
Contemporary challenges impacting on the practice of public relations in Nigeria (1990-2011)

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Abstract

This article analyses some contemporary challenges impacting on the practice of public relations in Nigeria. It covers the period from 1990, when the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) was officially recognised by the Federal Government through a charter called Decree No. 16 of June 1990, to now. The analysis was based upon archival review of academic and professional literature, and supported with expert interview data. The study also explores conceptual models underpinning the practice of public relations in Nigeria.

This article contends that despite changes including conferment of chartered status on the NIPR by the federal government, enactment of a code of conduct by the institute and establishment of a professional public relations diploma, public relations practice faces some critical challenges in Nigeria. The authors suggest ways to solve some of these challenges so that public relations can become a profession with senior managerial functions in the country.

Introduction

The conferment of chartered status on the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) by Decree No. 16 of June 1990, made the practice of public relations take a new turn in Nigeria. Reacting to the charter, Black (1991, p. 4) stated, "1 June, 1990 was remarkable for the public relations profession in Nigeria". Prior to this time, public relations was an 'all comers' trade' with professionals and non-professionals jostling for survival. The decree conferred structure on public relations practice by giving it official recognition in

both public and private sectors, and prescribing acceptable qualifications and a code of conduct for practitioners.

A review of numerous studies (Otubanjo, Amujo & Melewar, 2010; Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2009; Mbeke, 2009; Akpabio, 2009; Skinner & Mersham, 2009; Niemann-Struweg & Meintjes, 2008; Molleda & Moreno, 2006; Pratt, 1985; Bates, 2006; Trush, 2006; Nessmann, 1995; L'Etang, 2003; Spicer, 2000; J. E. Grunig, 2001; Petersone, 2004; Lawniczak, 2001; Golitsinski, 2000; Ragozina, 2007) reveals a corpus of ideas on the history, growth, professionalism, theory and practice of public relations in Africa, the West, and transitional democracies in former Communist enclaves. However, the challenges of public relations practice in some African countries, especially Nigeria, remain under-investigated. In view of this identified conceptual gap, this article aims to fill the void by discussing some of the teething challenges affecting the profession.

In order to accomplish this task, the article begins with an analysis of NIPR professional public relations education and academic public relations education. It goes on to investigate accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations education, ethical codes of conduct, public relations consultancies, and the use of conceptual public relations models in Nigeria.

Rationale for the study

The dynamism of globalisation presents an opportunity for promoting public relations in African economies, especially Nigeria. Interestingly, Nigeria has vast natural resources and untapped business opportunities in public relations consulting services, which may be attractive to foreign public relations firms. It has a population of over 150 million people,

and over 6000 public relations practitioners in employment and private services. There are thousands of blue-chip national and multinational corporations in oil and gas, telecommunications, food and beverages, mines and power, banking and insurance, textile, automobile, manufacturing and others. Nigeria is the sixth-largest petroleum-producing nation in the world. However, there are fewer than 50 active, well-established national and foreign public relations firms to provide public relations services for these organisations (PRCAN, 2009, p. 38). In short, the business community is under-served by public relations firms. Therefore, Nigeria offers an interesting opportunity for foreign scholars to apply broader conceptual understanding of public relations trends, and for foreign public relations firms to consider investment opportunities in a growing corporate communication economy.

Additionally, Nigeria's recent recapitalisation exercises in the financial industry (banking and insurance) and expansion of the telecommunication industry may attract foreign public relations firms to invest in the economy. Finally, Nigeria provides researchers with an opportunity to conduct comparative studies comparing public relations in Nigeria with other developing countries, Western nations and transitional democracies.

Methodology

Desk research, sometimes known as secondary research, was used by the authors to gather data for the study. Through desk research, we collected past publications of NIPR, including: the government charter, *NIPRNews*, *Journal of Public Relations*, membership registers, training and development programmes, workshop articles, PRCAN's *PR Review*, news releases, Dr Sam Epelle Memorial Gold Paper Public Relations Lectures from 1989 to 2008, Code of Professional Practice Bye-Law No 1, Lagos, The 25 Years of Public Relations in Nigeria, Public Relations Consultancy Practice Bye-Law No 3, NIPR AGM brochures from 1990

to 2010, and presidents' speeches, among others. We conducted qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) on these publications. The main objective of our analysis was to identify the presence or absence of particular themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000), including:

1. A robust professional public relations education will enhance a practitioner's professionalism.

2. An education that includes rigorous scholarly, theory-building, social science and management courses will promote professionalism.

3. Accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations education programmes in tertiary institutions will enhance the social status, prestige and recognition of public relations practitioners in society.

4. The more practitioners who comply and adhere to the country's code of conduct and ethics, the more likely it is that the industry will increase professionalism.

5. If clients receive measurable indices of public relations impact on the bottom line through rigorous market research methods, the field of public relations consultancy will gain recognition.

6. The more practitioners who adopt the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, the more likely it is that top management will recognise the usefulness of public relations consultation.

Our review of the practice of public relations in Nigeria was compared against these six themes. We observed there were challenges to these themes and identified discussion relating to what practitioners could do to enhance the field of public relations in these areas. The six themes/patterns are discussed in the results and discussion section, below.

Our review of public relations in Nigeria also included an open-ended questionnaire that was sent to 10 experts. The use of experts as key informants was based on Abels and Behrens (2009) expert interviews concept, a process in which one or more people who are considered knowledgeable in a particular field share their knowledge on topical issues in the field. The experts function as crystallisation

points of practical insider knowledge (Bogner & Menz, 2009), and they possess qualified knowledge (Abels & Behrens, 2009). Expert interview is a valuable instrument of data collection (Dorussen, Lenz & Blavoukos, 2005) and has been used in comparative studies by Bailer (2004) and Arregui, Stokman and Thomson (2004), among others.

