's unity has been a contentious issue since its independence in 1960. Unresolved issues such as ethnic and religious tensions; failed federalism and unbalanced power-sharing; economic disparities and resource control; and rising secessionist agitations have undermined the Nigerian state. The amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates in 1914, which resulted in the creation of the Nigerian state has been faulted as the bane of the country's inability to forge a national consensus. This thinking has been grossly exploited by the political elites to advance their self-serving interests. Fashina (2012, p. 3) reiterates it more succinctly thus: "ethno-nationalists assume, falsely, that cultural sameness is a guarantee of political and socio-economic justice. In reality, cultural sameness does not make justice more probable." The pertinence of this submission is demonstrated by the Somali paradox, a state where the overwhelming majority are part of a single, homogeneous ethnic group. All Somalis are Muslims and share the same language and culture. Nevertheless, one of the most terrible civil wars in Africa has been waged in this country for more than two decades (Elmi & Barise, 2006, p. 32).

Ikime (1985) provides historic evidence that foregrounds that Nigeria may have been a product of colonial enterprise, nonetheless, the people that make up the present day Nigeria had interacted in the precolonial era. Thus, the argument that Nigeria is an artificial manufacturing of the British cannot be solely attributed to Nigerians inability to create a nation. He argues thus:

> …years after independence, many Nigerians still explain our inability to forge a truly united nation in terms of the fact that Nigeria is an artificial creation of the British. In taking that attitude, we assume that our situation is peculiar. Of course, we must know, deep down, that it is not. Most nations of the world are artificial creations, in so far as they are the products of accidents of history.

Ikime cites the United States as an example of a nation formed by historical circumstances, yet evolved into a nation. In his words:

> …the U.S.A. is a strong and united nation. Yet it is also an artificial creation, even if its colonial experiences were, in some ways, dramatically different from ours. The example of the United States is clear evidence that the so-called artificiality of the original coming together of diverse groups does not constitute an insurmountable barrier to the building of a united nation-state. If we in Nigeria have thus far failed to evolve policies and strategies that can lead to the emergence of a truly united nation, let us not blame it on our past. Rather let us take a hard look at our policies and our strategies (1985, pp. 2-3).

The social, economic and political challenges that Nigeria faces provide an appropriate context for adopting the integrative-relational model that could galvanise the strategic use of PR tactics to drive inclusive governance in Nigeria. This is particularly necessary given the elusive search for the making of a country—Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the nuanced perspectives of PR through its stages of evolution, typology of PR practice in government, and how the integrative relational approach can be adopted to contribute to effective governance in Nigeria. The assumption is that the underlying principles of PR can be deployed as a tool for driving effective government-citizen engagement in Nigeria. However, this can only be achieved when the PR professionals who work for government build on the 21st Century "understanding of the role and definition of public relations that suggests that PR provides a new level of leadership for management to integrate relationships inside, as well as outside an organisation, using a wide-range of management strategies and tactics, including communication" (Caywood, 1997, p. xi).

Public Relations and Governance: A Conceptual Understanding

From Ancient Greece and Rome to the American Revolution, scholars have documented the ubiquitous role of PR and communication in political governance (Strömbäck & Kiousi, 2014). In comparing PR and government, one may be tempted to conclude that both are mutually exclusive. But a critical interrogation of these concepts would reveal that both, indeed, share attributes of inclusiveness.

There is a lack of consensus in scholarly literature regarding definitions of PR because it is a "field more often characterised by what it does than what it is" (Bruning & Ledingham (2000, p. x). The difficulty in defining PR, therefore, is attributable to it being "a complex and hybrid subject which draws on theories and practices from many fields, such as management, media, communication and psychology." This fact is buttressed by Angie Bradbury, Managing Director, Dig&Fish that the "industry has a definition crisis because its remit is so large" (Dawson, 2018). This limitation notwithstanding, "definitions set intellectual boundaries on the field to be investigated" (Grunig, 1996, p. 461). Therefore, the definition that is adopted in this article provides an epistemic framework for understanding an integrative-relational approach to government public relations which this paper advocates. Strömbäck & Kiousis's in Kiousis & Strömbäck (2014, p. 250) define PR for government as "the management process by which an organisation or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals." Of course, most definitions of PR emphasise the relational dimension as one that exists between an organisation and its diverse publics, in accordance with the position of Strömbäck & Kiousis. However, more pointedly is the special emphasis on achieving consensus through consultation for citizens' buy-in for government policies and practices.

Similarly, among several perspectives on what governance is, that of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is highly instructive. Hence, governance is defined as "structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation." This definition constructs governance as a subject of thought with multifaceted relevance, not in a narrow sense of politics. This perspective is elastic enough to accommodate other important concepts with the sameness of degree, were it conceptualised in the most restrictive sense of politics.

Placing the definitions of PR and governance by Strömbäck & Kiousis and UNESCO respectively in critical perspectives, government public relations can be conceptualised as the process of managing purposeful communication and action by an organisation or individual actor for political purposes in an attempt to influence, establish, build, and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with its key stakeholders to gain support and achieve goals on the bases of accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity, inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation.

Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" of 1863 situates the interface between governments and their citizens when he conceptualises democracy to mean "government of the people, by the people, for the people." His understanding of this system of government reinforces the notion of democracy being a form of social contract "between the politician and the mass of society; the idea that the politician would always be beholden to the people." This idea of democracy makes "people-oriented techniques of public relations to play such an important role, in winning governments, but also in running governments, working with governments and changing government policy (Stockwell, 2009, p. 415). Therefore, the primary task of government PR is to provide platforms for continuous engagement between government and its citizens through a two-way symmetrical communication. It is only through such a dialogic approach that the tenets of democracy can be achieved. The PR professional, when actively engaged, and given the room to operate without micro-managing, can provide strategic insights into how governments and citizens can better relate, and optimally benefit from such a symbiotic relationship (Olawuyi, 2014).

Governments exist to serve their citizens, and it is the responsibility of citizens to contribute effectively to the smooth running of governments. The r\

The respect for this social contract by both parties definitely leads to development in society. Although the adoption of government public relations has been criticised based on the premise that its techniques are used to manipulate public opinion and close the public sphere to the free-ranging debate which are crucial to the deepening of democratic ideals, nonetheless, PR for government is an invaluable asset based on the following reasons:

1. A democratic government is best served by a free two-way flow of ideas and accurate information for citizens and governments to make informed choices;
2. A democratic government must and be accountable to the citizens it serves; and
3. Citizens as taxpayers, have a right to government information – but with some exceptions.

Given the above, it is evident that the adoption of public relations for government has more than a passing role of pitching content in the media and burnishing the image of political actors. Rather, it is basically building trust between government institutions and citizens. It is worth noting that "today, people's trust levels in news sources are lower than ever before, in this era of fake news, data harvesting and consumer scepticism." Consequently, there is the urgent "need to tell …stories through a new lens, generating earned opinions, nailing all areas of communication and helping consumers see what's trusted and what is not" (Bradbury in Dawson, 2018). Simply put, PR has more to offer than is currently known to the practitioners and their principals.

Crisis of Evolution and Misconceptions about Public Relations

Some PR scholars argue with some persuasive eloquence that one of the besetting challenges that have insistently dogged the practice of PR is its historical evolution (Myers, 2021; Meadows and Meadows, 2014). These scholars contend that the ambivalence in how PR came to be, is seen, and practiced has subjected it to the identity crisis that it suffers. For example, it is only PR, out of the marketing communication mix that seeks to make clarifications about what it is, and not. Ajala (2001, p. 11) provides a catalogue of misconceptions, which some people, including PR practitioners and students of mass communication, have of the nature and functions of PR. These include:

1. Publicity for political aspirants, business executives, military leaders, etc.;
2. Series of free meals and gifts for journalists, prospective supporters, clients and others;
3. A simple means of gaining media coverage;
4. Means of covering up mistakes; and
5. A mechanism for personal empire building.

Ajala's (2001) catalogue of these misconceptions, though not exhaustive, clearly depicts the crisis that PR faces. This degenerate perception, which seems to be the acceptable norm among people of what the practice is, was exemplified in 2005 when a former Nigerian minister who was caught red-handed engaging in bribery, and had even returned the money, went to court demanding an apology for his disgraceful removal from office by the president, because he did not personally enrich himself with the PR lobby fund. Reacting to this "sordid revelations, the CEO of Mediacraft, Mr. John Ehiguese, elected to write an opinion article entitled "Giving PR a bad name" as an outright objection to what he says, "simply galls the stomach." In his words:

> …as a trained and registered Public Relations practitioner, with a thriving practice, I cannot, in good professional conscience, allow this heresy to go unchallenged. Ex-Minister[redacted] and his ilk need to be educated on the gapping difference between public relations and bribery. The two are, indeed, mutually exclusive (Ehiguese, 2005).

Ehiguese explains further:

> In a wider context, it is a most unfortunate, although admittedly widespread misconception in Nigeria to equate public relations with outright bribery. This misconception stems from an apparently pervasive ignorance about what PR is and how it works. PR is not, and should not, involve bribery in any form. Indeed, bribery, in the context of PR is clearly unethical, as obtains in the codes of ethics that guide the practice of PR everywhere in the world (2005).

A topic that is usually given attention at the introductory course in PR is an attempt to conceptually clarify how marketing, advertising, publicity, and propaganda are different from public relations. It is ironic but interesting at the same time that PR seems to be the only discipline in the marketing communication mix that embarks on vigorous 'sensitisation' by defining itself, essentially by what it is not. These misconceptions, according to Ajala (2005, p. 36) "occur because public relations practitioners perform various functions. While some work in the area of product publicity, others are fund raisers, while others are political specialists who decide what their candidate will say or do." It is true that PR people function in several areas of human endeavours. Notwithstanding, to attribute these multiple functions to the misconstruction of the profession is absolutely arguable.

