



## Public Relations and Reputation Management at the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Abuja, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction (FMHAPR) in Nigeria has faced persistent public criticisms, allegations of inefficiency, mismanagement, and delayed responses to humanitarian crises, leading to erosion of public trust and reputation challenges. To address this requires deliberate public relations efforts.

**Objective:** This study investigated how Public Relations strategies are used for reputation management at the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Abuja, Nigeria.

**Method:** The study adopted mixed-methods, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A total of 384 copies of questionnaire were distributed to FMHAPR officials, PR practitioners, and residents within the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), yielding 380 valid responses, alongside 12 in-depth interviews with key informants.

**Result:** Quantitative findings revealed moderate public awareness (24.5% very aware), neutral perceptions of communication effectiveness (31.1%), and low transparency ratings (33.2% not very transparent), with television news (37.6%) and social media (32.6%) as primary information channels. Qualitative data indicated that while the ministry employed diverse tools such as press releases, social media updates, stakeholder briefings, and crisis communication plans, its strategies remained largely reactive, moderately effective, and constrained by inadequate funding, bureaucratic delays, limited digital capacity, resource shortages, and misinformation.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that FMHAPR's PR framework contributed moderately to reputation management but requires structural reforms, proactive digital engagement, and consistent transparency to rebuild public trust and enhance institutional credibility.

**Unique Contribution:** This study has provided insights into the role of public relations in shaping the reputation of government ministries in Nigeria, particularly in the humanitarian sector. It is hoped that the findings will help in developing tailored PR strategies that enhance stakeholder trust and improve the ministry's image. It will also be of benefit to policymakers and PR practitioners in crafting effective communication approaches for government agencies.

**Key recommendation:** Strengthening digital infrastructure, promoting transparency in communication processes, and instituting regular evaluations to improve credibility and effectiveness in humanitarian governance.

**Keywords:** Public Relations, Reputation Management, Crisis Communication, Transparency, Stakeholder Engagement, Humanitarian Affairs.



## INTRODUCTION

Public Relations (PR) strategies have evolved into a vital component of governance, playing an indispensable role in shaping public perception, promoting transparency, and enhancing the reputation of governmental institutions. For the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction (FMHAPR), operating under heightened visibility and scrutiny, effective communication is essential for achieving administrative legitimacy and public trust (Asemah, Akase, & Adeline, 2023). The complexity of humanitarian interventions from poverty alleviation to social protection demands structured PR mechanisms that project credibility, accountability, and empathy, especially in societies characterised by suspicion and low trust in government-citizen relations (Grunig & Hunt, 2020).

The significance of PR in government communication is profound. Akinsola and Santas (2024), in their study of the N-Power Programme under the same ministry, highlight strategic communication as the cornerstone for raising awareness, clarifying policy objectives, and boosting beneficiary participation. Social media campaigns, press releases, and community engagement have proven vital in bridging government-populace gaps. Amid persistent misinformation and digital illiteracy, PR serves as a corrective tool, mitigating rumours, managing crises, and enabling two-way symmetrical communication (Coombs, 2015; Mustapha & Santas, 2025). Thus, the FMHAPR carries the dual burden of disseminating credible information while safeguarding its institutional image against frequent criticism.

Yet, the ministry's public image remains vulnerable to allegations of inefficiency, corruption, and mismanagement in social welfare schemes (Okoye & Akpan, 2021). Unaddressed, these threats erode confidence and undermine programme success. Siahaan et al. (2025) emphasise that in misinformation-prone digital ecosystems, organisational credibility hinges on proactive PR rooted in crisis communication and trust-building. Drawing on Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), institutions like the FMHAPR require adaptive responses—from corrective statements to stakeholder reassurance—to preserve and rebuild trust.