In this study, the experts comprised five NIPR professionals (three practitioners and two academics), and five other professionals (two from the media, one each from advertising, marketing and mass communication). The chosen interviewees possessed good knowledge of contemporary issues in the Nigerian public relations industry spanning two decades.

The experts were selected through purposive sampling after reviewing their profiles in the NIPR register of members. Purposive sampling is designed to gather individuals' experiences on a particular subject by choosing "information rich" cases comprising individuals (Devers & Frankel, 2000) who can provide the greatest insight into the study. Our preoccupation was sampling for insiders' perspectives by interviewing individuals from whom the nature of the experience we desired could be elicited through textual or verbal descriptions and narratives (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). In view of the difficulty in assembling the experts in a session due to their tight work schedules, the interview was conducted, based on their advice, through an open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questions contained in the questionnaire sent to the participants were:

a) Will robust professional public relations education promote professionalism? Explain.

b) Tell me your opinion on the possible effects of rigorous scholarly, theory-building social science and management courses on professionalisation of public relations.

c) Do you think accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations education programmes in tertiary institutions will enhance their social status and recognition in society? Explain.

d) How do you think practitioners' compliance and adherence to code of conduct and ethics will promote professionalisation?

e) Do you believe providing tangible measures on the impact of public relations on the bottom line will increase the recognition of public relations consultancy. How?

f) Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four public relations models represent historical phases in the practice of public relations. Explain if the models fit into the Nigerian experience.

f2) Identify and explain any other historical phases in public relations practice in Nigeria.

f3) Adoption of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations will enhance the recognition of practitioners by top management. How?

We developed the above questions based on the research propositions listed above. Responses, opinions and comments from the participants are discussed under each theme and research proposition in the result and discussion section below.

Additionally, we selected and analysed 60 news releases (10 multinational corporations, 10 national corporations, 10 non-profits, 10 government institutions, 10 development agencies and 10 academic institutions), obtained from national newspapers and NIPR's press cuttings from the 1990s and 2000s. They were content-analysed and from the analysis, we identified patterns/themes illustrative of press agency continuum, public information continuum, social initiative continuum, the two-way asymmetrical continuum, and two-way symmetry. Moreover, we selected two copies of news releases from each of the six categories above and sent them with the open-ended questionnaire to each interviewee for their interpretation and discussion. The participants illustrated the above five themes in the interview data, and those from academia identified the sixth variant, the indigenous cultural model, which we had earlier established in our literature review (Akpabio, 2009; Ogbonda & Siddens, 1999; Wilson, 1987; Ugboajah, 1972). The results are discussed under the conceptual public relations models section.

Results and discussion

In order to discuss the results of data generated, the authors present the six themes/patterns that were illustrated using qualitative content analysis of NIPR publications, news releases, expert interview data, in the form of research propositions. The themes are: professional public relations education, academic public relations education, accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations education, NIPR code of conduct, public relations consultancy in Nigeria, and use of conceptual public relations models. The six research propositions will be used hereunder to discuss the themes above.

Professional public relations education

Proposition 1: The more robust the professional public relations education, the more likely it will enhance professionalism.

Education is seen as having the capacity to play a vital role in the professionalisation of public relations (Lowe, 2002). Hainsworth (1993) encouraged completion of a rigorous course of study in public relations education in order to promote professionalism in public relations. From the formation of NIPR in 1963 to 1989 there were no public relations curricula in the universities, polytechnics or colleges in Nigeria. Having identified this problem, the NIPR established professional certificate and diploma examinations in 1989. The certificate examinations are divided into parts I and II, each comprising five papers. The diploma, which forms part III of the programme, has five papers (NIPR, 1993a; NIPR, 2011). The NIPR Diploma has been evaluated and accredited by the Federal Ministry of Education as the equivalent of a CAM (Communications Advertising and Marketing Education Foundation, UK) diploma, higher national diploma or university degree (Amujo, 2000). Subsequently, NIPR has produced hundreds of graduates who are employed by various organisations in private and public sectors.

Table 1: Curriculum of the NIPR diploma programme

Programme and course title		
	Professional certificate examination	PART I
1	Principles of public relations	I
2	Business administration and management	I
3	Principles of psychology and sociology	I
4	Public relations media and methods	I
5	Communication theory and practice	I
	Professional certificate examination	PART II
1	Economics	II
2	Public relations for private and public sectors	II
3	Comparative public relations systems	II
4	Public relations in government	II
5	Research and evaluation in public relations	II
	Professional diploma examination	PART III
1	Public relations policy, planning and strategy	III
2	Corporate/product brand management	III
3	Media relations dynamics and management	III
4	Stakeholder relations management	III
5	Marketing and advertising management in public relations	III

Developed by the authors based on data obtained from the NIPR 2005 Syllabus and its website in March 2011
<http://www.nipr-ng.org/academics.html>

It is pertinent to discuss some fundamental issues identified in the current NIPR curriculum in Table 1. First, the establishment of a public relations diploma by the NIPR was a laudable decision to fill the void created by lack of public relations education in Nigeria. Second, its graduates are likely to operate as public relations technicians. Some scholars (Broom, 1982; Broom & Dozier, 1986) have described the role of a communication technician as one who prepares and produces communication materials for public relations programmes or performs non-managerial functions like carrying out orders (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) concerning the execution of public relations programmes (L. A. Grunig, 1990; Lowe, 2002). In view of the above, we asked the following open-ended question in the questionnaire: “Will robust professional public relations education promote professionalism? Explain.” One of the respondents observed,

Some NIPR graduates that do not possess [a] prior academic degree may end up as public relations technicians with good competencies in writing, editing, photography, media liaison, or production of publications such as news releases, advertising copy, speeches, corporate magazine and newsletter.