Lastly, based on the indiscernible identities of what constitutes PR, it has been referred to differently as: spin, publicity, gin and tonic, hype, propaganda, etc. This maze of confusion as to what PR is exactly, or what PR people do has increasingly undermined the strategic relevance of the profession. Ajala's (2001) position that the general misconceptions about public relations practice can be attributed to the multiple functions and multidisciplinary nature of the profession having its hand in almost everything is highly contentious. Olawuyi (2018) provides a counterintuitive position thus:

> The evolution of public relations over time lends it to amorphous interpretations of its expected functions. This, most definitely, has implications on how the profession is defined, practiced, and perceived. The history of public relations, also, characterises the dialectics in its definition.

It is pertinent to fully grasp the evolution of PR because it "will help the practitioner and the scholar to appreciate the dynamic forces that have shaped the discipline and continue to influence its development" and how it "will allow the practitioners and the scholar to predict and anticipate and be prepared for directions the profession is likely to take in the coming years" (Freitag & Stokes, 2009, p. 17). The PR model developed by Grunig & Hunt (1984) provides the template to examine public relations with a historical context in an attempt to fully understand the basis for its identity crisis. The model reveals the stages in the evolution of PR, and the two types of PR practice. The basic assumption of the models is that the profession has fully evolved from press agentry to the two-way symmetrical practice in a mutually exclusive manner. The Grunigian model is presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Models of Public Relations

Model	Communication Type	Purpose	Application	Research	Characteristics
Press Agentry (Publicity era-1800s)	One-way communication	Propaganda	▪ Entertainments ▪ Sports ▪ Marketing	Research	▪ Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audience to behave as the organisation desires ▪ Attention-getting ▪ Complete truth not essential
Public Information (Information era-early 1900s)	One-way Communication	Dissemination of information	▪ Government ▪ NGOs ▪ Commercial organisation	Readability and Comprehension	▪ Uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to distribute organisation's information. ▪ PR practitioner is often regarded as "Journalist in Residence" ▪ Honest and accurate dissemination of information (Truth is important)
Two-way asymmetrical (Advocacy era-mid 1900s)	Two-way communication	Scientific Persuasion	▪ Competitive business organisation ▪ Causes and movements	Attitude and opinion	▪ Uses persuasion and manipulation to modify attitude and influence behaviour as the organisation desires ▪ Research is not carried out to determine or feel the pulse of the publics about the organisation ▪ There is a Two-Way imbalanced effect in favour of the

					organisation
Two-way symmetrical (Relationship era-late 1900s)	Two-way communication	Mutual understanding and conflict resolution	▪ Regulated business ▪ Non-profit org. ▪ Social movement	Perception and values	▪ Uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and its publics ▪ Two-way balance effect

Source: Grunig and Hunt (1984)

A Critique of the Grunigian Model of Public Relations

Moloney (2006, p. x) argues plausibly that there is a convictive need to break away from the "Grunigian paradigm of PR thinking" which empirically does not guarantee "the search for communicative symmetries, but instead the search for communicative advantages that strengthen the interest of those it serves." Hence, he proposes a normative theory of PR which can only thrive "in a state of communicative equality" that champions for "public and private subsidies to resource-poor, marginalised groups, and to technical and social innovators in order to give them the equality of a threshold level of PR 'voice." Moloney's (2006) critique of the model provides an entry point for PR practitioners in government to take another look at their role on how to forge "people-oriented techniques of public relations" (Stockwell, 2009, p. 415).

Unfortunately, the assumption has always been that the Grunigian model of PR provides the ideal form of practice which is predicated on "virtuous messaging, known as two-way communications between equal, listening, negotiating, mutually respectful message senders and receivers." This assumption definitely belies the reality of the practice as it never portends or pretends to provide such a communicative platform. As a matter of fact, for all practical purposes such conception of the profession's "communicative virtue is not supported by much evidence in the field, and so takes teaching and writing by the PR academy into a Neverland of perfection" (Moloney, 2006: pp. xii-xiii).

The Grunigian model also assumes that each of the stages in the evolution of PR is mutually exclusive. While the model provides deep insight into the development of the profession over time by identifying critical landmarks and defining moments, each stage does not imply a clean break from the other. A hard look at the model implies that the progenitors of PR deployed their craft for propaganda purposes through the use of 'persuasion and manipulation to influence the audience to behave as the organisation desires.' Based on how PR started, it would not be improper to say that PR and propaganda are sides of a coin. No wonder it is said that 'PR is a dozen, propaganda is twelve. This fact is buttressed by Ige (2009, pp. 8-9 thus:

> …like some other concepts, propaganda has been overused in a negative way and taken out of context. Whether propaganda is synonymous with public relations or not depends on the interpretation of each person who uses, hears or takes time to contemplate it. Credit must be accorded to the public relations industry for raising the ethics and standards of information and communication management. Propaganda (it must be agreed) generally has a negative connotation and perception. It is owing to this fact, that public relations professionals vehemently want to distance themselves from associating with it. But if truth be told (and this is no propaganda) the practice of public relations is actually an offshoot of a refined form of propaganda.

The thin line that demarcates PR from propaganda makes it more difficult to discern their differences, not in terms of conceptual definition, but in terms of their deployments. The fact of this thesis was established by Moore (1996) when he notes that "PR is fouled with propaganda; it ranges over the ground between compulsion and free persuasion. PR becomes propaganda when it is imperative in tone, offers no alternative facts or views and is formulaic." Parsons (2004, p. 105) also emphasises the inter-relatedness of the two concepts thus: "In the name of strategic persuasion, public relations practitioners have, over the years, resorted to a variety of techniques that hover on the border between persuasion and blatant propaganda, or between the truth and lying by omission."

