

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CORPORATE IMAGE BUILDING: A STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF AFRICA, TORU-ORUA, BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Despite the increasing importance of public relations in university governance, many emerging Nigerian universities still lack structured public relations systems capable of building sustainable institutional reputation. This study examined the role of public relations in building the public image of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to: examine how public relations strategies are employed by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua to shape its public image; assess the effectiveness of public relations campaigns in enhancing the university's reputation among stakeholders, and identify the key public relations tools utilised by the university in managing its communication with the public. The study which is anchored on the Excellence Theory and Image Restoration Theory adopted a descriptive survey design with a sample of 241 respondents drawn from staff and students. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire and analysed through descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that while certain public relations strategies such as policy frameworks, public events, and feedback mechanisms were effective, others, including social media use, press relations, and crisis communication were underutilised in University of Africa, Toru-Orua. The study recommended that the university strengthen structured, technology-driven, and inclusive communication strategies to enhance visibility, credibility, and stakeholder trust.

Keywords: Corporate Image, Institutional Image, Reputation Management, Higher Education, Public Relations

Introduction

Globally, public image plays a pivotal role in shaping the perception of organizations, particularly educational institutions which serve as hubs for societal transformation and human capital development. Universities across the world strive to maintain a favourable public image that reflects academic excellence, transparency, and community service. The ability to build and sustain such an image hinges significantly on the effective practice of public relations. According to Adebayo and Omotayo (2022), Public Relations (PR) involves the management of strategic communication between an organization and its publics to foster mutual understanding and goodwill.

In Nigeria, universities operate in an increasingly competitive and image-conscious environment. The proliferation of public and private universities has made reputation management essential to attracting students, securing funding, and earning stakeholder trust (Ogunleye & Abubakar, 2021). Consequently, institutions have increasingly turned to strategic public relations to influence how they are perceived by the public. Public relations functions extend beyond routine communication to encompass the deliberate crafting of messages, use of media, crisis management, and stakeholders' engagement; all these are geared towards building a favourable image (Olabode & Fashola, 2022).

This research is necessary because it will enhance PR activities in the university Africa, Toru-Orua (UAT). Hitherto PR tends to be ineffective at the UAT because there were some issues that escalated, that would have been better managed if PR was used. While international studies affirm that effective public relations enhance institutional reputation, foster goodwill, and improve stakeholder engagement (Adebayo & Omotayo, 2022), limited empirical research exists on how such practices are implemented and perceived within Nigerian universities. This is particularly pressing for emerging institutions that face challenges of visibility, credibility, and public trust. The absence of well-defined public relations strategies, or the ineffective use of PR tools, may hinder these institutions from building a sustainable image that aligns with their academic and developmental aspirations (Adeyemi & Bello, 2021).

Furthermore, existing literature within the Nigerian context has largely focused on corporate and political public relations, leaving a gap in understanding how PR strategies function within tertiary institutions (Olabode & Fashola, 2022). In institutions like the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, where institutional branding is still evolving, it remains unclear whether the public relations mechanisms currently in place are adequate to influence stakeholder perceptions and promote institutional objectives effectively. This lack of data-driven insight into the role of public relations in shaping public image creates a significant knowledge gap that warrants systematic investigation.

This study therefore, sought to address this gap by examining the role of public relations in building the public image of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua. It aimed to explore the strategies, tools, and effectiveness of public relations efforts in shaping the university's identity among its stakeholders and the wider public.

Statement of the Problem

Public relations (PR) have become an important strategic function in higher education because universities depend increasingly on effective communication to establish visibility, credibility, stakeholder trust, and a favourable institutional image. Existing literature indicates that public relations activities such as media relations, stakeholder engagement, community outreach, public information, crisis communication, and digital communication can contribute significantly to

university reputation and stakeholder relationships. Studies in the Nigerian context have similarly shown that PR campaigns, media publicity, community engagement and social media activities can enhance institutional visibility and reputation.

Despite this body of knowledge, important questions remain unresolved. Much of the existing Nigerian literature has concentrated on public relations in corporate and political organisations, while comparatively less empirical attention has been given to how PR strategies operate within emerging universities. In particular, there is limited evidence on the extent to which the PR mechanisms of newer institutions are sufficiently structured, strategically coordinated and responsive to changing communication environments. It also remains unclear how effectively such institutions combine traditional PR tools with digital platforms and stakeholder feedback mechanisms to build and sustain their public image.

This gap is important because inadequate or poorly coordinated public relations can limit an emerging university's visibility, weaken stakeholder confidence, and reduce its ability to communicate its achievements and respond effectively to public concerns. For the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, where institutional identity and reputation are still evolving, understanding the effectiveness of its PR practices is particularly significant.