Another respondent added: “The current curriculum should be expanded to include robust professional and academic courses in strategic management, finance and communication. This will enable NIPR [to] prepare its graduates for top advisory role[s] and enhance their professional status”.

In addition, we believe they will need access to rigorous, theory-building social sciences and liberal arts courses to rise to top management and perform strategic communication functions, where they oversee corporate communication processes and manage emerging national and global corporate communication challenges effectively.

Third, the curriculum needs be grounded in a scholarly body of knowledge and intellectual tradition (J. E. Grunig, 2000; NIPR, 2011) that can equip its graduates with desirable skills for professional practice, scholarly research and

theory building. Scholars have argued that the public relations curriculum should encompass a body of scholarly knowledge (Saunders & Perrigo, 1998), develop specialised education and training through college and university degrees (White, Oukrop & Nelson, 1992), understand enhanced theory building and use of social science research (St. Helen, 1992), and promote an intellectual tradition (J. E. Grunig, 2000). To reflect IPRA (1990) and PRSA (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999) recommendations on public relations education, the NIPR curriculum would need to include communication, social sciences and liberal arts courses that provide a rigorous theory-building education.

Fourth, the curriculum should incorporate appropriate management and business courses that would give its graduates solid business knowledge and prepare them for top managerial roles in a dynamic Nigerian economy. For example, Sallot, Cameron, and Weaver-Lariscy (1998a, 1998b) advised that the public relations curriculum should prepare graduates for managerial roles that will enable them to become members of the dominant coalition of an organisation (J. E. Grunig, 2000), collaborating with the management team to influence strategic decisions by acting as expert prescribers, communication and problem-solving process facilitators (Blum, 1997; Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998). The current diploma syllabus does not appear to include topics that would facilitate these scholars’ suggestions.

Academic public relations education

Proposition 2: The more the practitioners complete a rigorous body of scholarly, theory-building social science and management courses, the more likely it is that they will promote professionalisation.

The relevance of scholarly, esoteric, theory-building liberal arts, social sciences, and management bodies of knowledge to the professionalisation of public relations cannot be over-emphasised. Many scholars have argued that higher education is the key to developing

the profession of public relations for management functions (Hornaman, 2000). Some scholars (White et al., 1992) have recommended that specialised training, college, university and continuing education in public relations are necessary requisites to elevate the public relations industry to the status of a profession. Based on the above, we asked this open-ended question: "Tell me your opinion on the possible effects of rigorous scholarly, theory-building social science and management courses on professionalisation of public relations?" A respondent revealed, "To ensure practitioners move public relations from its craft status in Nigeria, public relations education should be integrated into the university academic system; they should design and run undergraduate degrees in public relations in the universities." Another participant advised,

Public relations curricula in the universities must include rigorous, theory building social sciences, liberal arts and mass communication courses. These courses will equip its graduates with rich academic skills and help them develop scholarly tradition that will enable them earn the respect of the general public and older professional bodies such as law, medicine, accounting and others.

It must be emphasised that an academic route will promote recognition of public relations. Pincus, Rayfield and Ohl (1994) recommended the inclusion of public relations in MBA programmes to enable practitioners to reach the highest corporate decision-making. Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis (1999) and Sriramesh and Hornaman (2006) suggested the inclusion of management and business courses in the public relations curriculum. Nessmann (1995) proposed applied function and use of theory to enhance a practitioner's crisis management and analytical thinking. Duncan, Caywood, and Newsom (1993) supported an integrated communication programme having strong liberal arts, business, organisational behaviour, counselling skills and communication. In addition, Lowe (2002) and

Verwey (2000) recommended the broadest-based public relations education with strong university tradition and generic education in communication studies.

The late entry of a public relations curriculum into the curricula of Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges is affecting its professional recognition. It was not until 1992 that the NIPR endowed an MSc Public Relations professorial chair in the Marketing Department, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This was a laudable effort, however, it is increasingly inadequate for over 6000 practitioners; some of them need a postgraduate degree in public relations to enhance their career mobility to a higher tier in their employment. Also the annual retraining programmes introduced for them since the 1990s were commendable, but attendance had dropped significantly since the 2000s due to cuts in some organisations' training budgets. However, there were no further conscious efforts on the part of NIPR to ensure the growth of reflective, theory-building, management-based, strategy-driven public relations education with communication courses (Sparks & Conwell, 1998). For instance, out of more than 90 universities, 50 polytechnics and 50 colleges of education in Nigeria, it was around 2004 that Covenant University and Lagos State University began undergraduate programmes in public relations.

Table 2, below, shows that there are increasing numbers of public relations modules and postgraduate public relations degrees in higher institutions in Nigeria. If this trend continues, it signals an orientation towards managerial roles, strategic thinking, theory-building social science research and intellectual traditions in future, which will enable practitioners with postgraduate degrees (MA/MSc/MBA/PhD) in public relations to become members of the active 'dominant coalition' (J. E. Grunig, 2000) of an organisation's management team. They will have greater powers to influence the choice of a public relations model and strategic corporate communication approach (L. A. Grunig, 1990), acting as expert prescribers, communication

Table 2: List of higher institutions offering full public relations courses, diplomas and postgraduate degrees.

