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## Public Relations Tools for Sustainable Mutual Understanding Between Higher Educational Institutions and Their Publics in Nigeria

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**Citation:** Igben H.G.O (2022) Public relations tools for sustainable mutual understanding between higher educational institutions and their publics in Nigeria, *British Journal of Marketing Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 4, pp.1-16

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper identifies the public relations tools which higher educational institutions use for building sustainable relationships with their strategic publics in Nigeria. Public relations tools as an important aspect of public relations practice in every organisation largely determine the status of relationship that higher educational institutions have with their respective publics. It is widely believed that the public relations tools higher educational institutions employ have the potentials for building healthy relationships with their publics with the consequent capacity for removal of unfavourable rumours and stories that could have negative implications for the organisations. A survey of 140 public relations staff and 313 students of higher educational institutions in Nigeria was carried out. Findings reveal that some higher educational institutions use some of the tools as a matter of custom without establishing whether such tools are relevant to addressing their corporate public relations needs. Others try to allow research to precede their selection of the public relations tools of the schools, while some yet do leave their public relations tools in reckless abandon. The study recommends that public relations departments or units of higher educational institutions should always establish the public relations needs of their respective higher educational institutions before initiating the tool for interacting with the publics in order to identify the most effective tool for interaction that would drive sustainable peaceful co-existence between higher educational institutions and their relevant publics.*

**KEYWORDS:** public relations, image building, publics, higher educational institution

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### INTRODUCTION

Every organisation including the higher educational institution depends on certain public relations tools for initiating and sustaining positive relationship with its strategic publics. But despite the availability of a great number of these tools to the higher educational institutions, not many appear to utilize them as expected. The result of such public relations engagement varies as different organisations often adopt different communication strategies other than those needed by such higher educational institutions. The corporate world has witnessed in recent years the creation of an office for corporate communications or public relations to facilitate the propagation of an organization's mission. Quite often, the office has a cross-functional responsibility of maintaining a constant link with the publics and with all functional units of an organization including top management. Its operations vary from one organization to another principally because of differences in mission, vision, goals, values and the products that an organization is established to offer to its customers. This paper attempts to identify the number of public relations tools that the higher educational institutions in Nigeria utilize for establishing and sustaining a healthy

relationship with relevant publics. Secondly, it also interrogates the process of utilizing these public relations to establish if appropriate preliminary research was conducted to determine the relevant public relations functions of such educational institution in order to strategically plan the relevant public relations tools for such purpose. Absence of such preliminary research will mean evolving public relations tools that are out of touch with the corporate needs of such institution of higher learning though so much would have been voted and spent on public relations functions.

The function of public relations in the tertiary institutions is to create mutual understanding between the higher educational institutions and their respective publics. Public relations tools represent the major pillars geared towards achieving the organizational goals as established by the administration of higher educational institutions for forging and sustaining relations with its strategic publics. Although all members of the higher educational institutions are ambassadors of the institutions, and thus peripheral public relations practitioners, especially those in leadership, management and supervisory positions, public relations professionals are formally saddled with the primary responsibility to coordinate the public relations programme in order to achieve positive holistic corporate positive relationship with target.

The higher educational institutions environment has in recent years become highly competitive with the liberalized educational policy which permit private participation. Increased level of private participation and rise in the number of public schools left no choice with higher educational institutions than to evolve ways of maximizing opportunities available in the competitive drive for students admissions. It is therefore highly imperative that every higher educational institution utilizes requisite tools for building and sustaining their respective positive corporate image.

With the growth of modern public relations, public relations professionals and scholars in the field have separately and severally tried to secure clarification for the public relations field through creation and initiation of hundreds of thousands of definitions. However, for the purpose of addressing this topic adequately one of such definitions is highlighted here.

