

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION AND ADOPTION AMONG ORGANISATIONS IN KATSINA STATE

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Abstract

Public relations continues to occupy a peripheral position in many organisations across Nigeria, frequently reduced to event management, media relations or crisis response rather than being embraced as a strategic management function. This tendency is particularly pronounced in Northern Nigeria, where empirical scholarship on the subject remains scarce despite the region's growing public, private and non-governmental organisational landscape. This study assesses the extent to which organisations in Katsina State recognise, accept and adopt public relations as a strategic management function, and identifies the barriers constraining fuller institutionalisation. The study is anchored on Excellence Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995). A qualitative research design was adopted, drawing on semi structured interviews with thirty public relations officers, purposively selected in equal numbers from public sector, private sector and non-governmental organisations in Katsina State. Interview data were analysed thematically following the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). Findings reveal that public relations remains inadequately recognised as a strategic management function in a considerable number of organisations, with practitioners frequently excluded from management decision making, policy formulation and strategic planning. The study further finds that concerns regarding the professional qualifications of personnel performing public relations duties, the absence of dedicated public relations departments in several organisations, and inadequate welfare and working conditions for practitioners collectively constrain the institutionalisation of public relations as a strategic function within the state. The study contributes originally to public relations scholarship by extending institutional recognition research, hitherto concentrated in Southern Nigeria and other African contexts, into a Northern Nigerian setting that has received markedly little empirical attention. Two recommendations, directly aligned to the study's objectives, are advanced for

strengthening the recognition and institutional adoption of public relations within organisations in the region.

Keywords: public relations, institutional recognition, strategic management, professionalisation, Excellence Theory, Institutional Theory, Katsina State

Introduction

Public relations has, over the past four decades, evolved considerably as both an academic discipline and a professional practice, moving from its early associations with press agency and publicity towards a more strategic conception grounded in relationship management, organisational reputation and stakeholder engagement (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Scholars working within the Excellence tradition of public relations research have long argued that the value of the function lies not merely in its communicative output but in its capacity to inform and shape organisational decision making at the highest levels. Tam, Kim, Grunig, Hall and Swerling (2022) reaffirm this position, arguing that communication excellence depends on the extent to which public relations is empowered, structurally integrated, and valued by senior management as a contributor to strategic outcomes rather than a peripheral support function. A recent global bibliometric review by Setiawan, Riyanto and Hariyati (2026) confirms that public relations management continues to mature as a strategic and interdisciplinary research domain, interconnected with strategic communication, crisis communication and corporate reputation, with scholarly attention increasingly extending beyond its traditional centres in the United States and Europe towards Asia and Africa.

Despite this theoretical consensus, the practical reality across much of Nigeria tells a different story. Adama, Kossi, Okujeni, Vendaga and Okocha (2025), in a recent study of Nigerian corporate organisations, found that although public relations managers have gained increasing influence within some large institutions, integration into genuine top management decision making remains uneven, constrained by bureaucratic structures and

limited managerial understanding of the function's strategic value. Eyo (2026), examining the comparative practice of public relations across public and private organisations in Nigeria, similarly found that public sector organisations tend to confine practitioners to technical, reactive roles while private organisations more readily extend managerial responsibilities to their communication personnel, a pattern the study attributes to differences in leadership style, organisational culture and power dynamics across sectors.

In a related conceptual contribution, Eyo (2025) further argues that the professionalisation of public relations practice in Nigeria remains undermined by the deployment of unqualified practitioners, weak ethical standards and the continuing absence of regulatory autonomy for the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, a concern that resonates directly with the findings of the present study. These findings raise important questions about the extent to which organisations across different regions and sectors of the country have internalised the strategic conception of public relations that scholars and professional bodies continue to advocate.

Katsina State, situated in Northern Nigeria, presents a particularly instructive yet under examined context for this inquiry. The state hosts a growing mix of public sector institutions, private businesses and non-governmental organisations, each operating within a socio economic and cultural environment that differs markedly from the urban commercial centres of Lagos, Abuja and Akwa Ibom where much of the existing Nigerian public relations literature has been situated. Umaru, Arabo and Usman's (2022) assessment of public relations in North Western Nigeria remains among the few studies to examine the region directly, and its findings point to a persistent gap between the theoretical expectations of the profession and its practical standing within regional organisations. Whether this pattern holds specifically within Katsina State, and what factors sustain it, remains an open empirical question that the present study addresses.