S/N	Name of institution	Type of public relations degree
1	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	Dip/MCA/PhD Public Relations
2	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	M.Sc/PhD Public Relations
3	University of Lagos, Lagos	M.Sc/PhD Mass Communication (PR)
4	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye	BA/PgD Public Relations
5	Imo State University, Owerri	MSc/MBA Public Relations
6	Enugu State University of Technology, Enugu	MSc/MBA Public Relations
7	Ambrose Alli University, Abraka	MCA/PhD Public Relations
8	Bayero University, Kano	M.Sc/PhD Mass Communication (PR)
9	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	MSc/PhD Mass Communication (PR); MBA Advertising and PR
10	Benue State University, Makurdi	M.A. Mass Communication (PR and Advertising)
11	University of Uyo, Uyo	MA/PhD Mass Communication (PR)
12	Federal University of Technology, Owerri	Master of Technology (PR and Advertising)
13	Covenant University, Otta	BSc/MSc/PhD PR & Advertising
14	Federal University of Technology, Akure	PgD/Msc in Public Relations
15	Lead City University, Lagos	Diploma in Public Relations
16	Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin	PgD in Public Relations
17	University of Jos, Jos	BA, MA Mass Communication (PR)
18	Lagos State University, Lagos	BA, MA Communication (PR)
19	Igbinedion University, Benin	BA, MA (PR & Advertising)
20	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	BSc, MSc, PhD Mass Communication (PR)

Developed by the authors with data obtained from Nigerian newspapers.

facilitators, problem-solving process facilitators (Broom & Dozier, 1986) and be in positions of influence with their CEOs (de Bussy & Wolf, 2009).

Accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations education

Proposition 3: Accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations education programmes in tertiary institutions will enhance their social status, prestige and recognition in society.

Interestingly, Hainsworth (1993) argued that accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations programmes are cardinal prerequisites for the industry to become a profession. Also, Sha (2011) contends that accreditation is a contributor to professionalism in public relations. Given the opinions of the

above scholars, we asked this open-ended question: “Do you think accreditation of practitioners and certification of public relations education programmes in tertiary institutions will enhance their social status and recognition in society? Explain.” One of the participants stated, “Accreditation of practitioners is essential for quality control, to guard against unethical conduct, prevent infiltration of the profession by charlatans, and promote recognition in society.” It is expected the NIPR will play a critical role in accreditation of public relations practitioners and collaborate with Nigerian Universities Commission and Board of Technical Education to ensure quality assurance of public relations curriculums in the universities, polytechnics and colleges. The NIPR charter makes accreditation of public relations practitioners a compulsory exercise before they can practice. That is, anyone practising without NIPR’s

accreditation and registration is regarded as a non-professional and he/she risks legal prosecution (NIPR Bye Law No. 1 of 1992). From evidence available to the authors, we could not ascertain if the NIPR has prosecuted any non-member practising public relations in the country. The admission and accreditation procedures of the NIPR are based on academic and professional qualifications, including age and experience (NIPR Decree No. 16 of 1990, p. A477; NIPR Membership Criteria, 2011). The charter stipulates the acceptable qualifications such as an NIPR diploma, CAM diploma, IPR diploma, Business Education and Examination Council (BEEC) public relations diploma or higher national diploma, BA, BSc, MA, MSc, MBA and PhD in public relations or mass communication/communication arts (NIPR, 1992; NIPR Membership Criteria, 2011) for registering practitioners. Initially, many of the earliest practitioners in Nigeria obtained a CAM (Communications Advertising and Marketing Education Foundation) diploma from the UK, while a few possessed degrees in mass communication, social science and humanities in the 1960s and 1970s. The majority of practitioners admitted through age and experience in the heyday of NIPR did not make an effort to undertake professional development in public relations through training programmes, sitting NIPR diploma exams or obtaining postgraduate degrees in public relations. However, age and professional experience have been proven not sufficient substitutes for accreditation in public relations (Sha, 2011). As a result of this, NIPR proposed that prospective members should possess one of the following qualifications: NIPR diploma, CAM diploma, IPR diploma, higher national diploma, Bachelor, Master or PhD degree in public relations, mass communication, communication arts, or other related disciplines, with at least two to five years professional public relations experience. It has recommended compulsory professional Viva Presentations before a selected Council of Fellows for senior practitioners with more than 10 years professional practice to attain the Fellowship cadre of NIPR membership (Amujo, 2000). It has begun mandatory

continuing professional development (NIPR, 2011 cited by the *Nigerian Tribune*, 28 April 2011) to sharpen professional competence of its members.

The NIPR practitioners were made up of male and female practitioners from about 250 ethnic groups that make up the country. However, the membership register was not fully updated, which hindered the ability to state the total number of male and female practitioners precisely. Nevertheless, we estimate about 55 percent male and 45 percent female practitioners. The majority of the earliest practitioners were CAM diploma holders. Currently, over 60 percent of the young practitioners possess the NIPR diploma, accredited by the Nigerian Ministry of Education as the equivalent of a university degree and CAM diploma (Amujo, 2000), university degrees, higher national diplomas or diplomas in different disciplines.

The encouraging progress made by the NIPR in membership accreditation was not pursued with zeal in the certification of public relations programmes offered by the universities and polytechnics in Nigeria. Hainsworth (1993) and Wylie (1994) argued that certification of academic public relations programmes is a prerequisite for attaining professionalism in the industry. A participant from academia contended,

Many of the public relations courses offered by some higher institutions are replications of NIPR syllabus ... some are basically theoretical without inculcation of professional skills and case study analysis. The only exemptions are two or three institutions offering professional master degrees in public relations.

Some participants argued that public relations curricula run by some mass communication departments have no management courses, while those run in some management departments, especially MBA programmes, have no broad-based liberal arts, esoteric theory-building courses. Moreover, there is the problem of non-professional faculty members teaching public relations in higher institutions. Lecturers of public relations

courses should be experienced public relations professionals with higher academic qualifications in public relations, communication studies, mass communication, advertising and marketing. Non-professional faculty members pose a risk to the standards in public relations education (Sallot et al., 1998a, 1998b) necessary for professionalisation.