Chukwu (2012:169 ) states that public relations practice is “a management philosophy aimed at doing everything possible to create good relationship between an organization and its public”. Chukwu’s definition by implication refers to a wide range of tools within the reach of public relations that are aimed at making the organization to succeed in building internal and external goodwill with the expectation of achieving needed reputation for an organization in order to remain in business and fulfill its purpose. The need for adequate communication between the organization and its publics will continue to be in high demand as there is increase in the activities of such an organisation. Every organisation whether it is conscious of it or not, needs good relationship with its employees, consumers of its products and services, future investors, shareholders and in fact the entire publics. As an organization specialized in manufacturing or offering services, it needs to show itself to existing or potential customers that it is up to date.

The foregoing definition support the use of public relations activities for building and sustaining relationship between an organization and its diverse publics within the purview of a systemic framework. Nwokoye(2008) postulates that, public relations is regarded as a corporate activity for establishing and promoting fruitful relationship with diverse publics. He indirectly infers interdependent relationship between an organization and its divers publics. This position is corroborated by Chukwu as he opines that public relations is the strong commitment of an organization to ensure that it incorporates the interest of its diverse publics in whatever it does. The

underlying idea is that every organisation though a separate entity is in an interdependent relationship with its strategic publics. It suggests the every organisation including the higher educational institutions should always have a holistic view of the interdependent relationship that exists between the organization and its public. Such holistic view of interdependent connection should underscore the commitment of top management in the process of policy formulation and implementation which guarantees satisfaction of the interest of all concern. This understanding drives the process to ensure that everything was done to meet public acceptance. Public acceptance is a paramount consideration in corporate policy formulation which goes to show that though organisation and the publics are separate entities they are somewhat interdependent. That is the pursuit of corporate interest may be more guaranteed of success if such pursuit is inclusive of the interest of the diverse strategic publics of the organization.

Edoga and Ani (2001) note that a company should deliberately plan and execute a continuous public relations programme to develop a good relationship between it and the various publics and amongst other objectives that are being sought with public relations. Stressing the position of public relations in the country, Olawnoru (2013) maintains that most officials occupying the public relations positions of various organisations in the country today are not professionals. They generally have a fair knowledge of what they are supposed to do. If this observation is correct, the quality of public relations services these categories of practitioners offer will be low.

Higher educational institutions in Nigeria are key players in our society today and their role in the academic environment is considered as a backbone for the country's economic growth in this twentieth century. This is with a reference to strengthening the quality of the learning process and knowledge delivery.

Higher educational institution as an organization interacts with the students, academic and non-academic staff, parents, association, the management, the host community, governing council, the state and the federal government, and the various National Commissions for higher education, which represent its strategic publics. The activities of higher educational institutions in one way or the other affect those publics mentioned above. Therefore, to maintain a cordial relationship with its publics, higher educational institution at all time must try to create a rapport that translates to mutual understanding with all these bodies. It can achieve this through the supply of relevant factual information to the various strategic publics as well as listening to feedback from these publics by allowing free flow of information, paying of claims as at when due to the staff, engaging in proper and standard academic work, standing by the rules and regulations of the different National Commissions concern in the performance of its activities.

Management of higher educational institution cannot pretend to be unaware that public relations does not only ensure good relation with the relevant publics but can strive towards improved corporate image with the potential for increased students patronage. It is in the light of the importance attached to public relations that this study seeks to identify the public relations tools in use in the higher educational institutions for interacting with their target publics. The study also seeks to establish the public relations tools the publics preferred for receiving information from the higher educational institutions in Nigeria.