The emphasis is that, it is no fault of PR that it has to bear the burdens of misconception and identity crisis; PR is a victim of its evolution. However, if a clear distinction must be created, then it has to be one that fundamentally empowers the PR professional "to function as a boundary-spanner representing the organisation to the publics and the publics to the organisation" (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2014, p. 251).

Typology of Public Relations Practice for Government

A typology of PR practice can be extrapolated from the "Models of Public Relations" developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984). It is important to note that each stage of the Grunigian model can be described as a type of PR practice. In other words, each model describes a PR practice that is based on the degree of centrality of the interest and views of stakeholders to an organisation, and the mode of interaction/communication between the organisation and its stakeholders. That is, the importance an organisation attaches to its stakeholders would determine how it communicates with them.

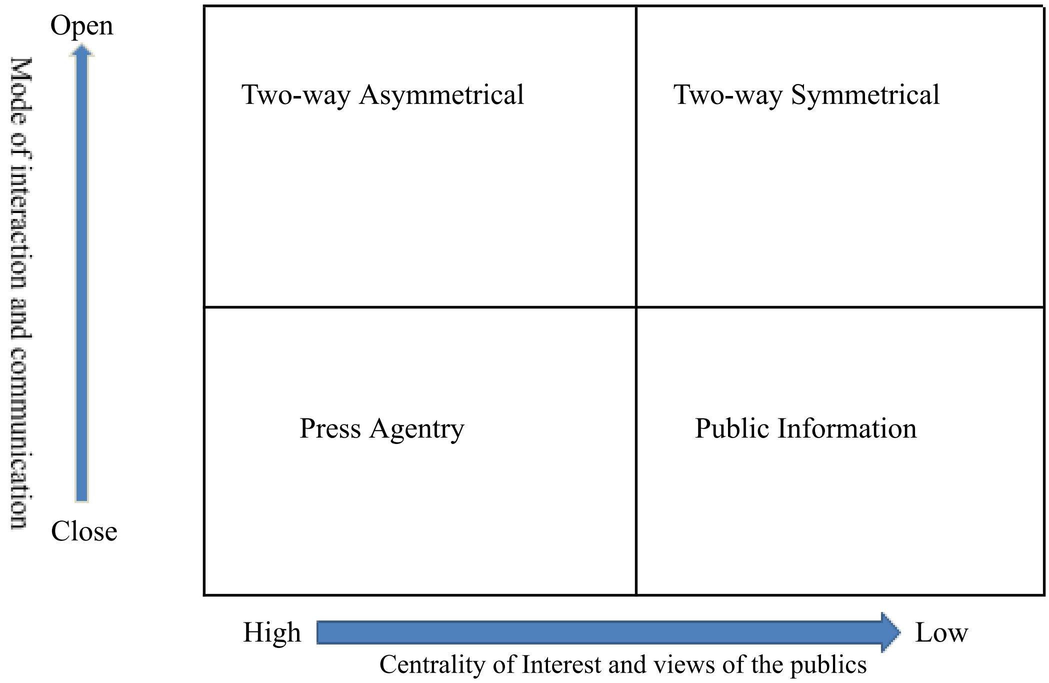

Fig. 1: Typology of public relations practice (Adapted from Grunig & Hunt Model, 1984)

The organisation whose PR practice is based on the philosophy of 'press agentry' demonstrates engagement with their stakeholders through the consideration that the centrality of their interests and views are inconsequential. In other words, relating with stakeholders under this practice is essentially about privileging the interest of the organisation above that of the stakeholders. Given the self-seeking nature of this practice, the mode of communication with stakeholders is closed, which implies that the organisation controls the interaction without any room for feedback from stakeholders.

The 'Public Information' type of PR practice reduces everything about the profession to 'working with the media or media relations.' The drivers of this PR typology are, essentially, journalists who transmuted into PR practitioners because of their experience in journalism. They are also referred to as "journalists in residence." Although the centrality of the interests and views of stakeholders are high on the organisation's agenda, its mode of communication/interaction is closed, that is, one-way, which shuts out stakeholders from expressing their concerns about the organisation.

The third type of PR practice is the 'two-way symmetrical.' This typology embraces a philosophical tradition that considers the centrality of the interests and views of stakeholders to its behaviour as somewhat unimportant based on a closed interactive platform. The organisation interacts with its stakeholders with the intention of altering the behaviour and/or attitude of its stakeholders, while the organisation is unwilling to change its behaviour and/or attitude based on the interests and views of stakeholders.

Finally, the 'two-way symmetrical' type of PR which may be described as the 'ideal' form of PR practice places a premium on sustainable relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders based on mutual understanding. The interests and views of an organisation's stakeholders are considered as highly central to the attainment of its goals based on an open mode of communication/interaction. The "Mexican Statement" expresses the philosophy more poignantly thus: "Public relations practice is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders, and *implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation's and the public interest*" (Jefkins & Yardin 1998, p. 7) (emphasis is mine).