NIPR code of conduct

Proposition 4: The more the practitioners comply and adhere to a code of conduct and ethics, the more likely it is that they will promote professionalisation.

It is important to commend NIPR's effort in ensuring the Federal Government of Nigeria promulgated NIPR Decree No. 16 of 1990, which gave birth to a legal charter designed to foster professionalism and promote ethical conduct in the industry. The charter provides legal recognition by government and the private and public sectors of the economy. Importantly, the charter specified ethical standards and a code of conduct which practitioners must comply with in the course of their professional practice (NIPR 1992). With the advent of chartered status in 1990, the NIPR published a *Code of Professional Practice By-Law No 1 of 1992*, which acquainted its more than 5,000 members with the key provisions of the charter. A review of the charter by the authors shows it enumerated a set of ethical codes that should guide the conduct of practitioners in their professional practice, and prescribes sanctions in case of any breach (NIPR 1990, p. A480).

Cameron, Sallot and Weaver-Lariscy (1996) and Saunders and Perrigo (1998) argued that public relations must meet certain criteria that are basic to all professions, one of which is maintaining a code of ethics (Hornaman, 2000). In addition, Ajala (2001) stated that a public relations practitioner's conduct is measured not only against his or her conscience but also against some norm of acceptability that has been societally, professionally or organisationally determined. Some scholars (Bowen, 2007; Smethers, 1998) proposed inclusion of ethics in the public relations curriculum to enable it to gain the respect and

recognition due a profession. One of the challenges facing NIPR after gaining its charter was poor compliance by some practitioners with its code of conduct. An analysis of the NIPR curriculum reveals it does not include public relations law and code of ethics courses (see Table 1) as recommended by IPRA (1990). Moreover, Hutton (1999) asserted that poor adherence by public relations practitioners to their code of conduct accounted for a negative image of the industry. In view of the above, we asked the following: "How do you think practitioners' compliance and adherence to a code of conduct and ethics will promote professionalisation?" One of the informants stated that "The unethical behaviour of some NIPR practitioners gives the public an opportunity to criticise public relations as spin, manipulation, propaganda, deception and half-truth in the country". Our recommendation is that, in view of the fact the NIPR is a member of IPRA, its leadership and directorate of education should incorporate IPRA recommendations on public relations law, ethics and moral philosophy in its curriculum in order to earn the trade real professional recognition in Nigeria.

According to Bates (2006) a public relations code of conduct should be used for 'policing' the practices and conduct of public relations professionals. It is important to applaud the NIPR's effort in attaining chartered status in 1990 when few countries had legal Acts for controlling public relations profession. The Public Relations Society of America was chartered in 1947, whereas the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, United Kingdom, only obtained its chartered status in 2005, about 15 years after the NIPR, while the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, the Public Relations Institute of Australia, the Public Relations Society of India among others, have not been chartered up to now. Currently, compliance with code of conduct of most public relations institutes/societies is 'voluntary' and 'policing' of public relations around the world is limited to self-regulation, reprimands and sanctions internally (Skinner, Mersham & Valin, 2003).

However, the NIPR code of conduct is not a legal instrument for achieving compliance among members. One of the participants observed that “The NIPR does not have an active ethics compliance or monitoring committee that should monitor the activities of its members, identify and investigate infractions, report and recommend sanctions against erring practitioners to its leadership”. From our investigation, there was no record indicating that the NIPR has sanctioned any of its members for unethical misconduct. A respondent said “I was aware three members were summoned by disciplinary committee for unethical behaviours, but they failed to appear before the committee for appropriate sanctions”. One interviewee said, “Some practitioners are not aware, neither are they practising John W. Hill’s advice, that public relations professionals should act as ethical counsels to management” (see Heath & Bowen, 2002). This problem is not peculiar to NIPR members: many public relations practitioners are not ‘ethical counsels to management’ globally. Nevertheless, we advise practitioners act as a “corporate conscience” (Ryan & Martinson, 1983) and strive to develop ethical leadership in public relations (Lee & Cheng, 2011) in order to attain true professional status in Nigeria and globally.

Public relations consultancy in Nigeria

Proposition 5: Providing clients with measurable indices of public relations’ impact on the bottom line through rigorous market research methods will increase the recognition of public relations consultancy.

The Public Relations Consultants’ Association of Nigeria (PRCAN) was formed in 1984 in Lagos (NIPR, 1993b; Ogunnorin, 2000; PRCAN, 2004). Prior to this time there was no organised association for public relations consultants because the field was in its infancy. At the time few corporate organisations saw the need to engage the services of public relations firms because the nation's economy was still basking in the euphoria of the oil boom of the 1970s. Additionally, consumers often used their ‘idle’ funds to eagerly buy goods with little or

no sales communication. Besides, there was relatively ‘enlightened’ competition among corporations coupled with a handful of popular brands that could barely meet the demands of consumers, and consumer loyalty to the available few brands was still very strong. Also, industrial conflicts were uncommon and various industrial complexes in different parts of the country were at their optimum production capacity. Moreover, consumer purchasing power was enhanced by the upward review of civil servants’ salaries recommended by the Udoji Commission in 1972 (NSIWC, 2008). However, in the 1970s and 1980s advertising agencies were more prominent than public relations firms, and they were controlling the public relations expenditure to the chagrin of a few public relations firms.