### **Publics of higher educational institutions in Nigeria**

Every higher educational institution in Nigeria has its specific and generic publics but in this context reference is made below to the generic publics of any higher educational institution. As earlier mentioned above, the institution interacts with different segments of the publics who by implication constitute the framework of its relevant publics. Below are the generic publics of a typical higher educational institution:

1. Government which includes: federal. State and local government
2. The Governing Council
3. Employees including all categories of staff such as retired, current and potential staff.
4. The students' population including former, current and potential students
5. Her host community
6. Parents
7. Unions
8. National Commissions

### **Higher education public relations tools and activities**

Higher educational institutions use proven public relations tools and activities to stir up positive attitudes and behaviours in their strategic publics. The choice of which one to use depends on so many factors which include financial constraints, nature and scope of public relations needs, the environment factor as to whether competitive or monopolistic and political factor which may thrust up regulatory policies and regulations. These tools include the following for building the corporate image of the various institutions of higher learning:

1. Media Relations
2. Advertorials.
3. Social media include school websites, Facebook page and Whatsapp Group.
4. Newsletters on its activities
5. Communities relations
6. Gifts items especially at yuletide when various Christmas gifts are give n out.
7. Brochures, handbook and catalogue
8. Sponsoreship or partnership
9. Speaking engagement
10. Business events
11. Liaison between the Governing Councils, associated unions, the staff, students and the government, state or federal.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature on public relations with focus on sustainable positive relationships between institutions and their publics for effective management of tertiary institutions were reviewed for the purpose of writing this paper. The first thought of why organisation use public relations is among other reasons, how they can control their target publics (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006; White & Dozier, 1992; Dozier, 1990). Tianping (2003) indicated that public relations is a basic function of a modern school's management. Kotler (2003) further writes that the practices of public relations help build good relations with organisation's diverse publics and obtain favourable publicity, build up a good corporate image and wade off unfavourable rumours and stories. Therefore, public relations tools when effectively employed will enhance the image and relationship of the various stakeholders of higher educational institutions and consequently stimulate public loyalty . It is important to state

that a search for literature shows that the public relations tools employed by higher educational institutions to disseminate information to strategic stakeholders of the higher educational institutions to build relationships have been under researched. This study was therefore conducted to address this research gap.

The aim of this study is to identify the public relations tools which higher educational institutions employ in the hope of capturing effective and beneficial interaction with their publics in Nigeria. From this aim it is imperative to explore the following objectives: (1) To identify the public relations tools utilized by the higher educational institutions in Nigeria for building relationships with their publics. (2) To establish the public relations tools most preferred by publics of the higher educational institutions in Nigeria. And (3) to establish if the preferred public relations tools were deployed as a result of preliminary research on the public relations needs of the institution concern.

This work reviewed literature on public relations including the tools utilized for image building approaches. Accessible literature reveals that public relations is not new and its modern-day origins in the United States can be traced as far back as 1807 with President Jefferson's address to Congress (Lancaster, 2005). According to Moore and Kalupa (2007) public relations as practised today is a twentieth century American phenomenon and its fundamental elements of informing people, persuading people and integrating people were basic to earliest society just as they are today.

Moore and Kalupa (2007) further assert that the need for communications among organisations and their publics is defined by the dominant role ascribed to public relations functions in the economy today and exists as an essential middleman between the corporation and its publics. Hence, public relations functions cannot be integrated into other areas since these functions cannot be managed strategically (Grunig et al., 2006). Public relations is therefore a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends (Cutlip, Center, and Broom, 2006).

Public Relations practice is deliberate, planned and sustained to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its public. PR consists of all forms of planned communication, outwards and inwards, between an organization and its publics for achieving specific objectives concerning mutual understanding (Jefkins, 2006). Jefkins presents public relations as a management function, which uses the attributes of management for example, planning, collaborative decision making, and research to foster the organization's ability to build mutually beneficial relationships on which the corporate vision and mission depend.

Available literature also present public relations as communication and relationship management. As communication management, public relations focuses on the flow of communication between an organization and its publics to achieve positive relationships. In the context of relationship management, public relations function derive support from communication as a property of those relationships rather than the conduit between organizations and public.