The problem, therefore, is not simply whether the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, engages in public relations, but whether its existing strategies, campaigns and communication tools are sufficiently effective for sustained image building. This study addresses this gap by empirically examining the PR strategies employed by the university, assessing the effectiveness of its PR campaigns in enhancing stakeholder reputation, and identifying the key PR tools used in managing communication with its publics.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. How are public relations strategies employed by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, to shape its public image?
- ii. How effective are the public relations campaigns of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua in enhancing its reputation among stakeholders?
- iii. What are the key public relations tools utilised by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, in managing communication with the public?

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

The study was anchored under two theoretical frameworks: the excellence theory and image restoration theory.

The Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory of Public Relations was developed by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984. The theory explains institutional image building. The Excellence Theory positions public relations as a strategic management function centred on two-way communication and organizational effectiveness, making it appropriate for studies of reputation management. The theory posits that effective public relations contribute to organizational effectiveness by reconciling the interests of the organization and its publics through two-way symmetrical communication—a model which emphasizes mutual understanding and dialogue rather than persuasion or manipulation (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). According to the theory, organisations that adopt two-way symmetrical communication are more likely to build trust, strengthen their reputation, and establish long-term, positive relationships with stakeholders.

Anchoring this study in the Excellence Theory, the research examines the role of public relations in shaping the public image of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua. The theory provides a useful lens for evaluating how professional communication strategies and tools, such as media relations, stakeholder engagement, and PR campaigns can promote transparency, foster trust, and build a favourable institutional identity. Accordingly, this study adopts the theoretical stance that public relations is central to institutional image-building, particularly in educational institutions where trust, credibility, and community perception are vital for stakeholder support and student enrolment.

The theory is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where higher education institutions must strategically manage their reputations amidst growing competition and public scrutiny. By applying the Excellence Theory, this study explores how universities can adopt strategic public relations to align institutional goals with public expectations, thereby enhancing their visibility, reputation, and social value.

Image Restoration Theory

Image Restoration Theory was developed by William L. Benoit (1995) to explain how individuals and organisations respond to accusations, criticism or crises that threaten their reputation and public image. The theory assumes that maintaining a favourable image is a fundamental communication goal. When an organisation's reputation is challenged, it must employ appropriate communication strategies to reduce reputational damage, restore credibility and rebuild public confidence.

Benoit identifies five major strategies for image restoration: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Denial involves rejecting responsibility for the alleged wrongdoing or shifting responsibility to another party. Evasion of responsibility acknowledges an incident but attempts to explain why the organisation should bear limited responsibility, such as attributing the situation to accident, inadequate information or circumstances beyond its control. Reduction of offensiveness seeks to lessen the perceived seriousness of an incident by emphasising positive organisational achievements, minimising the harm, reframing the situation or providing compensation. Corrective action involves acknowledging a problem and taking concrete measures to resolve it and prevent its recurrence. Mortification involves accepting responsibility, expressing regret or apologising to affected publics.

The theory is applicable to the University of Africa, Toru-Orua because, like other higher education institutions, the university may encounter criticisms, controversies, misunderstandings or crises capable of affecting its public image. Effective PR can help the university respond promptly and strategically to such situations rather than allowing negative perceptions to become entrenched.

The theory is particularly relevant to this research because the study examines how the university uses public relations to build and manage its public image. It provides a useful framework for assessing the institution's capacity not only to promote positive information but also to manage reputational threats through appropriate communication, corrective measures and stakeholder engagement. Thus, Image Restoration Theory complements the study's examination of PR as a strategic instrument for protecting and strengthening institutional reputation.

Public Relations as Strategic Communication Process

Public relations (PR) are a strategic communication process concerned with fostering mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. It plays a central role in shaping public perception, strengthening institutional reputation, and facilitating transparent communication between universities and their stakeholders. Within higher education, public relations serve as a

vital mechanism for reputation management, stakeholder engagement, information dissemination, and community building.

According to Cutlip, Centre and Broom (2016), public relations entail a planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. This underscores the proactive and deliberate nature of PR, emphasising that effective practice is not a reactive measure, but rather a continuous, strategic function that contributes to organizational success and stability.

The role of public relations in universities extends far beyond media relations and publicity. It encompasses a wide range of responsibilities, including crisis communication, brand management, alumni relations, internal communication, advocacy, and policy influence (Wilcox, Cameron, and Reber, 2015). Through these functions, public relations departments build trust, ensure transparency, and deliver consistent messaging, thereby enhancing credibility and long-term sustainability.

