

INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN DELTA, EDO AND RIVERS STATES OF SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

Public relations is a strategic communication function that promotes mutual understanding and goodwill between organizations and their publics. Despite its importance, many local government councils in Nigeria either lack effective public relations structures or fail to utilize them adequately in public administration. This study examined the influence of public relations on local government administration in Delta, Edo, and Rivers States, Nigeria. Three local government areas were randomly selected from each state, resulting in a total of nine local government councils. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Senior staff members of the selected councils were interviewed, while 1,283 questionnaires were distributed to both council employees and members of the public. A total of 1,222 valid responses were retrieved and analyzed using percentages and mean scores. The findings revealed that all the selected councils had public relations units, although most operated under the designation of Public Affairs Departments. However, respondents perceived these units as ineffective in addressing public concerns and managing crises. The study further found that effective public relations practice has the potential to positively influence public opinion and improve the image of local government administration. Nevertheless, public relations remains underutilized in many local government councils, limiting its contribution to grassroots governance and public engagement. The study concludes that public relations is a vital instrument for enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in local government administration. It recommends the establishment and strengthening of professional public relations units in all local government councils to improve government-public relations and promote good governance at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Public Relations, Local Government Administration, Public Perception, Grassroots Governance, Communication Strategies.

Introduction

Local government is one of the oldest forms of political administration and serves as the level of government closest to the people. Historically, local governance existed through clan and village assemblies, while democracy itself evolved from local governance practices in the ancient Greek city-states (Onyeniyi-Onuorah, 2005). In pre-colonial Nigeria, various ethnic groups maintained distinct systems of local administration rooted in their cultural traditions. The Hausa/Fulani operated a centralized emirate system, the Yoruba were governed through the Oba and subordinate chiefs, while the Igbo practiced a republican system characterized by community assemblies, village heads, and councils of elders.

The colonial administration formalized local governance through the Native Authority Ordinance (1914), Native Court Ordinance (1914), and Native Court Revenue Ordinance (1916) (Dike, 2011).

However, a major turning point occurred with the 1976 Local Government Reform under the Murtala/Obasanjo administration, which established a uniform single-tier local government structure nationwide. This reform standardized local government functions, structures, finances, and relationships with state governments, while emphasizing grassroots participation and development (Awotokun, 2005).

The 1999 Constitution further guaranteed the existence of democratically elected local government councils as the third tier of government in Nigeria. Presently, Nigeria has 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs), each administered by an elected chairman and councilors representing various wards. Local governments are responsible for promoting grassroots development, mobilizing local resources, facilitating citizen participation, and serving as a communication link between government and the people (Adeyemo, 2005).

Given their proximity to citizens, local governments are expected to deliver essential services and foster community development. However, concerns persist regarding their effectiveness in engaging the public and addressing local needs. Effective communication is therefore crucial in strengthening the relationship between local governments and their communities.

Public relations (PR) plays a vital role in this regard. As a management function, PR facilitates mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation between organizations and their publics. The British Institute of Public Relations defines public relations as the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (Oboh & Enobakhare, 2010). Through strategic communication, public relations enhances transparency, promotes citizen participation, and improves organizational image.

As the closest level of government to the grassroots, local governments require effective public relations practices to communicate policies, gather public feedback, and build public confidence. Despite their strategic position, many citizens perceive local governments as disconnected from the communities they serve. This perception may be linked to inadequate communication and limited application of public relations strategies.

Consequently, this study examines the role of public relations in Local Government Administration in Nigeria. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Determine whether public relations units exist within local government administrations in Nigeria.
2. Assess public perceptions of public relations practice in local government administration.
3. Examine the influence of public relations on the image of local government administration.
4. Identify the communication strategies employed by public relations units in local governments.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of these communication strategies in fostering government-public relations at the grassroots level.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. Survey research is appropriate for collecting data on respondents' opinions, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs regarding a phenomenon. It enables the researcher to gather information from a large population through questionnaires and interviews,

making it suitable for examining the influence of public relations on local government administration in Nigeria.

The population comprised residents aged 18 years and above in nine selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) across Delta, Edo, and Rivers States. One LGA was selected from each senatorial district in the three states:

1. **Delta State:** Warri South, Ughelli South, and Oshimili South.
2. **Edo State:** Oredo, Esan Central, and Akoko Edo.
3. **Rivers State:** Port Harcourt City, Ahoada East, and Eleme.