The management function that monitors and manages opinions of the general public towards an organization is the use of public relations (Moore & Kalupa, 2007).The objectives of public relations is to manage misconceptions for unfounded opinions not to tarnish the image and operations of an organisation. Wells, Burnet, and Moriarty (2005) also support this view and stressed that public relations objectives focus on creating credibility, delivering information,



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building positive images, changing stakeholders' attitudes, opinions, or behaviors about a company. Wells et al., (2005) further opines that public relations practitioners have many tools to establish and enhance a positive image of an organisation and its products among its various publics. Hence, the various tools employed by public relations practitioners to deliver his messages to the publics of an organisation include speeches, sponsorships, events, corporate advertising, press releases, websites, internal publications and notice boards (Belch & Belch, 2001; Lancaster, 2005; Moore & Kalupa, 2007; Palmer, 2000; Wells et al., 2005).

According to Palmer (2000), sponsorship involves investment in an event or cause in order that an organisation can through it achieve its objectives. Thus, through events, an organisation can achieve objectives such as increase in awareness level, reputation enhancement and image building. Palmer (2000) additionally stated that major events are an opportunity for two-way dialogue between the organisation and the media. Event and sponsorship in the words of Duncan (2002) are designed to create involvement and intensify the marketing communications activities in an organisation. Lancaster (2005) believe that key individuals can be invited to artistic events and such key individuals can be targeted, contacted, entertained and result in long term relationships building.

Moore and Kalupa (2007) also were of the view that events play an important part in changing attitudes and opinions. The authors further assert that events provide information that often induces a change of mind. Clow and Baack (2007) further mention that since event is an opportunity for organisation to have a dialogue with their publics, public relations professional should always amplify responsibility for positive outcomes of events and increase the desirable outcome in the eyes of the publics. Therefore, public relations practitioners must recognize the importance of events in transforming passive attitudes into positive opinion on controversial issues.

### **Building Corporate Image Using Public Relations**

Most organisations today place high emphasis on external communication such as marketing, branding and image management, with lesser attention on internal communications (Chong, 2007). According to Pickton and Broderick (2005) image is the perception of the company by its publics. The authors emphasized that an organisation have many images, not one, because each target audience is affected by its own interest and contacts. Clow and Baack (2007) stressed that a strong company image, which took years to build, may be destroyed in just a few weeks or months by negative publicity and events. Therefore, the role of public relations professional is to build strong company image through public relations activities (Clow & Baack, 2007).

Wells et al.,(2005) mention employee relations, media relations, corporate relations, financial relations, public affairs and community relations as types of relations that public relations professionals of an organisation deal with. Dortok (2006) concedes that building a positive image for an organisation, is often considered to be crucial to paying more attention to employees as they are considered one of the most trusted information sources of an organisation. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) further indicate that communication becomes a vehicle used by an organisation to initiate, develop, maintain and repair mutually productive relationships. Thus, employees' relations involves internal marketing which communicate an effort aimed at informing employees concerning marketing programmes as well as encouraging their support which affect the image of the organisation (Wells et al., 2005).

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Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest, (2001) argue that companies with extensive corporate communication strategies are more likely to have strong reputations. Thus, as companies focus on managing relationship with its publics the more likely they are to have a strong reputation. Dolphin (2004) argue that corporate reputation can win competitive advantages for an organisation in a crowded marketplace. Wells et al., (2005) add that a successful relationship between an organisation and its strategic publics depends on public relations professional's commitment to honesty, accuracy and professionalism. Therefore, when these qualities are tarnished, the public relations professional cannot function effectively as a liaison between a company and the publics (Wells et al., 2005).

Clow and Baack (2007) echo that corporate reputation is extremely vulnerable and extremely valuable hence good reputation is hard to build and cannot be bought by an organisation. In the words of Leeper (2004) recognizing community as the context within which organisations operate and recognizing the need for organisations to establish strong communities, is a good backdrop for realizing idealistic role of public relations. Post, Preston and Sachs, (2002) point to the fact that a company's wealth and its license to operate are influenced by its relationship with stakeholders. Therefore, active and continuing participation within a community helps to maintain and enhance cordial relationship to the benefit of both the institution and the community at large. Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (2004) emphasize that public encompasses any group of people who are tied together however loosely, by some common interest or concern and who have consequences for an organisation. Consequently, lack of community relations activities automatically limits the ability of public relations departments of the private universities to perform their functions effectively in building relationships. Beavers-Moss (2001) conclusively states that building credibility and trustworthiness are the main issues in public relations. In view of this, public relations practitioners must recognize the importance of events and sponsorships in transforming passive attitudes into positive opinion on controversial issues.