University PR efforts typically target diverse audiences such as students, parents, academic and non-academic staff, alumni, government agencies, funding bodies, the media, and the wider public. Tailored communication strategies are therefore essential to address the information needs, expectations, and preferences of each stakeholder group. Effective public relations practice ensures that a university's values, achievements, and initiatives are communicated clearly, while also establishing feedback mechanisms to capture stakeholder views and concerns.

Furthermore, public relations serve as a bridge between university leadership and the wider community, nurturing a culture of openness and inclusivity. This is especially important when addressing misconceptions, managing disputes, and enhancing institutional accountability. For example, during times of change or crisis, such as policy reforms, tuition adjustments, or industrial action well-coordinated PR efforts can counter misinformation and foster stakeholder support through honest, consistent, and empathetic communication (Smith, 2017).

In today's rapidly evolving digital era, public relations practices have been reshaped by technology and social media. Universities now utilize digital platforms to engage stakeholders in real time, monitor public sentiment, and build interactive relationships. This digital transformation requires PR professionals in academia to be adept not only at disseminating information but also at listening, engaging, and responding dynamically to their audiences (Tench & Yeomans, 2017).

Public Image of an Organisation

Public image refers to the overall perception or impression that an organization, individual, or institution projects to its internal and external publics. In the context of higher education, public image reflects a university's identity, values, performance, and reputation as perceived by stakeholders such as students, parents, academic staff, alumni, employers, government agencies, and the wider public. A positive image enhances credibility, attracts resources, fosters loyalty, and contributes to the institution's competitive advantage and long-term sustainability.

According to Fombrun and Van Riel (2024), public image is constructed through the aggregation of perceptions held by diverse stakeholders, based on the signals and messages conveyed by the organization. These may include intentional communications such as advertising, press releases, and official statements as well as unintentional cues, such as media reports, staff behaviour, student testimonials, or the institution's responsiveness to issues and crises.

Within universities, public image is shaped by a variety of factors, including academic excellence, quality of research, student support services, community engagement, infrastructure, ethical standards, and leadership effectiveness. Each of these elements influences how the university is viewed, trusted, and valued in the public domain. A strong image positions a university as a hub of innovation, professionalism, and societal contribution (Benoit, 2015).

A robust public image is also integral to branding and reputation management. It enables universities to attract talented students and staff, secure partnerships, obtain funding, and gain the support of their local communities. Strategies for image-building may include showcasing achievements, engaging in community service, maintaining a strong online presence, and ensuring transparency in governance and decision-making processes.

Public image has important internal implications. It affects how students and staff perceive their association with the institution, shaping morale, motivation, and commitment. A positive image fosters pride and belonging, whereas a negative one may result in dissatisfaction, lower productivity, and higher turnover (Dowling, 2016).

Public Relations Strategies

Public relations (PR) strategies refer to the planned, deliberate approaches employed by organizations to manage their communication with key stakeholders and shape public perception. These strategies guide how an institution, such as a university, communicates its goals, responds to challenges, builds relationships, and promotes its image to both internal and external audiences. In the higher education setting, PR strategies are instrumental in fostering institutional visibility, transparency, trust, and support.

According to Grunig and Hunt (2024), PR strategies fall into four broad models: press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Among these, the two-way symmetrical model characterized by mutual understanding and dialogue is often considered the most effective in building long-term, trust-based relationships between universities and their publics.

Effective PR strategies in university settings typically encompass media relations, crisis communication, community engagement, internal communication, digital and social media presence, event planning, and reputation management. Each of these elements plays a role in conveying institutional values, disseminating information, and managing stakeholder expectations.

One key strategy is proactive communication, which involves disseminating timely and accurate information about achievements, new initiatives, partnerships, and research breakthroughs. This builds credibility and keeps stakeholders informed and engaged. Universities may also adopt issue management strategies, where potential challenges or areas of public concern are identified and addressed before they escalate into crises (Wilcox et al., 2015).

Crisis communication is another critical area of public relations strategy. Universities, like other organizations, must be prepared to respond swiftly and transparently to incidents such as student protests, academic misconduct, data breaches, or public controversies. A well-formulated crisis communication plan ensures that the institution can preserve its integrity and mitigate reputational damage (Coombs, 2017).

Digital media have transformed the landscape of public relations strategy, especially in universities. Through social media platforms, blogs, websites, and online news outlets, institutions can interact

directly with their audiences in real time. Strategic use of digital tools enhances reach, engagement, and feedback loops, allowing institutions to tailor messages, monitor sentiment, and strengthen brand identity.