The Nigerian public sector faces bureaucratic bottlenecks, resource shortages, and inconsistent communication practices that impede effective governance (Achanya, Akpede, & Ogande, 2025). Although some research has examined PR in related contexts, such as social interventions (Akinsola & Santas, 2024) or general public administration (Asemah, 2021), a notable dearth exists in studies specifically targeting PR as a strategic reputation management tool in humanitarian ministries like the FMHAPR. Prior works often prioritise private-sector applications, information roles in other ministries, or broad crisis responses, overlooking the unique vulnerabilities in poverty alleviation and humanitarian affairs, where direct impacts on marginalised populations amplify scrutiny.

This theoretical gap aligns with practical realities: persistent criticisms of administrative inefficiencies, delayed emergency responses, and relief fund mismanagement have weakened the FMHAPR's credibility and stakeholder cooperation. Communication here tends to be reactive rather than proactive and symmetrical (Grunig & Hunt, 2020; Coombs, 2015). Addressing this academic and practical lacuna, the present study evaluates the ministry's PR strategies to identify



strengths, uncover deficiencies, and suggest improvements for greater transparency and effectiveness. By examining their influence on reputation management, transparency, and public trust in this context, the research fills a literature void and advances discourse on strategic communication and accountability in Nigeria's humanitarian landscape.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- i. What PR strategies are employed by FMHAPR to manage its reputation?
- ii. How are these PR strategies implemented?
- iii. How effective are these PR strategies in managing FMHAPR's reputation?

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **Public Relations**

Public Relations (PR) as a field of practice and study encompasses far more than the dissemination of information it is a strategic and deliberate process designed to build, nurture, and sustain mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its various publics (Grunig & Hunt, 2020). In contemporary governance, PR functions as an integral management tool that supports institutional credibility, policy communication, and stakeholder inclusion (Nwafor, Oginyi, & Okwubunka, 2023). According to Watson and Noble (2021), PR is both a philosophy and a management function that aligns organisational objectives with public expectations through transparent dialogue and consistent messaging. It serves as the bridge between institutions and the citizenry, promoting understanding, collaboration, and goodwill. Within public institutions such as the FMHAPR, PR becomes indispensable in ensuring that humanitarian interventions are not only effectively implemented but are also perceived by the public as transparent, accountable, and credible.

### **Reputation Management**

Reputation management involves the systematic monitoring and influencing of public perceptions to protect and enhance an organisation's credibility and legitimacy. In public institutions, it requires proactive strategies to mitigate risks from crises or criticisms, ensuring that communication fosters trust and stakeholder confidence amid scrutiny (Coombs, 2015; Kim & Ferguson, 2019).

### **Transparency**

Transparency in governmental communication refers to the open, timely, and accurate disclosure of information, enabling public scrutiny and reducing suspicion. It is essential for building institutional accountability, particularly in ministries handling public funds and humanitarian interventions, where perceived opacity can erode trust (Kim & Ferguson, 2019; Watson & Noble, 2021).



## **Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement entails active, two-way interactions with diverse publics—such as citizens, media, donors, and civil society—to incorporate their views and foster collaboration. Effective engagement shifts from one-directional dissemination to symmetrical dialogue, enhancing mutual understanding and long-term relationships in public sector governance (Grunig & Hunt, 2020; Lee & Choi, 2020).

## **Crisis Communication**

Crisis communication involves strategic responses tailored to the nature and perceived responsibility of a crisis, aiming to minimise reputational damage through timely, empathetic, and consistent messaging. In public institutions facing allegations of mismanagement, appropriate strategies ranging from justification to corrective action—are critical for restoring public confidence (Coombs, 2015).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Public Relations Strategies Employed by Governmental Institutions**

Scholars such as Watson & Noble, (2021) widely agree that public relations in the public sector fundamentally differs from corporate PR. This is because its primary objective is accountability rather than profit-making. In governmental communication, the emphasis is placed on legitimacy, transparency, and citizen engagement values that reinforce democratic governance (Grunig & Hunt, 2020). Government institutions rely on PR strategies to inform, persuade, and maintain positive relationships with their various publics, including citizens, media, donors, and civil society groups.