### **The Role of the Educational Public Relations Practitioner**

The role public relations usually plays in educational institutions is to manage the flow of both internal and external communication. In the process, public relations departments manage their organisation's reputation with various groups including internal and external publics. According to Sietel (2009) public relations practice promotes two-way communications based on research through a multimedia. The traditional role of the educational public relations specialist has been that of a scribe and paper mover, whose purpose typically was to inform and often to publicize. For the most part, the duties of the educational public relations specialist or practitioner was the recording and publishing of minutes of board meetings, the development of brochures for financial campaigns and even the supervision of the school newspaper.

Today however, the role of the educational public relations practitioner has broadened largely. Flatt (2002) listed twenty (20) roles for the contemporary public relations specialist. These leadership roles emphasized a variety of skills which include: publicizing, advertising, marketing, of existing and new products and services, editing and knowing basic graphic design, conducting budget and building referendum, campaigns, public relations in service for administrators and staff, relating effectively to adults and youths in the community, problem solving situations, dealing with oral and written complains and organizing and administering communications plans for schools crisis, keeping accurate district school public relations records, determining alternative features and serving not only as the district peacemaker and public conscience, but also as one of the institutions'

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key advisers, which includes speaking for the institutions on occasions. Corporate image is extremely valuable and extremely vulnerable (Clow and Baack, 2007). Good reputations are hard to build and cannot be bought. One of the public relations office responsibilities is to protect the image of the higher educational institutions to its relevant publics. Building good relationships with students, employees and the media helps to obtain a favourable publicity, build up a corporate image and hold off unfavourable rumour and stocks (Kotler, 2003).

### **Role of Public Relations in Educational Institutions**

The public relations plays key role in educational institutions through management of the flow of both internal and external communications. Public relations departments in educational set up do manage their organization's reputations with various groups including internal and external publics. This is what Seitel (2009) implies when he said that public relations practice is a two-way communication with the support of multimedia. According to Seitel, public relations practice in the USA, is therefore accorded a prominent role in management from a position as a Vice President with board representation. The Executive Vice President presides over specialized functional areas headed by highly placed directors that oversee specific activities and publics. However, the case is different in Nigeria. Public relations do not have that opportunity. Contrary to what exist in the USA, public relations practice in Nigerian educational institutions are founded on dissemination of information that usually comes from management, with the public relations practitioner completely excluded from the process of generating the information. This position reduces the PR practitioner to the status of an 'errand boy' who does the bidding of the master without raising any question. A public relations practitioner reports through a bureaucratic process as he or she is not accorded management status.

### **Theoretical framework**

The study is hinged on the *System Theory*. A system theory in public relations is a public relations' lens in which an organisation and its target publics are seen as separate but interconnected units in which an action in one unit stimulates a reaction in other units (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth, 2007). Lattimore et al maintain that system theory supports the idea that reaction of one entity in response to the action of the other is often condition by the demand of the initial action precipitating the reaction. Such condition according to Lattimore et al may be political, economic and social. Grunig and Dozier (1995) add within the context of system theory the relationship between organisations and their target publics is symbiotic. They argue that while organisations depend on the publics for supply of raw materials, labour and patronage, the publics depend on the organisations for products and services. This suggests the inter-connectivity between the organisation and internal and external publics.