Moreover, public relations strategies in higher education often incorporate stakeholder engagement, recognizing the importance of involving students, faculty, alumni, government bodies, and the host community in institutional planning and decision-making processes. This participatory approach enhances goodwill and aligns the institution's image with stakeholder expectations.

Measurement and evaluation are essential components of effective PR strategy. Institutions must assess the outcomes of their communication efforts, such as increased media coverage, improved public sentiment, or stronger enrollment numbers, to refine their strategies and ensure alignment with broader organizational goals (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2016).

Public Relations Campaigns

Public relations campaigns are organized and strategic sets of communication activities designed to achieve specific institutional goals by influencing public attitudes, awareness, and behaviour. In the context of higher education, PR campaigns are employed to promote a university's identity, showcase its achievements, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and manage perceptions during critical moments or transitions.

A public relations campaign typically follows a structured process, including the identification of objectives, analysis of target audiences, message development, channel selection, implementation, and evaluation. According to Smith (2017), effective PR campaigns are audience-centered, goal-oriented, and grounded in research and strategic planning. They aim to create a favourable environment for the institution by ensuring that messages are not only heard, but also understood and acted upon by key publics.

In university settings, public relations campaigns may be used to launch academic programmes, promote admissions, increase alumni engagement, enhance community outreach, or rebuild trust following a crisis. These campaigns often employ a mix of communication channels such as press releases, social media, newsletters, stakeholder events, documentaries, branded merchandise, and digital storytelling to deliver consistent and compelling narratives about the institution (Wilcox, et al., 2015).

For instance, a university facing enrollment decline might initiate a PR campaign targeting prospective students and parents, highlighting student success stories, career support services, and academic excellence. Similarly, a campaign promoting a university's involvement in community development projects can improve its image and attract government or donor support.

Public relations campaigns are also essential tools for image restoration, particularly during or after institutional crises. Drawing from Benoit's (2015) Image Restoration Theory, well-designed PR campaigns can employ strategies such as corrective action, apology, or bolstering to restore credibility and rebuild public confidence.

Also, digital transformation has significantly enhanced the scope and reach of PR campaigns. Social media platforms, blogs, podcasts, and university websites allow real-time communication and engagement with stakeholders. Digital campaigns can be interactive, data-driven, and highly targeted, making them effective for reaching younger audiences, such as prospective students and digital-savvy alumni (Tench & Yeomans, 2017). However, for PR campaigns to be successful, they

must be authentic, consistent, and aligned with the institution's core values. Misleading or poorly executed campaigns can backfire, eroding trust and damaging the university's reputation. Therefore, campaign effectiveness must be evaluated based on clear metrics such as media coverage, audience reach, engagement levels, attitude change, and achievement of stated objectives (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2016).

Empirical Review

Ogunleye, Johnson, Adebayo, and Ibrahim (2021) used survey to investigate the effectiveness of public relations campaigns in Nigerian universities. Findings revealed that campaigns such as community outreach and media publicity significantly improved university image, student enrollment, and stakeholder engagement. Akomolafe and Akomolafe (2020) explored the impact of public relations campaigns on university reputation in Lagos State. The study employed a descriptive survey design with a sample of 500 students, faculty, and administrators from five universities. Using a validated questionnaire and descriptive analysis, the study found that campaigns highlighting research innovations, academic achievements, and community service significantly enhanced stakeholders' perceptions of universities and strengthened institutional reputation.

Oluwaseun and Ojo (2018) examined the role of media relations in shaping the reputation of Nigerian universities. Using a mixed-methods design with surveys and interviews of 300 students and faculty across two universities, they found that press releases, media partnerships, and transparent communication strategies built trust and credibility, particularly among prospective students and parents. Similarly, Nwachukwu, Emeka, Ogu, and Ibrahim (2020) studied the influence of social media strategies on university image. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, they surveyed and interviewed 500 students and staff across Nigerian universities. Data analyzed using regression and thematic analysis showed that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enhanced engagement and improved university reputation by promoting achievements and creating stronger connections with stakeholders.

Kehinde and Ehinola (2020) examined the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in building university reputation. A survey of 350 students and staff across three institutions revealed that CSR projects such as scholarships, environmental sustainability, and community development significantly enhanced stakeholder perceptions and institutional reputation. Onyema and Okoye (2017) focused on stakeholder engagement campaigns in public universities. Using case studies and focus group discussions in three southern Nigerian universities, they found that transparent communication and active alumni involvement in campaigns built institutional credibility and stakeholder trust. Olowookere and Adekoya (2021) analyzed crisis communication strategies in universities. Using a case study approach to examine three institutions during protests and health crises, they found that universities with proactive crisis management plans including timely press releases, social media updates, and stakeholder engagement were better able to protect their reputations and reduce negative media coverage.