The nature of PR practice for government in Nigeria as demonstrated by the typology is one that reveals domineering influence of political actors. One in which practitioners are unquestionably beholden to their patrons and so acts as their master's lap dogs. They take and carry out orders, even when they are unflinching in the conviction that such decisions could erode confidence among the people. But because they consider their appointments as a rare privilege that should not slip, they would be willing to do everything to keep their jobs. A PR practitioner who is caught in the web of a 'survival mode' would always pander to the whims of their principal without raising concerns about the implications of such actions. It is not surprising, therefore, that public relations for government, as it is the case with other forms, in its crudest form, is media relations.

The reductionist perspective of PR as a "communicative exchange function where messages are 'produced' by PR professionals for their principals and are 'consumed' by those who receive them" shows that the "formal function of public relations people is to 'message' (Moloney, 2006). This may have prompted Robert Phillips after all his years as a PR juggernaut to doubt the things he once believed in his book, *Trust Me, PR is Dead*. In the "Preface" Phillips (2015) states that:

> …PR has run out of options and has missed its moment to lead. It is in terminal decline. About to be overrun and overwhelmed by the age of data, PR today is to communications what analogue was to digital at the turn of the century. I am afraid PR is dead, even though the body may still twitch for a while.
>
> Few will mourn its passing.

What are Philips' reasons for this tragic pronouncement about a profession in which he was a thought leader? In his words:

> …its failure to embrace data; its insistence on championing generalists in an age of mastery; its focus on physical expansion rather than developing the skillsets and intelligences needed to better serve clients' needs; the way it obsesses about advertising and the dreadfully-named "C-suite" (PR-speak for board-level executives), rather than focusing on ground-breaking ideas rooted in citizen truths; the building of bureaucracies rather than centres of excellence; and more (Philips, 2015).

The CEO of Black House Media, Mr. Adekunle Ayeni, in an article entitled "Why PR is Dead" also laments the ineffective force of public relations at making significant contributions within the Nigerian space thus:

> PR is rarely in the room when management is planning or when the government is strategising. When we get called, it is often for traditional media relations or to 'manage' press events.
>
> Clients complain they do not get value at the level of strategy; that they do not get help navigating social media; that they do not see creativity and innovation, especially in storytelling and community management (Ayeni 2016, p. 6).

Little wonder that among the *few* that mourned, and even had a rite of passage for *Mr. PR* was Mr. Ayeni's Black House Media who shared in the sentiments of PR being an idea that has outlived its relevance, however with the hope that PR's 'dry bones shall rise again.' No doubt that PR is going through challenging times and it may take us some time to redefine the philosophy and doctrinal standpoint of our practice, but I make bold to say that 'Trust me, PR is NOT dead!' and its relevance will continue to define individual and organisational impacts. It is the "communication techniques best suited for the times, working across time zones and cultures, with speed, dialogue, and credibility" (Edelman 2002, p. 126).

Use of Influence Resources in Public Relations

The influence of PR in driving governance in Nigeria is still burgeoning, with a lot of room for growth and improvement. However, not minding the derogatory remarks about the profession and the "prevalent narrow concept of the role of public relations among opinion leaders and public relations professionals themselves", it is incontrovertible that "public relations has a far greater potential and responsibility in our society than is realised…" (McLaughlin in Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 1). For PR to lead the charge in the integrative-relational approach that could give fillip to governance in Nigeria, the professional must come to the full consciousness that "power and influence are crucial to getting things done inside organisations" but quite unfortunately, many of them confess to lacking that appropriate power to make things happen. According to Berger & Reber (2006, p. 2), public relations professionals whom they interviewed revealed two major reasons that undermine the power and influence of PR practitioners:

> Some said organisational leaders are the problem: They do not understand the role and value of the practice, and they do not view PR practitioners as legitimate members of the strategic decision-making circles. Others blamed professionals themselves for being too inexperienced, too passive, or too publicity-focused, or for being deficient in leadership and strategic managerial skills.

The findings above by Berger & Reber (2006) starkly indicate that public relations professionals are marginalised and their voices muted. Invariably, they have become "*Seyi* [1]and *Muyiwa*[2] – diligent messengers who lack discretion and judgement – these are runners" (Olawuyi, 2016, p. 41). In an article titled "PR People as Errand Boys", PR Nigeria (2009) reiterates this more succinctly:

> Unfortunately, and ironically, amongst all the decent fields of professionals, only PR, perhaps, is the profession where people you are supposed to be consulting for or advising, "know" so much that they teach you how to advise them, thus turning a supposed professional to an errand boy. Let's do a check list: Lawyers, doctors, accountants, pharmacists, surveyors, bankers, engineers, builders, teachers, to mention a few other professionals are seen first as advisers, because the client or employer assumes that he/she does not know as much as these professionals. Even when he/she knows so much, he respects them and their advice as professionals. But in PR, the same clients or employers assume he/she knows so much that he/she wants an executor or an errand boy. *To worsen the whole situation is in the thinking that 'everybody can do PR; after all, it's about good talk, fine dressing and just media relations'* (emphasis is mine).