According to Asemah (2021), governmental PR strategies can be categorised into traditional and digital methods. Traditional tools include press releases, public service announcements, and community town hall meetings, which facilitate interpersonal trust-building, while digital strategies involve the use of websites, social media, and online feedback mechanisms for broader reach and real-time engagement. Similarly, Lee and Choi (2020) highlight the increasing importance of digital responsiveness in modern government communication, noting that institutions that utilise interactive digital platforms are more likely to manage crises effectively and build sustained public confidence.

In Nigeria, the FMHAPR's PR activities typically revolve around information dissemination, crisis communication, and image management. Akinsola and Santas (2024) observed that the ministry utilises social media platforms particularly Facebook and Twitter to publicise humanitarian projects such as the N-Power and Conditional Cash Transfer programmes. However, they noted that the communication is often one-way, with limited public feedback mechanisms. This aligns with the findings of Coombs (2015), who argues that without two-way symmetrical communication, public institutions risk appearing unresponsive and detached from citizens' concerns.



## **Implementation of PR Strategies in Governmental Organisations**

The successful implementation of PR strategies in public institutions depends on several organisational and contextual factors, including leadership support, resource allocation, and institutional culture. Oso and Akhagba (2014) assert that Nigerian public agencies face systemic barriers such as bureaucratic red tape, limited funding, and poor inter-departmental coordination that constrain the full implementation of communication strategies. These challenges often result in fragmented PR operations that are reactive rather than strategic.

Empirical evidence from Mustapha and Santas (2025) suggests that implementation gaps also stem from the absence of integrated communication frameworks within ministries. Many government communication units operate independently without a clear strategic alignment between policy goals and PR messaging. This weakens the overall coherence of government communication and hinders message consistency. In the case of FMHAPR, Akinsola and Santas (2024) found that most PR efforts are focused on short-term image repair rather than long-term reputation building. This reactive posture makes the ministry vulnerable to negative public narratives, especially during humanitarian crises or corruption allegations.

Moreover, Lee and Choi (2020) note that the extent to which PR strategies are implemented is influenced by digital literacy and media infrastructure within the public sector. Ministries that fail to adopt modern digital communication technologies struggle to engage the public effectively. The FMHAPR's reliance on traditional media, despite the growing influence of social media in Nigeria, exemplifies this limitation. Consequently, the implementation of PR strategies remains inconsistent, often lacking the dynamism required to maintain relevance in the digital age.

## **Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies in Managing Governmental Reputation**

The effectiveness of governmental PR is commonly measured by its ability to foster public trust, improve transparency, and manage crises. Scholars have emphasised that reputation management in public institutions is a multidimensional process involving communication clarity, responsiveness, and ethical conduct (Kim & Ferguson, 2019). Coombs' (2015) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) supports this by asserting that timely, empathetic, and transparent responses during crises are essential for reputation recovery.

Empirical studies indicate that proactive communication plays a decisive role in reducing misinformation and enhancing public perception. For instance, Kim and Ferguson (2019) found that government agencies that issue consistent, evidence-based updates during crises are perceived as more trustworthy and competent. Conversely, delayed or ambiguous communication fosters suspicion and erodes confidence. In Nigeria, Asemah (2021) and Oso and Akhagba (2014) both highlight how misinformation and lack of follow-up communication often aggravate public distrust in government institutions.

Within the FMHAPR, the success of PR strategies in reputation management has been mixed. While the ministry has made strides in visibility through social media campaigns and media partnerships, its reputation continues to be affected by allegations of inefficiency and corruption.