Statement of the Problem

Public relations scholarship and professional advocacy have consistently emphasised that the function delivers its greatest value to organisations when it is recognised as a strategic management activity rather than a peripheral communication task. Yet a considerable body of Nigerian evidence suggests that this recognition remains inconsistent, with practitioners frequently confined to technical execution, excluded from strategic decision making, and structurally positioned beneath departments such as marketing or administration rather than reporting directly to senior leadership. Aja, Chukwu and Odoh (2019) similarly observe that the professionalisation of public relations practice in Nigeria continues to be undermined by inconsistent recognition of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations' regulatory role, allowing individuals without appropriate training to occupy communication positions within organisations.

This problem appears especially acute outside Nigeria's major commercial centres, where organisations may lack exposure to global standards of public relations practice, face resource constraints that limit investment in professional communication structures, or operate within cultural and institutional environments that favour informal, relationship based communication over structured public relations practice.

Katsina State exemplifies this under examined context. Despite hosting a substantial number of public sector institutions, private businesses and non-governmental organisations, no existing empirical study has specifically investigated the extent to which these organisations recognise, accept and adopt public relations as a strategic management function, nor has any study systematically examined the barriers that may account for limited recognition where it exists. This absence of context specific evidence leaves practitioners, organisational leaders and professional bodies such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations without a clear empirical basis for understanding, or addressing, the standing of public relations within

organisations across the state. It is this gap that the present study seeks to fill.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to assess the institutional recognition and adoption of public relations as a strategic management function among organisations in Katsina State. The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the extent to which organisations in Katsina State recognise public relations as a strategic management function.
2. To identify the barriers that hinder the fuller institutional adoption of public relations as a strategic management function among organisations in Katsina State.

Research Questions

In line with the stated objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent do organisations in Katsina State recognise public relations as a strategic management function?
2. What barriers hinder the fuller institutional adoption of public relations as a strategic management function among organisations in Katsina State?

Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to organisations operating within Katsina State, drawn from the public sector, private sector and non-governmental or development sectors. The study focuses specifically on organisational recognition, structural positioning and institutional adoption of public relations as a strategic management function, rather than on the technical execution or tactical performance of public relations activities. Data collection was conducted through semi structured interviews with thirty purposively selected public relations officers drawn from across the three sectors. The study was conducted within the year 2026 and reflects the perceptions and practices of organisations during this period.

Review of related Literature

Conceptual Review

Public relations, as a concept, has been defined in various ways across the scholarly literature, though most contemporary definitions converge on the idea of managed communication between an organisation and its publics aimed at building mutual understanding and sustaining beneficial relationships. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) foundational account distinguished public relations practice according to four models, ranging from one way press agency and public information models towards two way asymmetrical and, ultimately, two way symmetrical communication, the latter representing a negotiated, dialogic relationship between organisation and public rather than a one directional flow of persuasive messaging. Central to the concept as it is applied in this study is the distinction between public relations as a technical function, concerned primarily with message production, media relations and event execution, and public relations as a strategic management function, in which practitioners contribute to organisational decision making, policy formulation and the management of organisational reputation and stakeholder relationships at the highest levels.

Institutional recognition, the second key concept underpinning this study, refers to the degree to which an organisational practice or function is accepted, legitimised and structurally embedded within an organisation, as distinct from its merely nominal or symbolic presence (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Suchman (1995) further clarifies that legitimacy of this kind is not a fixed property but a generalised perception that an entity's actions are desirable, proper or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms and values, meaning that organisations may actively pursue strategies to appear legitimate even where their internal practices do not fully reflect that appearance. A function may exist formally within an organisation, evidenced by a designated officer or unit, while remaining substantively unrecognised in the sense that it is excluded from meaningful decision

making processes, poorly resourced, or subordinated to other departments. Closely related to institutional recognition is the concept of professionalisation, which Nyitse, Inja and Agbam (2023) describe as the process by which an occupation develops and enforces standards of education, competence and ethical conduct sufficient to distinguish qualified practitioners from untrained individuals performing similar duties.