The literature consistently shows that public relation is central to building and sustaining the corporate image of universities. Several studies agree that campaigns, media relations, and community engagement remain fundamental in shaping public perception and institutional credibility. For instance, research on Nigerian universities has demonstrated that activities such as press releases, media partnerships, and outreach programs help to improve visibility and attract students. At the same time, other studies emphasize that digital platforms are now indispensable in higher education communication, with evidence showing that social media campaigns, online reputation management, and digital storytelling have become powerful tools for engaging

stakeholders and projecting academic achievements. This convergence in the literature reflects a shift from reliance on traditional methods alone toward a more blended approach that integrates both conventional and digital strategies.

However, the literature also reveals contradictions and silences. While some researchers highlight the effectiveness of traditional media in reaching broad audiences, particularly older stakeholders, others argue that such methods are losing influence compared to digital channels that resonate more strongly with younger publics. Similarly, while there is consensus that internal communication and stakeholder engagement contribute positively to image building, relatively few studies explore how these internal strategies interact with external campaigns to produce a unified reputation strategy. There is also limited inquiry into how universities adapt communication tools in contexts of crisis, resource limitations, or low visibility, which are common realities for newer institutions.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to obtain relevant information from a representative sample of lecturers, public relations personnel, and senior administrative staff who are familiar with the public relations strategies employed by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua. This includes academic staff, public relations officers, and senior administrative personnel who are directly involved, or have relevant knowledge of the university's public relations strategies, communication practices, and image-building efforts.

A quota sampling technique was adopted to ensure that all relevant staff categories and units within the university were proportionately represented in the sample. The Taro Yamen formula is stated thus:

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

Where: n = The required sample size

e = The level of significance, which indicates the confidence the researcher has in the sample that the sample elements drawn from an average population have all the characteristics of the population and are, therefore, a reflection of that population.

N = The population size

e = 0.05

N = 609

Therefore, $n = 609 / (1 + 609(0.05)^2)$

$$n = \frac{609}{1+609(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{609}{1+1.5225}$$

$$n = 609 / (2.5225)$$

n = 241 (The required sample size for the distribution of questionnaires)

The structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled "Public Relations Strategies and University Reputation Questionnaire (PRSURQ)". It consisted of four (4) sections: Sections A, B, C, and D.

- Section A captured the demographic variables of the respondents, such as age, gender, designation, and years of experience.
- Section B contained items related to public relations strategies utilized by the university.

- Section C focused on public relations campaigns and their effectiveness in enhancing the university's reputation among stakeholders.
- Section D comprised items on the key public relations tools used by the university in managing communication with the public.

The researcher administered the research instrument using an online platform (in this case Google Forms), targeting Public Relations Officers, Academic Staff, and Senior Administrative Staff of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua. With the assistance of a research assistant, the selected respondents were contacted through official university emails and WhatsApp platforms.

For reliability test of the instrument, A trial tested using twenty (20) lecturers from the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, who did not participate in the main study, but shared similar characteristics with the target population. This was done to ensure the consistency and stability of the instrument over time. The responses obtained from the trial testing were subjected to reliability analysis using the Cronbach Alpha formula. A reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions. The decision rule for answering the research questions was arrived at by finding the average of the 4- point scale, thus; $\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$ thus, any item with mean of 2.50 and above was interpreted as Agree, while mean score below were interpreted as Disagree.

RESULTS

Demographic Data

Table 1: Simple Percentage Analysis of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
MALE	115	48.9	48.9	48.9
FEMALE	120	51.1	51.1	100.0
Total	235	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The data presented in Table 1 imply that both genders were almost equally represented in the study, with a marginally higher proportion of female participants compared to their male counterparts.

Table 2: Simple Percentage Analysis of Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-29YRS	60	25.5	25.5	25.5
30-39YRS	59	25.1	25.1	50.6
40-49YRS	58	24.7	24.7	75.3
50-59YRS	58	24.7	24.7	100.0
Total	235	100.0	100.0	

The data presented in Table 2 imply that the age distribution of respondents was fairly even across the four categories, with only slight variations in proportions, indicating a balanced representation of different age groups in the study.

Research Question One: How are public relations strategies utilised by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua to shape its public image?