Given this situation, therefore, PR lacks the capacity "to help organisations navigate a complex and turbulent world" because it is increasingly more challenging "to advance the image of professionals beyond widely held perceptions of flacks and publicists." Hence, if the profession must "increase its social legitimacy and influence on a larger scale, we must rethink the practice – what it is and might be, and what it does and might do." How then can public relations professionals who work for the government "increase their influence and acquire legitimacy?" (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 2).

In answering this question, it will be more fitting to define what influence means within the context of public relations, which "is the power to persuade and convince others to get things done, without necessarily having the authority to do it." Put differently, influence "means *having a voice, being listened to, and being heard* (emphasis added) when seated at the table" (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 2). Instructively, when a PR professional is described as 'influential', such a person demonstrates an uncommon professional competence, emotional intelligence, leadership, and persuasive capabilities that make his or her counsels inviolable. Berger and Reber (2006) identify five influence resources that a seasoned PR professional must possess to make necessary impact, particularly, in the integrative-relational approach to governance. These are:

(1) *Individual influence resources:* These are the personal attributes that a professional brings to the job. These include professional experience and expertise; accomplishments and performance record; organisational knowledge; and skillsets such as problem solving, environmental scanning, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, and impression management. Other personal attributes like intelligence, creativity, integrity, charisma, character, vision, and risk-taking.

(2) *Structural influence resources* requires that the PR professional understands the power dynamics within his organisation. Knowing the axis of power within the organisation could facilitate how to get things done in the most efficient and effective ways. The knowledge of the organisational structure assists the practitioner to create an inclusive organisation where the strengths of every component unit is harnessed for the corporate good.

(3) *Relational influence resources* refer to the network of relationships that the PR practitioner has both "inside and outside of organisations, especially with those in positions of power and authority" (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 80). Relationships, according to Waldron in Berger & Reber (2006, p. 80), "represent a powerful multi-dimensional influence resource, a web of connections that can be cultivated and activated in public relations practice." The resources challenge the practitioner to weave a web of relationships that could hold true to the saying that "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

(4) *Informational influence resources:* Information is a critical resource in enhancing the influence of PR practitioners with their principals. Information is a "form of power, and controlling access to vital information or its use, content, and distribution represents influence resources in political arenas" (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 81). The following types of information resources are required for the enhancement of the practitioner's

[1] A Yoruba word that means 'Do this'
[2] A Yoruba word that means 'Bring this'

efficient delivery of functions: organisations' performance, strategies, and decisions; political information about other political players, agendas, and processes inside the organisation; and empirical data collected through research, case study analyses, and benchmarking activities, among others.
(5) *Systemic influence resources:* This refers to "professional organisations and associated codes, standards, established measures of professional value, and reputation." The systemic resources also include social, economic, and political developments and institutions in the larger social system that surround and intersect the organisations" (Barbalet in Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 81). The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and Public Relations Consultants of Nigeria (PRCAN) constitute systemic influence resource that members could leverage in the execution of their professional functions. It is important to note that "established measures of professional value or worth can help legitimate a profession and enhance its reputation and power" (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 81).

Table 2: Categories of influence resources

Category	Examples of resources
Individual	**Professional**: expertise, education, years and types of experience, performance record, organisational knowledge. **Skills**: interpersonal, technical, leadership, managerial, problem solving, political, and conflict resolution. **Personal characteristics**: intelligence, charisma, integrity, energy, willpower, character, risk taking, endurance, flexibility, focus, and vision
Structural	**Authority**: reporting position, memberships in decision-making groups, job description, project responsibilities, policies, and practices. **Controllable resources**: budgets, personnel, technologies, physical space, equipment, and timing/training. **Communication team**: size and capabilities of work unit, collective voice, training, and development programmes.
Relational	**Internal**: mentors, sponsors, access, to decision makers, teams, coalitions, alliances, shared identity groups, and social networks. **External**: other professionals, associations, coalitions, clubs, community organisations, and social networks.
Informational	**Access to information**: research data, case studies, benchmarking results, organisational memory, material information, and political intelligence. **Control over information**: control the access to, collection of, or timing and distribution of information; editorial over content.
Systemic	Professional associations; professional codes and standards; image or reputation of profession; measures of professional value; alliances and activists groups; and developments in political, social, and economic systems and institutions.

Source: Berger & Reber (2006)

Integrative-Relational Approach to the Practice of Government Public Relations

The demands of the 21st Century provide public relations practitioners with no options than to rethink its practices or risk relegation to the dungeons of history as a profession whose relevance is out of step with the dictates of the times. PR, writes Phillips (2015, p. 13), "can no longer dictate on its own terms" because the playfield has changed. Hence, it is no longer about "loudhailer broadcasting or "messaging the message" anymore. Shrill press releases are irrelevant in a world that sees through obfuscation and deceit. Building advocacy and activism from within networks is the way forward. The voices of regular people need to be heard."