This distinction is particularly relevant to public relations in the Nigerian context, where the boundary between trained practitioners and individuals informally assigned communication duties often remains poorly defined. Adoption, the third concept central to this study, refers to the process by which organisations come to incorporate a given practice into their routine operations and decision making structures, a process that may be driven by internal recognition of a practice's value, external pressure from regulatory or professional bodies, or imitation of perceived successful peer organisations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Empirical Review

A growing body of empirical scholarship has examined the standing of public relations within Nigerian organisations, offering findings that are directly relevant to the present study's inquiry. Adama, Kossi, Okujeni, Vendaga and Okocha (2025) investigated the integration of public relations managers into the management teams of Nigerian corporate organisations, focusing on institutions including First Bank, the National Youth Service Corps and Radio Nigeria. The study found that while public relations managers have gained increasing influence within these organisations, practical challenges including resource limitations and rigid organisational structures continue to hinder full integration into top management decision making, with the researchers concluding that organisational advocacy is needed to deepen management's understanding of public relations' strategic value.

Eyo (2026) conducted a comparative qualitative study examining public relations roles, practitioner functions and communication models across public and private organisations in Nigeria, drawing on interviews with twenty two senior public relations professionals. The study found that public sector organisations tend to adopt reactive communication strategies, with practitioners performing predominantly technical rather than managerial roles, whereas private sector organisations more frequently extend dual technical and managerial responsibilities to their communication personnel, applying two way communication models that support strategic alignment. The study attributed this sectoral divergence to differences in leadership style, organisational culture and internal power dynamics, and recommended greater integration of public relations into strategic management across Nigerian organisations generally.

In a related conceptual contribution, Eyo (2025) examined the systemic challenges undermining the professionalisation of public relations practice in Nigeria more broadly, identifying the deployment of unqualified practitioners, political interference, inadequate education and training, weak ethical standards and the absence of regulatory autonomy for the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations as interlocking obstacles to the profession's credibility.

The study proposed a tripartite framework emphasising education, accreditation and certification as mechanisms for strengthening professional standards, a proposition that speaks directly to the qualifications and welfare concerns identified in the present study's interview findings. Aja, Chukwu and Odoh (2019) similarly examined the role of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations in professionalising practice in Nigeria, concluding that inconsistent enforcement of membership and accreditation requirements has allowed individuals without formal communication training to occupy public relations positions across many organisations, thereby weakening the perceived credibility and strategic standing of the function. Nyitse, Inja and

Agbam's (2023) examination of public relations ethics and professionalism in Nigeria similarly found that weak enforcement of professional standards, combined with limited institutional support for practitioners, continues to undermine the ethical and strategic credibility of the profession nationally.

Umaru, Arabo and Usman's (2022) assessment of the role of public relations in private and public sectors in North Western Nigeria represents one of the few studies to examine the region directly relevant to the present study's geographic focus. Their findings point to limited institutional recognition of public relations across the sampled organisations, attributed in part to inadequate awareness among organisational leadership of the function's strategic potential and to a broader regional pattern of under resourced communication structures. This study, while valuable, was not specific to Katsina State and did not examine the qualifications, structural and welfare dimensions of recognition that the present study investigates.

Beyond the Nigerian context, comparative evidence from elsewhere in Africa reinforces the broader pattern. Adjin-Tettey, Allotey, Ogoe and Anyomi (2020), examining public relations as a strategic management function among selected organisations in Accra, Ghana, similarly found that while the theoretical case for strategic public relations is widely accepted within scholarly and professional circles, translating this recognition into genuine organisational practice remains inconsistent, shaped by factors including organisational size, sector and the professional background of senior leadership. Steyn's (2009) South African research stream similarly found that public relations achieves genuine strategic standing only where practitioners are positioned to engage in strategic reflection alongside senior management, rather than being limited to communication execution after strategic decisions have already been made, a finding that closely anticipates the present study's own concerns.