Based on the 2006 National Population Census, the combined population of Delta (4,112,445), Edo (3,233,366), and Rivers (5,198,716) States was 12,544,527.

The sample size was determined using the National Statistical Service (NSS) Sample Size Calculator at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The calculation produced a minimum sample size of 385 respondents. However, a total of 1,283 questionnaires were administered across the nine Local Government Areas, while approximately 10% of the questionnaire in each council were specifically allocated to council staff. The study employed both cluster and purposive sampling techniques. Cluster sampling was used to select respondents from the senatorial districts represented by the selected Local Government Areas. Purposive sampling was used to identify Local Government staff who possessed relevant knowledge of public relations activities within their councils. Data were collected through two instruments:

1. Questionnaire
2. Personal Interview

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, occupation, and educational qualification. Section B contained questions relating to public relations practice and its influence on local government administration.

In addition, one senior staff member from each of the nine Local Government Councils was interviewed to provide qualitative insights that complemented the survey findings. Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores. Responses to attitudinal statements were measured using a five-point Likert Scale:

1. Strongly Agree (SA) = 5
2. Agree (A) = 4
3. Undecided (UD) = 3
4. Disagree (D) = 2
5. Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1

The interview responses were analyzed qualitatively and used to support the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 1,283 questionnaires administered, 1,222 were successfully retrieved, representing a response rate of 95.2%. This high retrieval rate provided adequate data for analysis and enhanced the reliability of the study findings. It is constructive to note that the questionnaire was designed mainly to determine the influence of public relations in local government administration.

Description of the Sample Size

The sample (n-1, 222) returned was described in tables and charts below using percentages.

Table 1: Gender/Sex

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Males	651	53.2%
Females	571	46.7%
Total	1,222	100%

The copies of the questionnaire returned (n-1, 222) consisted of 651 (53.2%) male respondents and 571 (46.72%) female respondents as shown in the table and chart.

Gender/Sex in Chart

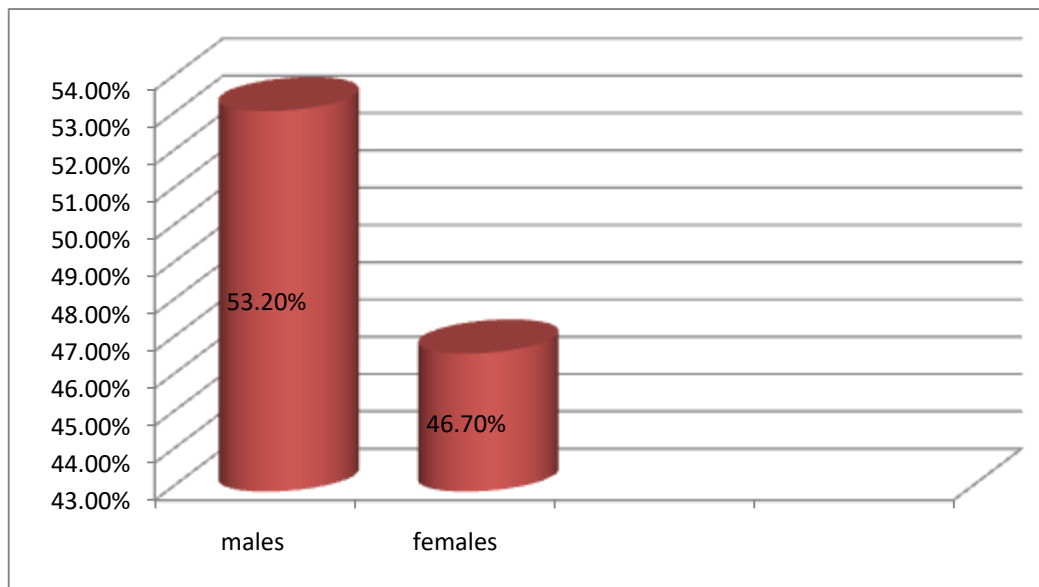


Table 2: Age Classification/Range

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 24	263	21.5%
25 – 34	390	31.9%
35 – 44	324	26.5%
45 – above	245	20%
Total	1,222	100%

The ages between 18-24 consisted of 263 (21.5%) respondents, 25-34 ages had 390 (31.9%) respondents, 35-44 ages had 324 (26.5%) respondents and 45 - above had 245 (20%) of the respondents.