Dike (2025) argues that for PR to be effective in such contexts, it must go beyond media relations to include stakeholder engagement and community-building initiatives that foster genuine connection and social accountability. This approach, he explains, humanises governmental institutions, allowing citizens to see beyond bureaucratic processes and recognise the tangible impact of policies.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Grunig and Hunt's Excellence Theory**

Grunig and Hunt's Excellence Theory, originating from their seminal 1984 work on public relations models and further developed through a major research project culminating in key publications in 1992 and 2002, remains one of the most influential frameworks in public relations scholarship. It offers a comprehensive view of how effective PR enhances organisational performance, stakeholder relationships, and reputation management, with the core premise that excellence is attained via two-way symmetrical communication. This model promotes mutual understanding, ethical dialogue, and negotiation between organisations and publics, contrasting with one-way models like press agency (focused on publicity), public information (one-directional dissemination), and two-way asymmetrical (persuasion-oriented) approaches (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The two-way symmetrical model is deemed the most ethical and effective, balancing organisational goals with public interests to build long-term trust and credibility.

In the context of this study, the theory provides critical benchmarks for assessing the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (FMHAPR)'s PR practices, where Nigerian public sector constraints such as hierarchical structures, resource limitations, and political pressures often favour reactive, one-way communication over symmetrical ideals. Critics like Motion and Leitch (2009) highlight the theory's oversight of power imbalances, making full implementation challenging in bureaucratic environments like the FMHAPR. Nonetheless, it guides recommendations for shifting towards proactive, dialogic strategies that could better manage reputational risks in humanitarian governance, fostering transparency and stakeholder engagement amid public scrutiny.

### **Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by W. Timothy Coombs and formally articulated in 2007 with refinements in subsequent works including the 2015 edition of his key text, extends crisis communication research by explaining how strategic responses protect and restore organisational reputation. The theory assumes that stakeholder attributions of crisis responsibility categorised into victim (low responsibility, e.g., natural disasters), accidental (minimal responsibility), or preventable crises (high responsibility, e.g., mismanagement) directly influence reputational threat. Tailored responses are essential: empathy and information for victim crises, diminishment or justification for accidental ones, and accommodative strategies like apologies or corrective actions for preventable crises (Coombs, 2015). Reputation is viewed as an asset managed through timely, consistent, and transparent messaging aligned with perceived culpability.



For this study, SCCT is highly relevant in analysing the FMHAPR's handling of reputational crises stemming from allegations of inefficiency, fund mismanagement, and delayed emergency responses. It evaluates whether the ministry employs appropriate strategies—such as denial, justification, or corrective communication—to mitigate blame and restore trust. However, critics note SCCT's emphasis on reactive approaches and assumptions of rational public responses, potentially overlooking proactive building or contextual factors like politicisation and cultural influences in Nigeria. Thus, its application here accounts for these variables, offering insights into enhancing crisis responses for greater accountability and credibility in humanitarian contexts.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the public relations (PR) strategies of the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (FMHAPR).

The population for this study consisted of FMHAPR officials, public relations practitioners, and residents within the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), the core urban district of the Federal Capital Territory where the ministry is headquartered and most of its programmes are visible to the public. Given the large population of the Federal Capital Territory, Cochran's (1977) formula was applied to determine a representative sample size of 384, based on a 95% confidence level (z-score of 1.96) and a 5% margin of error, assuming maximum variability ( $p=0.5$ ) for an effectively infinite population. Using stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness across respondent categories (officials, practitioners, and residents), 384 questionnaires were administered, with 380 valid responses retrieved, achieving a 99% response rate. Additionally, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including senior ministry officials and PR experts, to capture deeper insights into the ministry's communication practices, challenges, and institutional dynamics.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to examine levels of awareness, transparency, and effectiveness, while qualitative responses were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, perceptions, and communication barriers. This methodological triangulation enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings, enabling a nuanced evaluation of FMHAPR's PR strategies, their implementation effectiveness, and the institutional factors influencing reputation management outcomes.

## **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents and analyses the data collected from the field in line with the study's three research questions, which sought to:



### **Research Question 1: What Public Relations Strategies Are Employed by FMHAPR to Manage Its Reputation?**

Table 1 below presents the frequency distribution of responses from communication officers and staff regarding the PR tools and strategies employed by the ministry.