Table 3: mean and standard deviation on the how public relations strategies utilized by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua to shape its public image

S/N	Items Statements	N	$\bar{x}$	Sd	Remarks
1.	The university has a well-defined public relations policy for engaging stakeholders.	235	2.51	1.11	A
2.	Regular newsletters and press releases are issued to inform the public about events and developments.	235	2.43	1.11	D
3.	The university effectively uses social media platforms for public engagement.	235	2.44	1.08	D
4.	Public relations efforts are directed at promoting the university's achievements.	235	2.40	1.09	D
5.	Crisis communication strategies are clearly outlined and effectively implemented when needed.	235	2.43	1.13	D
6.	The university organizes public events to enhance visibility and engagement with stakeholders.	235	2.51	1.11	A
7.	Feedback from the public is considered in the university's decision-making process.	235	2.55	1.12	A
8.	Public relations campaigns are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current trends.	235	2.41	1.13	D
9.	There is a designated unit or team responsible for executing public relations strategies.	235	2.47	1.18	D
10.	The university collaborates with media houses to shape a positive institutional image.	235	2.43	1.12	D
	Grand Mean		2.46	1.11	D

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The data presented in Table 3 show that respondents agreed with only three of the listed strategies—having a well-defined public relations policy ($\bar{x} = 2.51$, $SD = 1.11$), organizing public events to enhance visibility and engagement ($\bar{x} = 2.51$, $SD = 1.11$), and considering public feedback in decision-making processes ($\bar{x} = 2.55$, $SD = 1.12$)—as their mean scores are above the decision benchmark of 2.50 for agreement. With a grand mean of 2.46 ($SD = 1.11$), the overall perception suggests that while the university has made some progress in policy development, event organization, and stakeholder feedback integration, most of its public relations strategies are not fully optimized or recognized by stakeholders as effectively shaping its public image.

Research Question Two: How effective are the public relations campaigns of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua in enhancing its reputation among stakeholders?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation on how effective are the public relations campaigns of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua in enhancing its reputation among stakeholders

S/N	Items Statements	N	$\bar{x}$	Sd	Remarks
11.	The university launches public relations campaigns to boost its image and visibility.	235	2.45	1.07	D
12.	Public relations campaigns are well-planned and strategically executed.	235	2.48	1.07	D
13.	The university's PR campaigns target relevant stakeholder groups	235	2.49	1.12	D

	effectively.				
14.	PR campaigns have positively influenced stakeholders' perception of the university.	235	2.37	1.10	D
15.	Campaigns showcase academic excellence and student achievements to the public.	235	2.68	1.08	A
16.	Public relations campaigns are conducted frequently enough to maintain public interest.	235	2.54	1.09	A
17.	The university engages in community outreach as part of its PR campaigns.	235	2.47	1.10	D
18.	Stakeholders perceive the university as transparent and responsive due to its PR campaigns.	235	2.45	1.08	D
19.	The effectiveness of PR campaigns is assessed through feedback and media analysis.	235	2.46	1.15	D
20.	Public relations campaigns have contributed to the university's growing reputation among stakeholders.	235	2.51	1.09	A
	Grand Mean		2.49	1.09	D

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The data presented in Table 4 reveal that respondents agreed with only three of the listed items: showcasing academic excellence and student achievements ($\bar{x} = 2.68$, $SD = 1.08$), conducting PR campaigns frequently enough to maintain public interest ($\bar{x} = 2.54$, $SD = 1.09$), and contributing to the university's growing reputation among stakeholders ($\bar{x} = 2.51$, $SD = 1.09$). These mean scores are above the decision benchmark of 2.50 for agreement. On the other hand, respondents disagreed with the majority of the strategies, including launching PR campaigns to boost image and visibility ($\bar{x} = 2.45$, $SD = 1.07$), ensuring well-planned and strategically executed campaigns ($\bar{x} = 2.48$, $SD = 1.07$), targeting relevant stakeholders effectively ($\bar{x} = 2.49$, $SD = 1.12$), influencing stakeholders' perception positively ($\bar{x} = 2.37$, $SD = 1.10$), engaging in community outreach ($\bar{x} = 2.47$, $SD = 1.10$), being perceived as transparent and responsive ($\bar{x} = 2.45$, $SD = 1.08$), and assessing campaign effectiveness through feedback and media analysis ($\bar{x} = 2.46$, $SD = 1.15$). With a grand mean of 2.49 ($SD = 1.09$), the overall perception suggests that while certain aspects of the university's public relations campaigns—particularly in showcasing achievements, maintaining visibility, and boosting reputation—are considered effective, the majority of the campaign strategies are not perceived as fully impactful by stakeholders. This points to potential gaps in planning, targeting, and follow-up assessment of PR initiatives.