Taken together, this body of empirical literature establishes a consistent pattern across Nigerian and West African contexts: public relations

frequently retains formal presence within organisations while lacking substantive strategic recognition, a gap shaped by sectoral differences, leadership attitudes, resource constraints, professional qualification deficits and broader institutional pressures. Notably, however, no existing study has examined this pattern specifically within Katsina State through direct qualitative engagement with organisational and communication personnel, a gap the present study directly addresses.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks, namely Excellence Theory and Institutional Theory. Excellence Theory, developed principally by Grunig and Hunt (1984), provides the study's first theoretical anchor. The theory identifies strategic management as a defining quality of excellent public relations practice, arguing that the function achieves its fullest value when practitioners are integrated into organisational decision making rather than confined to technical communication tasks. Central to the theory is the proposition that excellent public relations departments are characterised by empowerment, meaning direct access to and involvement with the dominant coalition of organisational decision makers, and by the practice of two way symmetrical communication, in which organisations engage publics in genuine dialogue rather than one directional persuasion. Tam, Kim, Grunig, Hall and Swerling's (2022) more recent elaboration of the theory reaffirms that communication excellence remains contingent on the degree to which senior management values and structurally empowers the public relations function.

Excellence Theory is applied in this study to explain and interpret the study's first research question, concerning the extent of organisational recognition of public relations as a strategic function, and offers a lens through which the interview findings on exclusion from management decision making can be understood as a departure from excellent practice. Institutional Theory, developed principally through the work of Meyer and

Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Suchman (1995), provides the study's second theoretical anchor. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that organisations often adopt formal structures, including designated functional units, primarily to signal legitimacy to their external environment, even where such structures are decoupled from actual operational practice, a phenomenon directly relevant to organisations that maintain a nominal public relations function without substantive strategic integration or that assign communication duties to unqualified personnel merely to demonstrate a symbolic presence.

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) account of institutional isomorphism further explains why organisations within a shared field tend to adopt similar structures and practices over time, identifying coercive isomorphism, arising from regulatory or legal pressures such as those exerted by professional bodies including the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations; mimetic isomorphism, arising from organisations imitating perceived successful peers under conditions of uncertainty; and normative isomorphism, arising from professionalisation processes that establish shared norms of appropriate practice. Suchman's (1995) account of legitimacy as a strategic and institutional resource further clarifies that organisations may pursue pragmatic, moral or cognitive legitimacy through their public relations structures, and that the perceived appropriateness of a function within its institutional environment can shape resourcing and recognition independently of its demonstrated operational value. More recent scholarship, including Hwang's (2023) analysis of institutional stability and accountability systems, continues to affirm that legitimacy seeking behaviour of this kind remains a robust explanatory mechanism for understanding why organisations adopt, or fail to adopt, particular structures even where such structures are only loosely coupled with substantive practice.

Institutional Theory is applied in this study to explain and interpret the study's second research question, concerning the organisational and

institutional barriers, including qualification deficits, structural absence and inadequate welfare provision, that constrain fuller adoption of public relations as a strategic management function.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing semi structured interviews as the primary method of data collection in order to obtain detailed views and experiences from respondents concerning the status, recognition and practice of public relations within organisations in Katsina State, a design justified principally by the study's aim of understanding not merely whether recognition gaps exist but why they persist, an understanding best obtained through direct engagement with the reasoning and lived experience of practitioners and management personnel rather than through standardised closed ended measurement, and further justified by the exploratory nature of the inquiry within a geographic context that, as the literature review establishes, has received no prior dedicated empirical attention, making an approach capable of generating rich, contextually grounded insight more appropriate than one designed primarily to test pre specified numerical relationships.

The population for this study comprises organisations operating within Katsina State drawn from three sectors, namely public sector or government agencies, private businesses and non-governmental or development organisations, this cross sectoral scope being deliberately chosen in order to permit comparison across sectors that prior Nigerian studies have tended to treat in isolation from one another. A purposive sampling technique is employed to select interview respondents from the three sectors. This approach is considered appropriate because the study seeks to engage individuals with direct knowledge on how their organizations structure, resource and value the public relations function. The respondents include senior communication officers, public relations practitioners, and members of management responsible for organisational communication.

Purposive sampling is further justified by the relatively small and dispersed population of identifiable public relations personnel in Katsina State, which makes probability sampling impractical for a qualitative inquiry of this nature.