Age Classification/Range in Chart

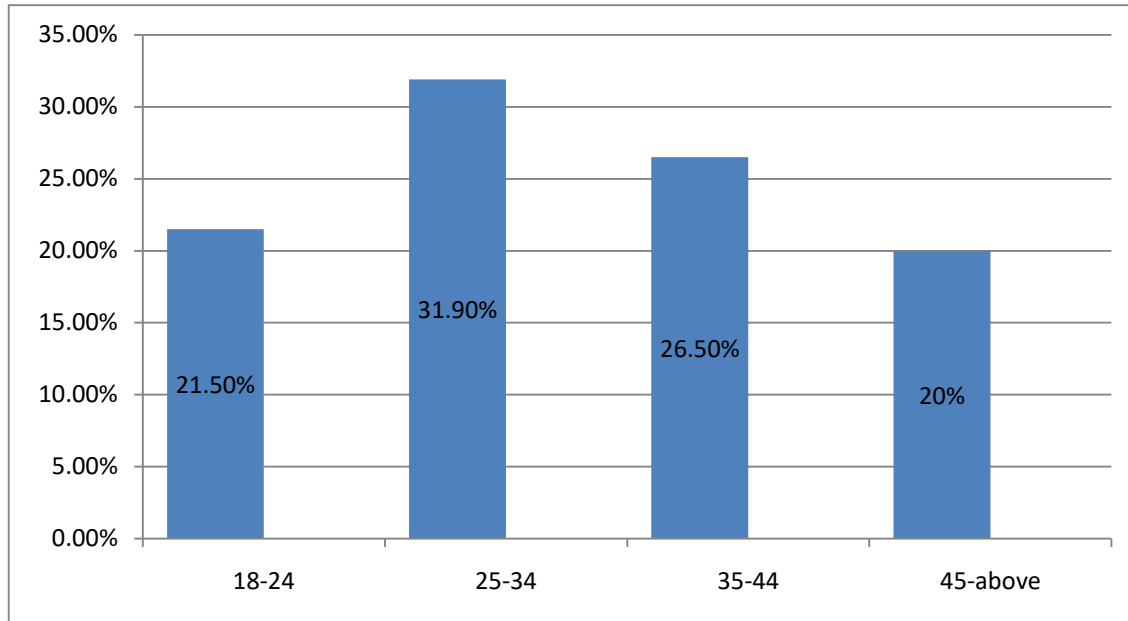


Table 3: Marital Status

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Single	516	42%
Married	505	41.3%
Widow	157	13%
Divorce/Separated	44	3.6%
Total	1,222	100%

In table 3, single respondents recorded 516 representing 42% respondents, married respondents were 505 representing 41.3%, widows were 157 respondents representing 13% and divorce/separated respondents were 44 respondents representing 3.6%.