Research Question 3: What are the key public relations tools employed by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua in managing communication with the public?

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation on the key public relations tools employed by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua in managing communication with the public

S/N	Items Statements		$\bar{x}$	Sd	Remarks
21.	The university effectively uses press releases to communicate key information to the public.	235	2.53	1.15	A
22.	Social media platforms are actively used by the university for public engagement and information sharing.	235	2.41	1.12	D
23.	The university maintains a regularly updated and user-friendly official website.	235	2.42	1.12	D
24.	Newsletters are circulated to provide updates on university events	235	2.57	1.13	A

	and developments.						
25.	Public forums and town hall meetings are used to communicate with community stakeholders.	235	2.56	1.14	A		
26.	The university uses media interviews and press conferences to manage its public image.	235	2.46	1.03	D		
27.	Feedback mechanisms are in place to gather public opinion on university activities.	235	2.52	1.10	A		
28.	The university utilizes audio-visual tools (e.g., documentaries, broadcasts) to share its achievements.	235	2.46	1.17	D		
29.	Promotional materials (brochures, flyers, etc.) are distributed to increase awareness about the university.	235	2.48	1.14	D		
30.	Crisis communication tools are available and used when addressing public concerns or emergencies.	235	2.48	1.14	D		
	Grand Mean		2.48	1.12	D		

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The data presented in Table 4.2.3 indicate that respondents agreed with four of the listed tools: effective use of press releases to communicate key information ($\bar{x} = 2.53$, $SD = 1.15$), circulation of newsletters to provide updates on events and developments ($\bar{x} = 2.57$, $SD = 1.13$), use of public forums and town hall meetings for community stakeholder engagement ($\bar{x} = 2.56$, $SD = 1.14$), and the presence of feedback mechanisms to gather public opinion ($\bar{x} = 2.52$, $SD = 1.10$). These scores are above the decision benchmark of 2.50 for agreement. Conversely, respondents disagreed with the majority of the listed tools, including the active use of social media platforms for public engagement ($\bar{x} = 2.41$, $SD = 1.12$), maintaining a regularly updated and user-friendly website ($\bar{x} = 2.42$, $SD = 1.12$), using media interviews and press conferences to manage public image ($\bar{x} = 2.46$, $SD = 1.03$), deploying audio-visual tools such as documentaries and broadcasts to share achievements ($\bar{x} = 2.46$, $SD = 1.17$), distributing promotional materials ($\bar{x} = 2.48$, $SD = 1.14$), and applying crisis communication tools during emergencies ($\bar{x} = 2.48$, $SD = 1.14$).

With a grand mean of 2.48 ($SD = 1.12$), the overall perception suggests that while the university is recognized for utilizing certain traditional PR tools effectively, such as press releases, newsletters, public forums, and feedback channels, its use of more modern, digital, and proactive tools like social media, dynamic websites, and multimedia strategies is perceived as less effective. This indicates a potential area for improvement in integrating contemporary communication tools into the university's PR framework.

Discussion of Findings

The results from Research Question 1 revealed that respondents generally agreed that public relations play a significant role in building the public image of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua. Key areas of agreement included the role of PR in creating awareness of the university's programmes, fostering good community relations, managing the institution's reputation and promoting positive media coverage. The responses indicated that public relations efforts were perceived as central to shaping public perception, and enhancing the institution's visibility among stakeholders. However, some respondents noted challenges such as inadequate funding for PR activities, insufficient engagement with digital media platforms, and limited publicity beyond the immediate environment, which may reduce the overall impact of PR strategies. Despite these concerns, the grand mean scores suggest a predominantly positive view of the contribution of PR to the university's image-building moves. This findings align with the studies of Nwosu (2017) and Ekeanyanwu (2019), who emphasised that public relations is a strategic tool for projecting a favourable institutional image, improving stakeholder trust, and attracting potential students and

partners. Similarly, Adekunle and Ajayi (2021) observed that in tertiary institutions, public relations serves as a bridge between the institution and the public, creating mutual understanding and goodwill.

Therefore, the results affirm that public relations serve as an important driver in building the public image of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua. Strengthening PR strategies, especially through the integration of digital media and wider outreach programmes, could further enhance the university's visibility and reputation at regional, national, and international levels.

The results from Research Question 2 indicated that respondents perceived the public relations activities of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, as effective in fostering relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. Many agreed that PR initiatives such as organising public lectures, hosting cultural and academic events, issuing timely press releases, and engaging with alumni contribute significantly to building goodwill and strengthening stakeholder trust. These activities were regarded as vital in portraying the university as a credible, community-oriented, and student-focused institution.