A total of thirty public relations officers were interviewed for the study, with ten respondents purposively selected from each of the three sectors, this balanced allocation enabling meaningful comparison of themes across sectors while remaining consistent with established guidance that qualitative thematic saturation is typically achievable within samples of this size. The interview guide comprises open ended questions designed to elicit respondents' perceptions of the role of public relations within their organisations. It also examines the extent to which practitioners are involved in management decision-making and strategic planning. Other areas covered include the professional and academic qualifications of personnel performing public relations duties, the presence or absence of a dedicated public relations department or officer, and the welfare and working conditions of practitioners.

The interview data were transcribed and analysed thematically, following the widely applied six-phase approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). The process involved familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for candidate themes, reviewing themes against the coded data, defining and naming the themes, and producing the final analytic account. This approach was considered appropriate because of its established analytical rigour and suitability for identifying recurring patterns of meaning within a moderately sized qualitative dataset. Particular attention was given to explanatory themes that could help account for the overall pattern of institutional recognition observed across the sampled organisations.

This qualitative approach is considered appropriate to the study's aims because it allows the research to move beyond simply establishing that recognition gaps exist, which prior Nigerian studies have already substantially demonstrated, towards a fuller, contextually grounded understanding of the specific organisational, professional and institutional factors driving these gaps within the particular setting of Katsina State, an understanding that a purely quantitative or hypothesis testing design would be poorly suited to generate given the exploratory nature of the inquiry and the absence of any prior validated measurement instrument specific to this context.

Results

The study draws on interviews with thirty public relations officers across Katsina State, purposively selected in equal numbers from the public, private and non-governmental sectors. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by sector.

Table 1 *Distribution of Interview Respondents by Sector*

Sector	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Public Sector / Government Agencies	10	33.3%
Private Businesses	10	33.3%
Non-Governmental / Development Organisations	10	33.3%
Total	30	100%

The interview responses are analysed thematically, in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) framework, yielding five major themes. Table 2 presents a summary of the thematic structure emerging from the data.

Table 2 *Summary of Themes Emerging from Thematic Analysis of Interview Data*

Theme	Core Finding	Theoretical Lens
Institutional recognition of PR	PR perceived mainly as publicity or media activity; weak integration into policy formulation	Excellence Theory
Exclusion from management functions	Practitioners largely absent from strategic meetings and decision making	Excellence Theory
Professional qualifications	Few practitioners hold Mass Communication or PR qualifications; duties often assigned to untrained staff	Institutional Theory
Availability of PR departments and personnel	Several organisations lack a dedicated PR department or designated officer	Institutional Theory
Welfare and working conditions	Inadequate welfare, logistics and professional development support reported	Institutional Theory

Institutional Recognition of Public Relations as a Management Function

The interview findings indicate that public relations is not adequately recognised by many organisations in Katsina State as a strategic management function. Although some organisations recognise the importance of maintaining good relationships with their publics, public relations is often perceived primarily as a publicity, information or media related activity rather than as an integral component of organisational management. Respondents further suggest that some organisational managers do not fully appreciate the strategic contribution that professional public relations can make to policy formulation, reputation management, crisis communication, stakeholder engagement and organisational decision making. This finding indicates that the institutional recognition of public relations remains relatively weak in some organisations, such that practitioners may be invited to perform communication related duties only after major organisational decisions have already been taken, rather than being involved at the planning and policy formulation stages.

Exclusion of Public Relations Practitioners from Management Functions

A further significant finding concerns the limited participation of public relations practitioners in managerial functions. The evidence suggests that many practitioners are not sufficiently involved in strategic management meetings, policy formulation and major organisational decision making processes. This exclusion may limit practitioners' ability to provide professional advice on matters relating to organisational reputation, stakeholder relationships, public perception and crisis management, and where practitioners are excluded from the management structure, their roles tend to become largely reactive rather than strategic. The findings suggest that organisations intending to derive maximum benefit from public relations should position qualified practitioners at a level where they can participate directly in management and contribute to organisational planning and decision making.