As PRCAN became vibrant in the early 1990s some advertising agencies diversified and founded public relations subsidiaries, handling full public relations services or the media relations of corporations, politicians, and government so as to keep the big public relations spends in-house. For example, Insight Communication Ltd, an advertising agency, established The Quadrant Company, a public relations firm; while Centrespread Advertising Ltd (now CentrespreadFCB), an advertising agency, established MediaMore, a media planning and public relations firm, among others. Also, a participant revealed: “In late 1990s, the PRCAN was redundant due to organisational and financial resources challenge, which incapacitated it to ward off advertising agencies’ inroads into its industry”.

In the 2000s PRCAN was more assertive in the Nigerian corporate communication landscape than in the 1990s. PRCAN president, Phil Osagie warned: “We are committed to ensuring that only qualified persons who are so recognised by law practise in Nigeria” (Brandwork Nigeria, 2010). Additionally, PRCAN inaugurated a capacity-building programme called *Mastering Public Relations* (Adewakun, 2011) to enhance professional competence development of its members, and established *PR Review*, a journal dedicated to promoting best practice in public relations consulting (PRCAN, 2009).

Public relations consultancies in Nigeria consist of public relations firms with one or two practitioners, small-scale public relations firms comprising about five practitioners, and large-scale public relations firms consisting of more than 10 practitioners. The one-practitioner or two-practitioner public relations firms sometimes operate mini offices from home, while the small-scale and large-scale public relations firms operate full office complexes. With the mounting economic crisis of the 1980s and the inability of advertising and sales promotion to deliver expected 'miracle sales' in the 1990s, the search for an alternative marketing communication strategy became compelling for the captains of industry, hence public relations counselling became the suitable alternative. The relative low profile and poor visibility of some public relations firms in Nigeria's economy today is a source of concern; only a few are big firms. From all indications, the public relations expenditure in Nigeria, estimated at 3 billion naira (US\$6.3 million) at the end of the 2010 business year, is not encouraging compared with the burgeoning advertising expenditure which *The Economist* (April 2011 citing MediaReach OMD) puts at 98 billion naira (US\$646 million) in 2010. However, the public relations economy is gradually taking flight when compared with its scope in the late 1990s. This relative success may be attributed at least in part to the rising profile and assertiveness of PRCAN since 2002.

Some possible reasons for the state of the public relations economy in Nigeria include: One, PRCAN was in a dormant state for a long time so it could not muster professional muscle to stave off inroads by advertising agencies; two, clients are worried about the intangibility of public relations promises; three, measuring the impact of public relations activities on the bottom line is difficult (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000). According to Heath (1991), increased standards of performance have been the route to distinction and respectability. A fourth reason is insufficient knowledge and inadequate use of social science and communication research methods to measure the impact of public relations on the bottom line (St. Helen, 1992),

and a fifth is lack of exposure to a higher public relations body of knowledge (Saunders & Perrigo, 1998) can erode the confidence of some public relations consultants, who may feel inferior to more broadly educated clients.

In order to ascertain if providing clients with measurable indices of public relations' impact on the bottom line is the antidote to these problems, we asked this question: "Do you believe providing tangible measures on the impact of public relations on the bottom line will increase the recognition of public relations consultancy. How? An informant commented:

Public relations practitioners must show proof of results by utilising qualitative and quantitative public relations and marketing research techniques to justify the impact of public relations expenditure on the bottom line, if they want to earn the respect of their clients and attract higher campaign expenditure.

Lindenmann (1993) adds that there is no one simple method for measuring public relations effectiveness, rather different scientific tools and techniques can be used properly to assess public relations' impact. The days when practitioners stacked up press clippings to impress CEOs with coverage of their corporations are gone in Nigeria; public relations consultants must provide convincing measures of the impact of public relations campaigns on corporate financial performance.

Furthermore, Tixier (1995) noted that it is important to prove public relations is beneficial to corporations. In order to convince top management of its benefits to the bottom line, Watson and Noble (2007) advised practitioners to utilise the tripartite public relations evaluation system: the commercial (justification of budget spend), the simple-effectiveness (assessment of programme output), and objectives-effectiveness (assessment of programme objectives and desired effects) (p. 22); while J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) added focus on outcome evaluation and process evaluation. Unfortunately, few public relations firms in Nigeria adopt rigorous and intellectually demanding research methods to evaluate the

outcomes of their programmes. Studies (Lusch & Harvey, 1994; Fombrun, 1996) have confirmed the impact of intangible resources such as image, reputation, branding, identity and positive media exposure on the bottom line. PRCAN members who adopt rigorous research methods for performance measurement will earn more professional prestige and recognition and should be able to obtain a larger share of public relations expenditure in Nigeria.

Use of conceptual public relations models

Proposition 6: The more practitioners adopt the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, the more likely it will enhance their recognition by top management.

J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) proposed four public relations models. They are: (1) press agency/publicity model, which uses persuasion/manipulation to influence the audience of their organisation in any way possible (L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig & Dozier, 2002); here telling the truth is not important (Gürel & Kavak, 2010); (2) public information, which evolves in response to journalists' attacks on corporations and government agencies (Peterson, 2004); it uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to disseminate truthful information (Peterson, 2004); (3) the two-way asymmetrical model, which uses scientific persuasion to influence behaviour of the public, but does not use research to find out how the public feel about the organisation (Peterson, 2004); and (4) the two-way symmetrical model, which is frequently used by organisations that practice excellent public relations (J.E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1992), where the practitioner is a top management member. Thus, Peterson (2004) concluded that the two-way symmetrical model is the most ethical model and enhances organisational effectiveness. Moreover, J.E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang and Lyra (1995) stated that the four models are representations of the values, goals, and behaviours of organisations when they practice public relations.