**Table 1: PR Strategies Adopted by FMHAPR**

PR Strategy/Tool	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Press Releases and Media Briefings	95	79.2
Social Media Engagement (Facebook, X, Instagram)	88	73.3
Stakeholder Forums and Town Hall Meetings	70	58.3
Community Outreach and CSR Activities	62	51.7
Internal Newsletters and Reports	40	33.3
Website/Online Updates	54	45.0

**Source:** Field Survey (2025)

The findings in Table 1 show that press releases (79.2%) and social media engagement (73.3%) are the most frequently used PR strategies by FMHAPR. Interviews revealed that these platforms serve as primary channels for policy dissemination and public information. However, community outreach and CSR efforts (51.7%) are less consistent, often depending on funding availability. Respondents noted that while the ministry has embraced digital communication, engagement is largely one-way, limiting opportunities for genuine dialogue with stakeholders.

Qualitative data further highlighted that FMHAPR's PR strategies are primarily reactive focusing on clarifying issues after controversies arise rather than proactively building a positive image. A senior communication officer remarked, "Our social media is active, but it is mostly used for announcements. We lack structured engagement that allows citizens to participate or respond." This supports the observation by Grunig and Hunt (2020) that effective PR requires two-way symmetrical communication for trust-building.





## **Research Question 2: How Effective Are These PR Strategies in Managing FMHAPR's Reputation?**

**Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of FMHAPR's PR Strategies**

<b>Indicator of Effectiveness</b>	<b>Highly Effective (%)</b>	<b>Moderately Effective (%)</b>	<b>Ineffective (%)</b>
Promoting Transparency	42.5	38.3	19.2
Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement	35.0	40.0	25.0
Managing Crises and Negative Publicity	31.7	30.8	37.5
Building Public Trust and Reputation	40.8	36.7	22.5
Promoting Positive Media Relations	47.5	33.3	19.2

**Source:** Field Survey (2025)

The data in Table 2 indicates that respondents perceive FMHAPR's PR strategies as moderately effective across most areas. A majority (80.8%) agreed that the ministry's communication improved transparency, especially through online publications and press briefings. However, crisis management scored the lowest, with 37.5% describing the ministry's efforts as ineffective. Interviews revealed that delays in response during crises often lead to public misinformation and speculation, which harm the ministry's credibility.

Further analysis using thematic coding revealed that the effectiveness of PR largely depends on leadership commitment, timely decision-making, and interdepartmental coordination. As one respondent explained, "Most crises linger because communication clearance takes too long. We wait for top approval before responding, and by then, misinformation has spread." This observation aligns with Coombs' (2015) Situational Crisis Communication Theory, which stresses that timeliness and appropriateness of response are vital for reputation protection.



### Research Question 3: What Are the Major Challenges Facing FMHAPR's PR Strategies?

**Table 3: Challenges Affecting PR Strategy Implementation in FMHAPR**

Identified Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bureaucratic Delays in Communication Flow	97	80.8
Inadequate Funding for PR Activities	88	73.3
Limited Digital and Technical Skills	76	63.3
Lack of Strategic Planning	70	58.3
Weak Internal Coordination	64	53.3
Poor Feedback Mechanisms	60	50.0

**Source:** Field Survey (2025)

As shown in Table 3, bureaucratic delays (80.8%) and inadequate funding (73.3%) were the most critical challenges identified. Respondents pointed out that hierarchical approval processes often delay official responses, reducing communication timeliness and effectiveness. The ministry also struggles with digital skill limitations (63.3%), which hinder consistent engagement on social media platforms. Qualitative data revealed that many communication officers lack formal training in digital analytics and online reputation management.