Professional Qualifications of Public Relations Practitioners

The interview findings also reveal concerns regarding the professional qualifications of some individuals performing public relations functions in organisations within Katsina State. Only a limited number of practitioners are reported to possess academic backgrounds specifically related to Mass Communication, Public Relations or other closely related communication disciplines. In some organisations, public relations responsibilities are reportedly assigned to individuals whose academic and professional backgrounds are not directly related to the field, a situation that raises concerns regarding professional competence, ethical practice and the quality of strategic communication services provided. The findings suggest that the appointment of appropriately qualified personnel is essential if public relations is to be fully recognised as a professional and strategic management function, and that organisations should give greater consideration to relevant academic qualifications, professional training and

competence when appointing personnel to public relations positions.

Availability of Public Relations Departments and Personnel

The study further finds that some organisations in Katsina State do not have dedicated public relations departments or qualified practitioners. In some cases, public relations responsibilities are reportedly combined with other functions, while in other organisations there is no designated officer responsible for managing relationships between the organisation and its various publics. The absence of a dedicated structure may affect the systematic planning and implementation of communication programmes, and may also make it difficult for organisations to effectively monitor public opinion, manage their reputation, respond to crises and maintain sustainable relationships with key stakeholders. This finding demonstrates that institutional adoption of public relations requires more than simply assigning occasional communication duties to employees; it requires the establishment of appropriate structures, the employment of qualified practitioners, and recognition of public relations as an integral organisational function.

Welfare and Working Conditions of Public Relations Practitioners

The interview findings indicate that many practitioners do not receive adequate welfare packages and institutional support to enable them to perform their duties effectively. Reported challenges include inadequate welfare provisions, limited professional development opportunities, and insufficient logistical support, among other working conditions that may affect practitioners' ability to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Effective public relations practice requires practitioners to have access to appropriate communication facilities, mobility, training, professional development opportunities and other resources necessary for carrying out their responsibilities; where such support is inadequate, practitioners may experience difficulty maintaining effective relationships with stakeholders and responding promptly to organisational communication needs. This finding suggests that improved welfare and working conditions are essential

for enhancing the effectiveness, motivation and professional performance of public relations practitioners in Katsina State.

Table 3 summarises the study's major findings against its two research questions.

Table 3 *Major Findings Mapped to Research Questions*

Research Question	Key Findings
RQ1: Extent of recognition of PR as a strategic function	PR is inadequately recognised as a strategic function in a considerable number of organisations; it is often treated as a publicity or information activity; practitioners are frequently excluded from management decision making, policy formulation and strategic planning
RQ2: Barriers to fuller institutional adoption	Barriers include the deployment of practitioners without relevant academic or professional qualifications; the absence of dedicated PR departments or designated officers in some organisations; and inadequate welfare and working conditions affecting practitioner effectiveness and motivation

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that the strategic value of public relations is yet to be fully appreciated and institutionalised in some organisations in Katsina State, a pattern that closely mirrors findings reported elsewhere in Nigeria and, more broadly, across Africa. The limited involvement of practitioners in management decision making observed in this study parallels the findings of Adama, Kossi, Okujeni, Vendaga and Okocha (2025), who similarly found that public relations managers in Nigerian corporate organisations continue to face bureaucratic and structural barriers to full integration into top management decision making, notwithstanding gains in influence in some institutions. It also echoes Eyo's (2026) comparative finding that public sector organisations in particular tend to confine practitioners to reactive, technical roles, a pattern this study finds similarly evident across sectors in Katsina State, suggesting that the sectoral divergence Eyo (2026) observed in Akwa Ibom may extend, at least partially, to organisations in Northern Nigeria. Steyn's (2009) South African findings

on the necessity of strategic reflection for genuine strategic standing lend further comparative weight to this pattern, suggesting it is not confined to Nigeria but reflects a wider challenge across African organisational contexts, a picture consistent with the global maturation of public relations management scholarship documented by Setiawan, Riyanto and Hariyati's (2026) recent bibliometric review.

The exclusion of practitioners from management functions identified in this study is particularly significant when interpreted through Excellence Theory, since Grunig and Hunt's (1984) foundational account, together with Tam, Kim, Grunig, Hall and Swerling's (2022) more recent elaboration, positions empowerment and access to the dominant coalition as defining characteristics of excellent public relations practice. Where practitioners are not involved in decision making processes, as this study's findings indicate, organisations lose the opportunity to incorporate professional communication perspectives into organisational policies and strategies.