However, the majority of the respondents argued that J. E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984)

models of public relations did not represent the historical phases in the practice of public relations in Nigeria. They identified six dominant historical phases in the practice of public relations in Nigeria. From the qualitative content analysis of news releases and expert interview data, it was clear that Figure 1 below represents the perception of public relations models in Nigeria.

Based on a literature review (Akpabio, 2009; Ogbonda & Siddens, 1999; Wilson, 1987; Ugboajah, 1972) and supported by informants' opinions, the indigenous cultural model represents the earliest form of communication used in Nigeria, which predates the modern communication system, the European traders and British colonialism. In view of the above, we asked the following question: "J. E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four public relations models represent historical phases in the practice of public relations. Explain if the models fit into the Nigerian experience." According to one informant, "Grunig and Hunt's models did not represent the typologies of public relations practice in Nigeria fully, but the models explained some historical shifts in our communication practice over time."

We asked the participants further to: "Identify and explain other historical phases in public relations practice in Nigeria." One of the participants stated: "The indigenous cultural model was first used in pre-colonial Nigeria by the traditional rulers to deliver messages through town criers to their subjects". Chukwueah (2010) confirmed the use of indigenous drums, town criers, and songs in recent public relations, advertising and marketing messages in Cross River State, Nigeria. Also, the use of the press agency model was confirmed in Nigeria. According to some participants, "The majority of public relations practitioners adopt the press agency model in practice because a lot of practitioners had initial careers in journalism". Also, a participant from academia added, "From observation, the press agency is commonly used during crisis periods, and the recurring corporate crisis in the country is responsible for reactive journalistic releases from some practitioners". Another interviewee stated,

“Some corporations, NGOs and politicians often hire journalists that have no basic public relations experience and training, as public relations practitioners”.

We observe that these ‘latter-day converts’ to public relations often approach public relations functions from a press agency paradigm. Additionally, some participants contended, “Public information continuum is prominent among practitioners in government public relations departments. This is because government employed more than half of the practitioners in the country”. Available evidence in NIPR’s register shows the majority of practitioners work for government; we believe they undertake public information dissemination to the public. Furthermore, some participants identified the emergence of the social initiative continuum. According to an interviewee in academia, “The social initiative model is used by two major groups in the country e.g. the development communication strategists, and advocacy groups such as the human and environmental rights organisations; the later used it more often during the military dispensation”. Even in this democratic dispensation, we observe news releases from rights activist organisations are tailored towards advocacy.

In addition, we asked this question: “Adoption of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations will enhance the recognition of practitioners by top management. How?” A majority of the participants stressed, “The two-way asymmetrical model is used by practitioners in the private sector, especially in small and medium companies with small budgets”. From the opinions of the participants, the two-way symmetry is gaining momentum. According to a respondent:

The two-way symmetry was not very popular some decades ago. The trend is emerging gradually among big national and multinational corporations and public relations consultancies that use public relations for strategic planning and measure campaign effects for management decision making.

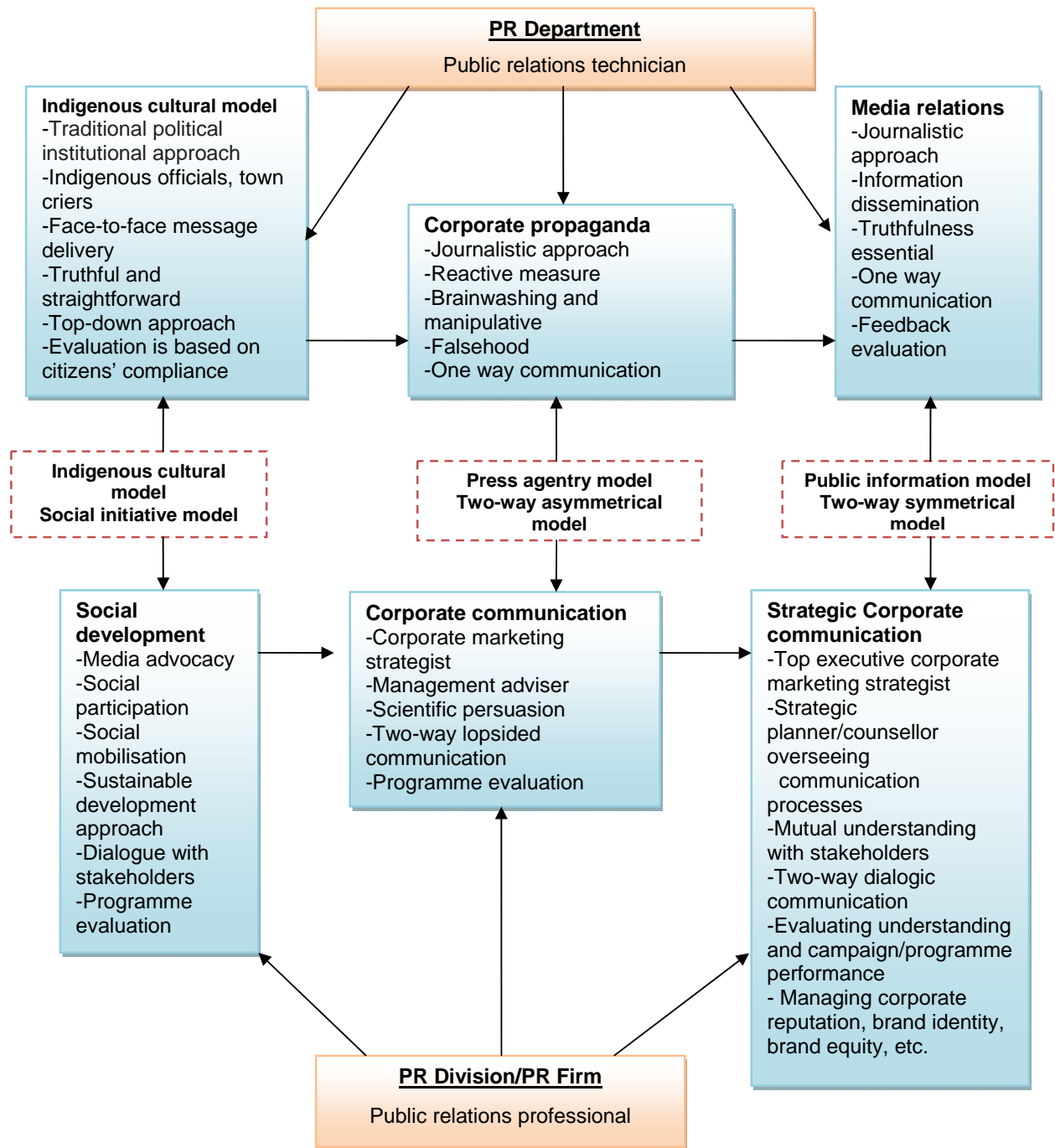
Another informant added, “If practitioners adopt the two-way symmetry it will enhance their recognition by top management and the general public.”