The interviews also revealed a structural challenge: PR units often operate in isolation from policy and planning departments, leading to poor alignment between communication strategies and programme implementation. This lack of synergy contributes to inconsistent messaging and undermines the ministry's reputation management efforts. These findings corroborate Oso and Akhagba's (2014) argument that Nigerian public institutions suffer from weak coordination, insufficient funding, and outdated communication models.

## DISCUSSION

### Public Relations Strategies Employed by FMHAPR

The findings revealed that the FMHAPR employed various PR strategies for reputation management, including press releases, media briefings, social media engagement, stakeholder forums, and community outreach. Quantitative data showed press releases (79.2%) and social media updates (73.3%) as the most utilised tools, while qualitative interviews indicated a primary focus on information dissemination rather than genuine stakeholder dialogue. This aligns with Grunig and Hunt's (2020) view that public institutions in developing contexts often



rely on the one-way public information model. Conversely, the ideal two-way symmetrical model—promoting mutual understanding and feedback—remains underdeveloped. These results concur with Akinsola and Santas (2024), who found similar one-way approaches in the ministry’s N-Power programme, but extend knowledge by applying them to humanitarian crises, where proactive engagement could better support marginalised groups. The observed reactive tendencies likely arise from institutional inertia, resource constraints, and bureaucratic hierarchies common in Nigeria’s public sector.

Furthermore, the study confirmed that FMHAPR’s PR strategies are predominantly reactive rather than proactive. Communication officers noted efforts mainly address negative publicity or clarify misinformation post-circulation, rather than prevent damage through ongoing engagement and transparency. This pattern mirrors Akinsola and Santas (2024) observations in the N-Power context, weakening sustained trust-building in low-confidence environments. However, it contrasts with proactive strategies in better-resourced international humanitarian agencies, attributable to greater autonomy and budgets.

Additionally, social media adoption for outreach exists, but engagement is limited, with posts largely one-directional and announcement-focused. This echoes Lee and Choi’s (2020) critique of performative rather than participatory digital engagement in government institutions. A two-way symmetrical approach could foster meaningful relationships through listening, responding, and co-creation. Despite progress in tool adoption, depth and quality remain constrained by institutional habits and absent structured digital strategies. This research extends prior work by contextualising these issues in Nigeria’s humanitarian sector, where aid dependencies heighten scrutiny and amplify limited interactivity’s impacts.

### **Effectiveness of PR Strategies in Enhancing Public Trust and Reputation**

The data showed that the ministry’s communication strategies positively contributed to public awareness and transparency, yet overall effectiveness remained moderate. About 80% of respondents agreed that communication enhanced transparency, but only one-third rated crisis communication as highly effective. This supports Coombs’ (2015) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), emphasising that effectiveness hinges on message clarity, timeliness, and appropriateness in crises. Delays in addressing controversies or irregularities allowed misinformation to spread, damaging credibility. These results align with Kim and Ferguson (2019), who linked consistent updates to greater trust in government agencies, though moderate ratings here reflect Nigeria-specific cynicism toward public institutions.

Interviews highlighted a key strength: the ministry’s visible media presence through press releases and television interviews, which boosted awareness of humanitarian interventions in disaster relief and poverty reduction. However, a major weakness emerged—a lack of sustained feedback mechanisms. The ministry informs publics about programmes but seldom uses audience research or feedback for improvements. This concurs with Watson and Noble (2021), who stress that public sector PR effectiveness requires ongoing evaluation, monitoring, and adaptation. The present study extends this by showing how such gaps erode trust in Nigeria’s humanitarian context, where emotional and cultural factors intensify inefficiency perceptions.



Furthermore, findings revealed a positive link between transparency and public trust. Prompt, factual, multi-channel communication increased confidence—for example, real-time updates during 2023 flood relief operations improved perceptions and media coverage. Conversely, delayed or unclear responses, especially amid fund disbursement controversies, sharply reduced trust. This reinforces Kim and Ferguson's (2019) view that transparent crisis communication bolsters perceptions of competence and honesty. Overall, while FMHAPR's PR has advanced visibility and transparency, its moderate influence on trust and reputation calls for enhanced consistency, inter-departmental coordination, and proactive mechanisms—challenges worsened by political interference and resource scarcity in the Nigerian context.