The fact is not contestable that public relations professionals are "discourse workers specialising in communication and the presentation of argument and employing rhetorical strategies to achieve managerial aims" (L'Etang, 2004, p. 2). However, the 21st Century imposes a somewhat new responsibility on professionals to "lead business and other complex organisations… on several levels including the integration of relationships with various stakeholders" (Caywood, 1997, p. xi). This leadership, according to Caywood, "will be defined by the public relations professionals' ability to integrate at several levels of business and society and create more integrated management processes." The inherent value of this integration "emerges from the self-defined role of public relations building "relations" or integrating relationships between an organisation and its publics" (Caywood, 1997, p. xi).

For PR to impact governance, relationship integration must occur at four critical levels: integration of relationships with various stakeholders, integration of management functions, integration of corporate and organisational structures, and integration with society (Caywood, 1997). These are discussed hereafter, drawing on how they contribute to effective governance.

(1) *Stakeholder relationship integration*: The first line of charge for the public relations practitioner is the deployment of "the intellectual- and skill-based" professional competence to forge relationships, maintain, and enhance the reputation of government with individuals and organisations "that have a "stake" in its failure or success. The PR professional has the responsibility to strengthen "the outside-in perspective" of government "through its managed relationships with as many stakeholders as practically possible. The leadership role of public relations is the coordination of "groups, audiences, publics, and stakeholders" with a view to managing their expectations in relation to governance. The stakeholders in government public relations are a vast and diverse group of internal and external publics and audiences with different agendas. These include: leaders and employees in the executive, legislative, or judiciary, ministries, department and agencies (MDA), public interest groups, political party leaders, political action committees, state and local officials, civil servants, pensioners, local governments, state governments, federal government, international community, investors, organised private sector, social movements, labour unions, professional interest groups, media, general public, etc. (Caywood, 1997).

(2) *Management function integration:* The second level of integration is with other units of government which requires that the public relations manager belongs to the dominant coalition within an organisation. In other words, the PR professional must be invested with management capabilities that earn him/her a "place at the management table" (Caywood, 1997, p. xii). The interaction of PR with other managers or heads of other units as the case may be, serves as an intellectual sounding board on the implication of policies or actions on government. In addition, PR at this level of integration brings to the table for use these component units "the greatest experience and skill using various communications-based strategies and tactics.

(3) *Corporate structure integration:* For governments to be accountable and responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens, then it must be run like a business enterprise, because in business, the customer is king. But governance in this part of the world is run like empires or feudal institutions. This third level of integration requires the PR professional to assume a "high counsellor level role" with "the proven ability to manage current issues and anticipate future demands" on government. The practitioner's leadership role in this context will be defined most profoundly by his quality of training and educational accomplishments (Caywood, 1997).

(4) *Societal integration:* The last tier of relational integration will be for the public relations practitioner to guide the government on the values that enhance effective government-citizen engagement. It is pertinent to note that the professional competence of PR practitioners to "describe, explain, and predict the societal pressures on" government and its institutions provides them with a "risk assessment and interpretation necessary" to make informed policy pronouncement and seek understanding and cooperation from citizens. Having the public relations professional at management positions and seated at crucial meetings "with a vision of ethical and value-driven purpose and actions" provides safety nets to make responsive, responsible, and ethical decisions for the good of government (Caywood, 1997).

CONCLUSION

The underutilisation of the fundamental principles of public relations in driving governance has led to the increasing erosion of public confidence in government and its institutions; and undermined its capacity to mobilise citizens on issues of national consensus. The deepening, ethno-religious divide in the country, is one that should be of concern to everyone, but more for the public relations professionals who work for the government because it challenges their roles as boundary spanners and members of the dominant coalition. The United States' White House provides an example of an integrated relational approach wherein the president employs PR as a tool for governance. The "White House embrace of public relations techniques has corresponded with an increasing dependence on public support for the implementation of presidential policy. No longer does public support merely elect presidents. Now public support is a president's most visible source of ongoing political power" (Maltese, 1994, pp. 3-4).

The leadership role of public relations in this era will be measured by how effectively professionals have been able to achieve the integration of various actors from the macro level of interaction with society to a more micro level of individual stakeholders in a complex society like Nigeria. This arduous responsibility requires that the consummate professional exhibits a range of attributes such as leadership, smart and innovative thinking, uncommon courage, technical competence, futuristic, out-of-the-box strategy, exit advocacy option, and deployment of influence resources. Without these qualities, the professional may succeed at getting a seat at the table but may never find his/her voice.

REFERENCES

Achebe, C. (2012). *There was a Country: A personal History of Biafra.* New York: The Penguin Press.

Ajala, V. O. (2001). *Public relations: in search of professional excellence Second Edition)*. Ibadan: MayBest Publications.

Ayeni, A. (2016). Why PR is dead. *Nigeria PR Report 2015: Inside the Public Relations Industry in Nigeria.* Lagos: bhm Group.

Berger, B. K. and Reber, B. H. (2006). *Gaining Influence in Public Relations: The Role of Resistance in Practice.* Mahwah, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.

Bruning, S. D. and Ledingham, J. A. (2000). "Introduction: Background and current Trends in the Study of Relationship Management." In S. D. Bruning and J. A. Ledingham (Eds.), *Public Relations as Relationship Management: A Relational Approach to the Study and Practice of Public Relations.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Caywood, C. L. (1997). "Twenty-First Century Public Relations: The Strategic Stages of Integrated Communication." In Clarke L. Caywood (Ed.) *The Handbook of strategic public relations and integrated communications*. New York: McGraw Hill, pp xi-xxvi.