It is imperative we stress the link between understanding the essence of the conceptual model and professionalism. Effective understanding and application of conceptual models will facilitate ethical practice in public relations (Peterson, 2004). It will enable practitioners know how to develop a public relations campaign, design evaluation procedures and develop consciousness to attain two-way symmetry, the ideal goal of the strategic management function in practice.

The use of public relations models is a by-product of intellectual tradition and application of conceptual thinking in public relations, which was the direct result of a body of theoretical knowledge and rigorous academic research (Sallot et al., 1998a, 1998b), theory building and testing (Guiniven, 1998), and postulation of the philosophical underpinnings of public relations education (McInerney, 1997) in some American and European universities. Conscious application of conceptual models to the practice of public relations by academics is a rare occurrence in Nigeria. This is because the tradition of rigorous intellectual research and academic theory building in public relations is just developing in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

An interviewee observed, “The late entry of public relations into the Nigerian university curricula did not give it the public respect and recognition it deserves”. It must be stressed that the professional approach to the development of public relations in Nigeria is responsible for this shortcoming. It is important to note that some of the earlier practitioners of public relations obtained a CAM diploma professional certification in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s. Without mincing words, these practitioners possessed sound professional skills and they demonstrated high professional competencies in many facets of the industry. Possibly, because many of them did not undergo theory building and rigorous academic tradition, they did not make the university the seat of public relations education in the country in good time.

Figure 1: Public relations models in Nigeria



Developed by the authors based on information obtained from literature review, news releases and interview data.

It must be emphasised that Nigerians value and respect a university education and degree. A participant noted:

Nigerians accorded medicine, law and accountancy professions public recognition because they have undergraduate degrees and have been part of the Nigerian university system more than five decades ago. We must move fast in this direction too if public relations must get esteemed social status and public recognition.

Therefore we believe if public relations needs full public recognition and respect, practitioners must make the university its port of entry in Nigeria as earlier suggested (IPRA, 1990; COMMPRED, 1999, 2006). We observe only two out of more than 90 universities just began awarding undergraduate degrees in public relations in Nigeria four years ago.

Conclusions

In view of these challenges, it is important to applaud the NIPR for some of its achievements: a) obtaining a charter status first in Africa in 1990 and ahead of many European and North American public relations associations/societies/institutes; b) hosting the Commonwealth Public Relations Conference in 1983; c) playing an active role in the continental African Public Relations Association and hosting its 2010 conference in Abuja; d) funding a chair in public relations discipline at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; and e) getting the government to evaluate and equate its diploma with a university degree. Additionally, it has made valuable contributions to the International Public Relations Association and established a public relations school in Lagos.

The analysis conducted in the present article suggests that, having achieved these milestones, the NIPR needs to surmount specific challenges affecting public relations in the country. Compliance with a code of conduct and knowledge of public relations law should be pursued as prerequisites for gaining public respect and professionalisation. Inculcation of moral philosophy among practitioners and ensuring total compliance with the NIPR code

of conduct in professional practice are suggested as the surest routes to guaranteeing the future of the public relations profession in Nigeria.

Public relations has not yet attained mature professionalism in Nigeria; it is seen as an occupation or a trade. However, the increasing entry of academics to the field and the development of postgraduate degree programmes in Nigeria give hope that there will be a gradual inclusion of rigorous liberal arts and management courses, and development of a sound academic and research tradition that will accelerate professionalism. Given the recent vibrancy of PRCAN, there are positive indices pointing to a dynamic and robust public relations economy that will rival the advertising economy in future. The establishment of a public relations school by the NIPR is a good development that can catalyse robust curricular development and foster professionalism.

Although the NIPR reviewed its curriculum in 2005 (NIPR, 2005), we suggest that the current curriculum be reviewed again in line with recommendations made by IPRA (1990) and PRSA (COMMPRED, 1999, 2006). Also, NIPR could encourage a holistic and a robust public relations education in the Nigerian higher institutions and emphasise completion of a rigorous body of scholarly and theory-building social science and management courses. Moreover, the NIPR could concentrate more on accreditation and certification of seamless public relations programmes for the purpose of quality control and standardisation of programmes in the universities, polytechnics, and colleges.

If conscious effort were paid to the teaching of conceptual public relations models in universities and colleges, and the use of the same among practitioners in their professional practice, we believe ethical public relations practice and professionalism could significantly evolve. A good knowledge of public relations models will give practitioners an understanding of the ethical issues underlying public relations practice globally. Finally, the authors suggest further research be carried out on professionalising public relations in Nigeria.

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