From the collection of the various public relations theories, system theory is best placed to support this study. First, with the proposition that organisations and their target publics are locked in an interconnected relationship, higher educational institutions public relations practice will when hinged on system theory encourage corporate policy that recognizes that the diverse internal and external publics are crucial to the realization of corporate vision and mission. Secondly, system theory supports the idea of promoting corporate policy that have regards for the target publics and therefore seeks to provide for the interest of such target publics as it does to organisation's interest in the process of policy formulation and implementation. Thirdly, it is the theory that believes that a change in higher educational institutions' policy will mean a change in the attitudes of target publics; this understanding increases the sensitivity of higher educational institutions to the needs



of target publics in the process of policy formulation and implementation. Fourthly, this theory is critical to this study because it tends to support the idea that mutual understanding is a function of the willingness of top management of higher educational institutions to cultivate and sustain public friendly policy.

A closer examination of the public relations theories reveal that only the system theory support the higher educational institutions' public relations policies and activities with regard to the entire stakeholders to the school as inter-related entities in which the action of one entity is capable of stimulating reaction from another entity or the whole. The implication is that the behaviour of internal publics in the context of system theory has the potential of influencing the attitude of external publics of an organization, the higher educational institution inclusive.

### **Method of data collection**

Primary data were collected from target respondents using the following two research questions for a period of four months in 2019. First the email addresses of respondents were extracted and digital copies of the questionnaire were sent to them via email. The target population of study consists of public relations staff and all students of higher educational institutions in Nigeria. From the study population, 180 copies of the questionnaire were mailed to public relations staff while 350 copies of the questionnaire were sent to students of higher educational institutions in Nigeria through purposive sampling. However 140 public relations relations staff and 313 students returned their copies of the questionnaire which indicated a return rate of 77.7% for the public relations staff and 89.4% for the students. Both return rates were found to be adequate for the purpose of this study in terms of effective representation of the study population.

The two research used for the data collection included the following:

The first question was what public relations tools are in use in the higher educational institutions? Second, was through what public relations tools do the target publics receive information from the schools? First question was meant to interrogate the public relations staff of the higher educational institutions while the second question was designed for collection of data from target publics of higher educational institutions both internal and external publics. The internal publics includes: the students, non-academic staff other than public relations staff, and academic staff both current and past. External publics includes: the host community members, media representatives, government officials, financial institutions, opinion leaders, consumers and suppliers of higher educational institutions and any who has something to do with the higher educational institutions in Nigeria.

From the first question, three questions were extracted for the interrogation of public relations staff of higher educational which included the following:

1. What public relations tool is in use in your school?
2. Which of the public relations tool does your school use most?
3. Is your use of public relations tools based on preliminary research outcome?

The following two questions meant for the target publics of higher educational institutions were generated from the second research question:

1. Through which public relations tool do you receive information from the higher educational institutions?

2. Which of the tools will you prefer as means of interaction with the higher educational institution?

### Data analysis

The data collected were analyzed and interpreted using simple percentage as presented below:

**Table 1: Response Return Rate**

Sn	Respondents	Mailed copies	Returned copies	Percentage
1.	Public relations staff	180	140	77.7
2.	Target publics	350	313	89.4

Table 1 shows that out of 180 copies of the questionnaire sent to public relations staff higher educational institutions, 140 copies were returned representing 77.7%. From the 350 copies of questionnaire sent to target publics of higher educational institutions, 313 copies were returned which represent 89.4%.

**Table 2: The public relations tools in use in the school**

SN	Public relations tools	Yes	%	No	%
1	Media relations	120	85.7	20	14.3
2	Advertorials	90	64.3	50	35.7
3	School websites	70	50	70	50
4	Facebook	60	42.9	80	57.1
5	Whatsapp	40	28.6	100	71.4
6	Newsletters	130	92.9	10	7.1
7	Community relations	65	46.4	75	53.6
8	Gift items especially at Christmas	95	67.9	45	32.1
9	Brochures, handbook and catalogue	125	89.3	15	10.7
10	Sponsorship	65	46.4	75	53.6
11	Speaking engagement	60	42.9	80	57.1
12	Business event	45	32.1	95	67.9
13	Liaison	61	43.6	79	56.4