The finding concerning the professional qualifications of personnel performing public relations duties in Katsina State organisations aligns closely with Eyo's (2025) conceptual analysis of systemic challenges undermining public relations professionalisation in Nigeria, which identifies the deployment of unqualified practitioners as a central obstacle to the profession's credibility nationally. It similarly corroborates Aja, Chukwu and Odoh's (2019) observation that inconsistent enforcement of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations' membership and accreditation requirements has allowed individuals without formal communication training to occupy public relations positions, and Nyitse, Inja and Agbam's (2023) finding that weak enforcement of professional standards continues to undermine the ethical and strategic credibility of the profession. Interpreted through Institutional Theory, this pattern is consistent with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) account of decoupling, whereby organisations maintain a nominal communication function, sometimes staffed by unqualified personnel,

primarily to project external legitimacy rather than to secure genuine strategic communication capacity, a dynamic Suchman (1995) frames as the pursuit of pragmatic or cognitive legitimacy independent of demonstrated operational value.

The absence of dedicated public relations departments in some organisations, together with the inadequate welfare and working conditions reported by practitioners, further reflects the normative and coercive isomorphic pressures described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and reaffirmed in more recent institutional scholarship such as Hwang (2023). In the absence of strong regulatory enforcement by professional bodies such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, and in a context where the strategic value of public relations remains poorly understood by organisational leadership, organisations in Katsina State appear to lack strong institutional incentives to invest in dedicated structures, qualified personnel or adequate practitioner welfare, a pattern that extends the regional evidence presented by Umaru, Arabo and Usman (2022) regarding the limited institutional recognition of public relations across North Western Nigeria more broadly.

The comparative evidence from Ghana presented by Adjin-Tettey, Allotey, Ogoe and Anyomi (2020) suggests that this pattern of formal presence without substantive institutional recognition is not unique to Nigeria but reflects a broader challenge facing public relations professionalisation across West African organisational contexts, one that nonetheless manifests with particular intensity in under resourced regional settings such as Katsina State.

Conclusion

This study set out to assess the extent to which organisations in Katsina State recognise public relations as a strategic management function and to identify the barriers hindering its fuller institutional adoption. The findings indicate that public relations remains inadequately recognised as a strategic function in a considerable number of organisations across the state,

with practitioners frequently excluded from management decision making, constrained by qualification deficits among personnel performing communication duties, hindered by the absence of dedicated public relations structures in some organisations, and affected by inadequate welfare and working conditions.

These findings extend Excellence Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995) into a Northern Nigerian context that has received markedly limited empirical attention, demonstrating that the gap between the normative ideal of strategic public relations and its practical institutionalisation, well documented elsewhere in Nigeria and West Africa (Adama et al., 2025; Eyo, 2025, 2026; Adjinn-Tettey et al., 2020; Steyn, 2009), is similarly evident within Katsina State.

Recommendations

Arising directly from the study's two objectives and research questions, the following two recommendations are made:

1. Organisational leadership across Katsina State should be deliberately sensitised to the strategic value of public relations, and qualified practitioners should be structurally positioned within management to enable direct participation in policy formulation, reputation management and organisational decision making. This recommendation responds directly to the first objective and research question, since the study's findings show that public relations is still widely perceived as a publicity or media related activity rather than a management function, and that practitioners are frequently consulted only after key decisions have already been made. Deliberate sensitisation, backed by clear reporting lines that place practitioners closer to senior management, would help close this gap between the recognised theory of strategic public relations and its practice within the state.

2. Organisations should establish dedicated public relations departments where none currently exist and prioritise the appointment of personnel with relevant academic and professional qualifications in Mass Communication or Public Relations, while the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations and related professional bodies should strengthen enforcement of accreditation standards and encourage improved welfare and working conditions for practitioners within the state. This recommendation responds directly to the second objective and research question, since the study's findings identify unqualified personnel, the absence of dedicated departments and poor practitioner welfare as the principal barriers to fuller institutional adoption. Addressing these three barriers together, rather than in isolation, offers organisations in Katsina State a realistic pathway towards institutionalising public relations as the strategic function the literature consistently shows it to be.

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