### **Challenges Hindering PR Implementation and Effectiveness**

The findings identified multiple interrelated challenges, including bureaucratic bottlenecks, insufficient funding, limited digital capacity, and weak inter-departmental coordination. Quantitative data revealed that bureaucratic delays (80.8%) and inadequate funding (73.3%) were the most critical obstacles. Respondents indicated that communication officers often require multiple layers of approval before issuing official statements, which leads to significant delays—especially during crises when rapid response is crucial. This problem reflects the structural inefficiencies commonly associated with public administration in Nigeria, aligning closely with Oso and Akhagba (2014).

Another major challenge is the lack of digital literacy and technological infrastructure. While FMHAPR has social media accounts and a functioning website, several communication officers admitted to lacking advanced skills in analytics, digital monitoring, and online engagement. This limits the ministry's ability to manage its reputation in a fast-paced, digital information environment where misinformation can spread rapidly. Mustapha and Santas (2025) also noted similar constraints in other Nigerian ministries, observing that inadequate investment in digital capacity building hinders real-time engagement and public responsiveness. Consequently, the ministry's online presence, although visible, remains underutilised as a tool for dialogue and crisis management.

In essence, the study found that poor internal coordination and absence of a strategic communication framework contribute to the inconsistency of PR messages. Departments within FMHAPR often operate independently, leading to fragmented communication and message duplication. For example, announcements from different units sometimes contradict one another, creating confusion among stakeholders. This lack of cohesion undermines the ministry's credibility and reinforces public scepticism. As Grunig and Hunt's (2020) Excellence Theory emphasises, effective PR requires integration across all levels of the organisation to achieve a unified voice and consistent messaging. Without such cohesion, even well-intentioned communication efforts can appear disorganised or insincere. Addressing these challenges will require institutional reforms, training, and the creation of a centralised communication framework that aligns PR strategies with the ministry's overall policy goals. This study extends earlier works by linking these systemic issues directly to reputation outcomes in a humanitarian ministry, offering context-specific insights for reform in resource-constrained African governance systems.



## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the FMHAPR employs a variety of public relations (PR) strategies such as press releases, social media engagement, and stakeholder briefings that have moderately enhanced its institutional visibility and reputation. However, their overall impact remains constrained by bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited coordination, and inadequate digital responsiveness. Drawing on Grunig and Hunt's (2020) *Excellence Theory*, the study highlights the need for FMHAPR to institutionalise two-way symmetrical communication practices that enable feedback and collaboration, while Coombs' (2015) *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* underscores the importance of timely and empathetic responses during crises to maintain credibility.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. FMHAPR should develop an integrated communication framework that aligns all PR activities with its core objectives and ensures message consistency.
- ii. To strengthen transparency, FMHAPR should routinely publish progress reports, financial statements, and policy updates on its website and social media pages to build credibility and public confidence.
- iii. The ministry should prioritise regular training and capacity development for PR officers in areas such as digital communication, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning. Reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks by decentralising communication authority will improve efficiency and responsiveness.

## Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional authority prior to the commencement of the study. Participants were fully informed that the research was conducted solely for academic purposes.

## Ethical Consent

Informed consent was sought and obtained from all participants in the study. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and it was clearly explained that participation was entirely voluntary with the option to withdraw at any time without consequence.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors 'contributions**

Humphrey Ofuegbe conceived the study, designed the research framework, and drafted the initial manuscript. Tsegysu Santas contributed to the literature review, data analysis, and interpretation of findings. Ofuegbe further handled data collection, questionnaire administration, and interview coordination. All authors critically reviewed and revised subsequent drafts, approved the final manuscript, and take responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

### **Availability of Data and Materials**

The datasets generated and analysed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### **Citation**

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