**Source:** Field survey 2019

The table 2 above shows that all the public relations tools are in use by all though in a varying degree. A large percentage of the respondents(92.9%) use newsletters to interact with their respective publics. The second highest percentage of the respondents(89.3%) use brochures, handbook and catalogue. The third highest respondents(85.7%) use media relations. Lowest percentage of the schools(32.1%) use business event as the public relations tool for interacting with their target publics. On the negative side, a large percentage of the respondents (71.4%) do not use whatsapp for interacting with their target publics. A large percentage of the respondents do not use business event(67.9%), speaking engagement(57.1%), Facebook(57.1%), liaison(56.4%) and sponsorship(53.6%).

**Table 3: The tools most used by the school**

SN	Public relations tools	Yes	%	No	%
1	Media relations	60	42.9	80	57.1
2	Advertorials	63	45	77	55
3	School websites	85	60.7	55	39.3
4	Facebook	36	25.7	104	74.3
5	Whatsapp	60	42.9	80	57.1
6	Newsletters	107	76.4	33	23.6
7	Community relations	24	17.1	116	82.9
38	Gift items especially at Christmas	17	12.1	123	87.9
9	Brochures, handbook and catalogue	35	25	105	75
10	Sponsorship	5	3.6	135	96.4
11	Speaking engagement	10	7.1	130	92.9
12	Business event	14	10	126	90
13	Liaison	25	17.9	115	82.1

Source: Field survey 2019

Table 3 above shows that (76.4%) of the respondents use newsletters most frequently as a public relations tool for interacting with target publics. Next on the most frequently used PR tool is school websites (60.7%). The least used public relations tool is sponsorship (3.6%).

**Table 4: Choice of PR tools after preliminary research**

SN	Public relations tools	Yes	%	No	%
1	Media relations	59	42.1	81	57.9
2	Advertorials	65	46.4	75	53.6
3	School websites	102	72.9	38	27.1
4	Facebook	62	44.3	78	55.7
5	Whatsapp	69	49.3	71	50.7
6	Newsletters	45	32.1	95	67.9
7	Community relations	64	45.7	76	54.3
38	Gift items especially at Christmas	61	43.6	79	56.4
9	Brochures, handbook and catalogue	53	37.9	87	62.1
10	Sponsorship	104	74.3	36	25.7
11	Speaking engagement	55	39.3	85	60.7
12	Business event	33	23.6	107	76.4
13	Liaison	60	42.9	80	57.1

Source: Field survey 2019

Table 4 above proves that not all the respondents conduct research prior to selection of public relations tools they use in their interaction with their respective target publics. Highest percentage (74.3%) of the respondents conduct research prior to use of sponsorship as a public relations tool for interacting with their target publics. Seventy-two point nine(72.9%) of the respondents conduct research before setting up school website. Few schools(23.6%) bother to conduct research before choosing business event for their interaction with their target publics. A large percentage of the respondents do not conduct research before use of business event(76.4%), newsletters(67.9%), brochures, handbook and catalogue(62.1%)speaking engagement(60.7%) media relations(57.9%), liaison(57.1%), gift items at Christmas(56.4%), advertorials(53.6%) and Whatsapp(50.7%).

**Table 5: Public relations tools through which the publics receive information from the educational institutions**

SN	Public relations tools	Yes	%	No	%
1	Media relations	60	19.2	253	80.8
2	Advertorials	20	6.4	293	93.6
3	School websites	50	16	263	84
4	Facebook	10	3.2	303	96.8
5	Whatsapp	5	1.6	308	98.4
6	Newsletters	60	19.2	253	80.8
7	Community relations	24	7.7	289	92.3
8	Gift items especially at Christmas	9	2.9	304	97.1
9	Brochures, handbook and catalogue	18	5.8	295	94.2
10	Sponsorship	11	3.5	302	96.5
11	Speaking engagement	8	2.6	305	97.4
12	Business event	3	1.0	310	99.0
13	Liaison	35	11.2	278	88.8

**Source:** Field survey 2019

In the table 5 above few respondents receive information through all the tools. Out of the total number of 313 respondents, 19.2percent each agreed that they receive information through newsletters and media relations respectively. Fifty (16%) claim that they receive information through the websites of schools. The lowest was three (1%) that receive information through business event.