Dawson, A. (2018). Head to head: is the PR industry suffering from an identity crisis?" Retrieved from https://mumbrella.com.au/head-to-head-is-the-pr-industry-suffering-from-an-identity-crisis-535068.

Edelman, R. (2002). "The Power of Public Relations in a Complex World." By CEOs from: Edelman, Burson-Marsteller, Fleishman-Hillard, Golin/Haris, Middleber, Lou Hammond, Nooma Russo, Cushman Amberg, RMR, Patrice Tanaka & Rudder Finn (Eds.) In *Inside the Minds: The Art of Public Relations (Industry Visionaries Reveal the Secrets to Successful Public Relations).* San Mateo, CA: Aspatore Books.

Ehiguese, J. (2005). "Giving PR a Bad Name." A Public Lecture Delivered at the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Lagos State Chapter at Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Elmi, A. A. & Barise, A. (2006). The Somali conflict: root causes, obstacles, and peace-building strategies. *African Security Review*, 15(1):32-54.

Fashina, O. (2012). "Foreword". In *Ethnic Nationalism: Challenges and Prospects of a Pan Nigeria.* Presented at the 17th Bi-Annual National Delegates Conference of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) by Professor Tam David West. Ibadan: Centre for Popular Education CEPED, pp. 1-8.

Freitag, A. R. and Stokes, O.A. (2009). *Global Public Relations: Spanning Borders, Spanning Cultures.* London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

Grunig, L. A. (1996). "Public Relations." In Don W. Stacks (Ed.) *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research.* Mahwah, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 459-478.

Grunig, J. E. and Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Henslowe, P. (1999). *Public relations: a practical guide.* London: Kogan Page Limited.

Ledingham, J. A. and Bruning, S. D. (2000). "Introduction: Background and Current Trends in the Study of Relationship Management" in Public Relations as Relationship Management: A Relational Approach to the Study and Practice of Public Relations. Contributors: John A. Ledingham - Editor, Stephen D. Bruning - Editor. Publisher: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Place of publication: Mahwah, NJ.

Miller, K. (2002). Communication Theories: Perspectives, Processes, and Contexts. Boston Burr Ridge: McGrawHill.

Phillips, R. (2015). Trust Me, PR is Dead. Marylebone: Unbound.

Ige, A. (2009). Propaganda and public relations: two sides of a coin. A term paper submitted in partial fulfilment of CLA 408; Governmental Public Relations, Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Ikime, O. (1985). In search of Nigerians: changing patterns of inter-group relations in an evolving nation state. Presidential Inaugural Lecture delivered at the 30th Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on May 1, 1985.

Jefkins, F. and Yadin, D. (1998). *Public Relations* (Fifth Edition). Harlow, England: Prentice Hall.

L'Etang, J. (2004). *Public Relations in Britain: A History of Professional Practice in the Twentieth Century.* London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Maltese, J. A. (1994). *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News (Second Edition, Revised).* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Meadows, C. & Meadows III, C. W. (2014). "The History of Academic Research in Public Relations: Tracking Research Trends over Nearly Four Decades. *Public Relations Review.* Volume 40, Issues 5, pp. 871-873.

McCollough, C. (2021). "Public Relations History: Theory, Practice, and Profession." *Journal of Public Relations Education,* 8(1), 187-191. https://aejmc.us/jpre/?p=2982.

Moloney, K. (1997). *Rethinking Public Relations: PR, Propaganda and Democracy.* London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

___________ (2006). *Rethinking PR: The Spin and the Substance* and *Rethinking PR 2: PR Propaganda and*

Democracy. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Moore, S. (1996). *An Introduction to Public Relations*. London: Cassell.

Olawuyi, E. A. (2014). Government public relations. course material, Distance Learning Programme, Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

______________ (2016). The value of theory-driven public relations practice in Nigeria. *Nigeria PR Report 2016*. Ikeja: BHM.

_______________(2018). Public relations in/and for governance: Towards an integrative relational approach. Quarterly lecture of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (Oyo State) delivered at the Banquet Hall, Premier Hotel, Ibadan on 1 March, 2018.

Phillips, R. (2015). *Trust me, PR is dead.* Marylebone: Unbound.

PR Nigeria (2009). PR people as errand boys. Retrieved on May 28, 2020 from http://prnigeria.net/pr-people-as-errand-boys/

Stockwell, S. (2009). Public relations and government. In J. Johnston & C. Zawawi (Eds.), *Public Relations: Theory and Practice,* Crows Nest, North South Wales: Allen and Unwin, pp. 414-442.

Strömbäck, J. and Kiousis, S. (2014). "Political Public Relations: Defining and Mapping an Emergent Field." In Jesper Strömbäck and Spiro Kiousis (Eds.) *Political Public Relations: Principles and Application.* New York: Routledge, pp. 1-32.

UNESCO (Not Dated). "The Concept of Governance." Retrieved from http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/geqaf/technical-notes/concept-governance.