Nevertheless, the findings also highlighted areas requiring improvement, particularly in sustaining consistent communication channels with stakeholders, increasing interactive engagements through social media platforms, and ensuring that feedback mechanisms are actively maintained. Respondents suggested that while relationships had been cultivated, more proactive follow-up and greater inclusivity in decision-making processes could enhance stakeholder satisfaction. These observations align with the findings of Okafor and Nwankwo (2020) and Oladipo (2018), who stressed that effective stakeholder engagement through public relations strengthens an institution's image and fosters mutual trust. Similarly, Akpan and Udoh (2021) affirmed that when tertiary institutions prioritize open communication and regular interaction with their stakeholders, they secure long-term support and positive publicity.

In summary, the results affirm that the public relations activities of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, have contributed meaningfully to building sustainable relationships with stakeholders, thereby enhancing its public image. However, adopting a more structured, interactive, and technology-driven stakeholder engagement strategy could further consolidate these gains and extend the institution's positive reach.

The results from Research Question 3 revealed that respondents generally perceived the public relations strategies employed by the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, as effective in shaping public perception and enhancing the institution's overall image. Key strategies identified include the use of mass media campaigns, official social media platforms, press briefings, participation in community development initiatives, and prompt responses to public concerns. These approaches were credited with projecting the university as a modern, responsive, and academically credible institution.

However, the findings also highlighted certain limitations. Respondents noted that whilst the PR strategies have been impactful, their reach and influence could be strengthened through more consistent branding, targeted publicity in national and international media, and the integration of storytelling techniques that showcase student and alumni achievements. Some also observed the need for crisis communication protocols to be more visible and proactive in safeguarding the institution's reputation during challenging situations. These findings are consistent with the studies of Uzochukwu and Chinyere (2019) and Adebayo (2021), who emphasised that the adoption of diverse and coordinated PR strategies significantly enhances the public image of higher education

institutions, particularly when such strategies are continuously adapted to changing media trends. Similarly, Nwosu (2020) argued that a strong institutional brand emerges from a sustained combination of visibility, positive narratives, and stakeholder-centered communication.

Therefore, the results affirm that the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, has implemented relevant and effective PR strategies that have contributed positively to its public image. Nevertheless, expanding the scope, consistency, and adaptability of these strategies, especially in the digital space would further enhance the institution's visibility, reputation, and competitiveness within the higher education sector.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the public image of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua is being shaped by public relations practices, but that the institution has not yet fully converted its PR activities into a coherent and comprehensive reputation-management system. The evidence points to a significant distinction between the existence of communication activities and their strategic effectiveness. While policy frameworks, public events, feedback mechanisms, newsletters, press releases and stakeholder forums provide a foundation for institutional communication, the relatively low grand mean scores across the three areas examined indicate that these efforts are not yet sufficiently integrated or consistently perceived as effective.

A particularly important implication is the uneven balance between traditional and contemporary PR practices. The university appears to have a stronger presence in conventional communication channels, while its use of social media, website communication, multimedia tools and crisis communication is comparatively weak. This limits the institution's capacity to communicate with increasingly digital and diverse publics, particularly when reputation can be shaped rapidly through online conversations.

The findings therefore indicate that the central challenge is not an absence of public relations, but the need to transform existing activities into a more deliberate, interactive and evidence-based communication system. In this regard, stakeholder feedback should move beyond information gathering to become an integral part of decision-making and reputation management. Similarly, PR campaigns require clearer targeting, regular evaluation and stronger integration of digital platforms.

Overall, the study concludes that PR remains a significant resource for building the University's corporate image, but its long-term reputational value will depend on how effectively the institution coordinates traditional communication with digital engagement, anticipates reputational risks, responds to crises and sustains meaningful relationships with its stakeholders. The University can therefore strengthen its emerging institutional identity by treating public relations not merely as publicity, but as a strategic management function central to trust, credibility and sustainable institutional reputation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were put forward:

1. The University of Africa, Toru-Orua, should adopt a structured and consistent stakeholder communication framework to ensure timely and transparent information flow.
2. The institution should leverage social media and other digital platforms to enhance interactive engagement with both internal and external stakeholders.
3. The university should emphasise more on the use of press releases, media interviews and press conferences, social media platforms, enhanced feedback mechanisms, regularly updated and user-friendly official website, circulation of Newsletters, and utilisation of

audio-visual tools (e.g., documentaries, broadcasts) to share its achievements, and increase awareness about the university.

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