**Table 6: The preferred public relations tools for interacting with the educational institution**

SN	Public relations tools	Yes	%	No	%
1	Media relations	30	9.6	283	90.4
2	Advertorials	35	11.2	278	88.8
3	School websites	232	74.1	81	25.9
4	Facebook	300	95.8	13	4.2
5	Whatsapp	258	82.4	55	17.6
6	Newsletters	195	62.3	118	37.7
7	Community relations	44	14.1	269	85.9
8	Gift items especially at Christmas	20	6.4	293	93.6
9	Brochures, handbook and catalogue	123	39.3	190	60.7
10	Sponsorship	60	19.2	253	80.8
11	Speaking engagement	55	17.6	258	82.4
12	Business event	26	8.3	287	91.7
13	Liaison	261	83.4	52	16.6

**Source:** Field survey 2019

Table 6 indicates that 300 representing 95.8% prefer use of Facebook for their interaction with higher educational institutions in Nigeria. Two hundred and sixty-one(261) respondents representing 83.4% prefer liaison as a tool of interaction with the higher educational institutions. Those who prefer the use of whatsapp were 258(82.4%) percent. One hundred and ninety-five representing 62.3 percent prefer the use of newsletters. One hundred and twenty-three representing 39.3% brochures, handbook and catalogue.

## FINDINGS

It was discovered that all the respondents collectively use all the public relations tools. But the degree of usage vary from one institution to the other with a good percentage that do not use the tool. What is certain is that whether they use public relations tools or not, the function of public relations in every organisation is non-negotiable. This suggests that the public relations tools may not be put to use the need for their use is ever present which takes a professional to acknowledge, and plan to fill through top management support.

It was discovered that while a few of the institution of higher learning conduct research and plan the selection of their public relations tools on the basis of research recommendation, others do otherwise. This implies that those who do not depend on research outcome for their selection of public relations tools will have to depend on what they felt to be the need of the target publics to select the public relations they use.

Lastly, the study established that the target publics prefer some tools to others for their interaction with the relevant educational institution of higher learning. This finding thrust forth the need for public relations professionals to ensure they understand the public relations tools preference of the



target publics before choosing any for use. This way, efficiency in the use of resources will be more likely guaranteed.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the study, the public relations of the higher educational institutions is saddled with the responsibility of building the image of the school through the use of certain public relations tools. It was established that the available public relations tools do not stimulate the equal response from target publics. This suggests that some of the tools have more positive effects than others as the publics found some more friendly than the other. The choice of which public relations tools to deploy depends on how much confidence that public relations staff has on such tool to bring about the necessary response. The process of choosing a particular public relations will pay off when it is preceded by public relations needs based research for the higher educational institution in question.

## **Recommendations**

From the conclusion drawn, the study hereby recommends the following for an effective and result oriented utilization of public relations tools by the higher educational institutions in Nigeria for meaningful interaction with their respective target publics:

1. Higher educational institution should be properly positioned as an academic leader and not follower through utilization of the public relations tools without connecting such use with corporate public relations needs especially in the face of the stiff competition that comes from private participation and increased number of public higher educational institution in the academic market place.
2. Showcasing the positive image of the higher educational institutions will be more rewarding if the public relations tools deployed indexed on high academic performance, quality staff (both teaching and non-teaching), good academic structure as well as cordial relationship between lecturer and student.
3. Since findings reveal that the public relations tools will not produce equal results higher educational institutions should always ensure that research into the public relations needs of the institutions precede the choice of any public relations tools they set out to use.

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