Marital Status in Chart

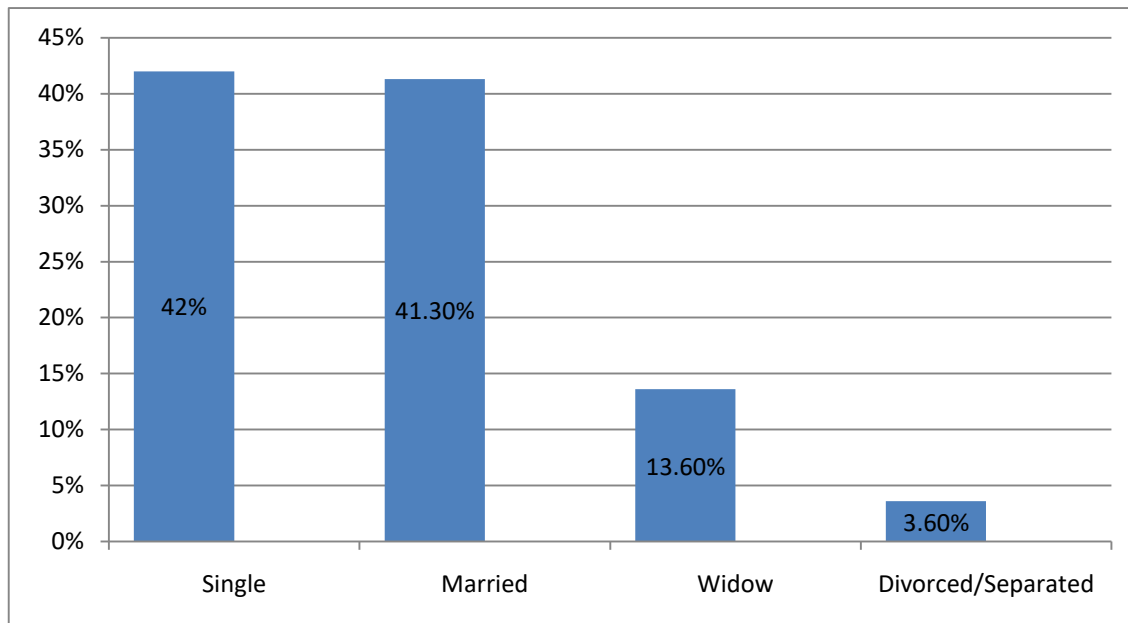


Table 4: Occupation of Respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Students	378	30.9%
Civil/Public servant	515	42.1%
Businessmen/Women	329	26.9%
Total	1,222	100%

The table revealed that 378 (30.9%) respondents were students, 515 (42.1%) were civil/public servant were, 329 (26.9%) of the respondents were businessmen/women.

Occupation of Respondents in Chart

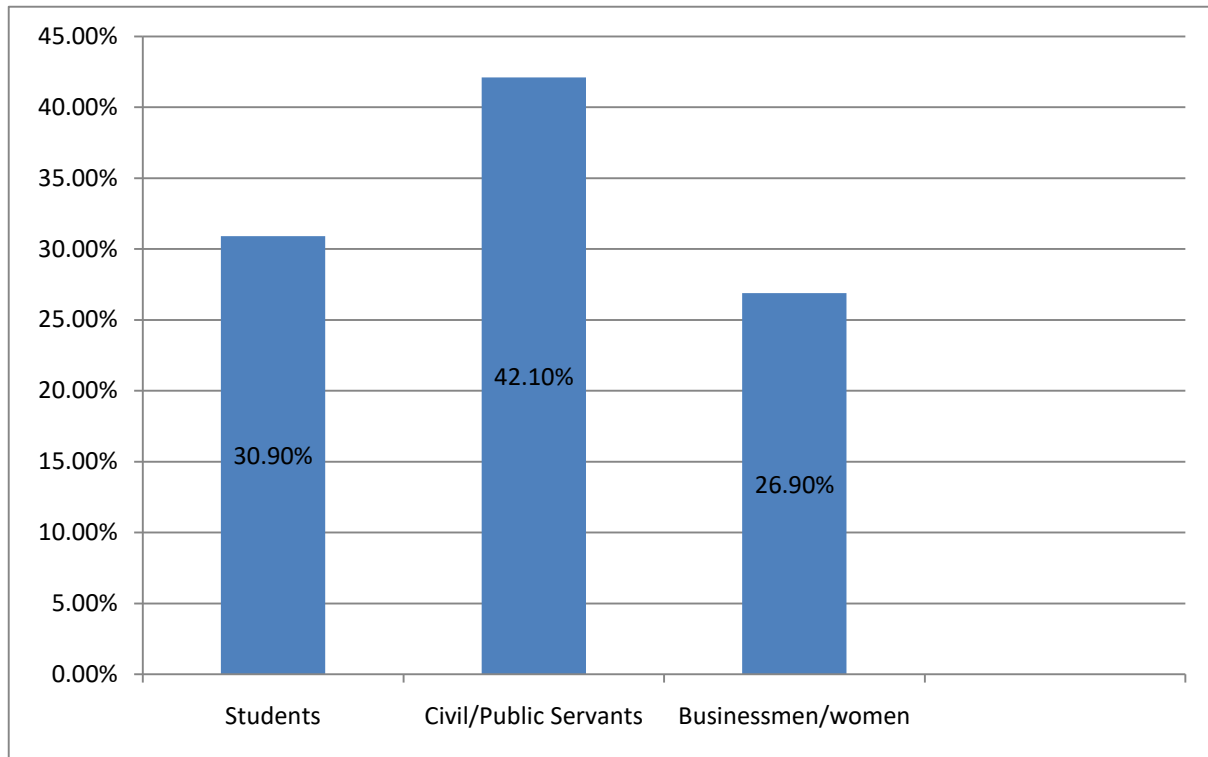
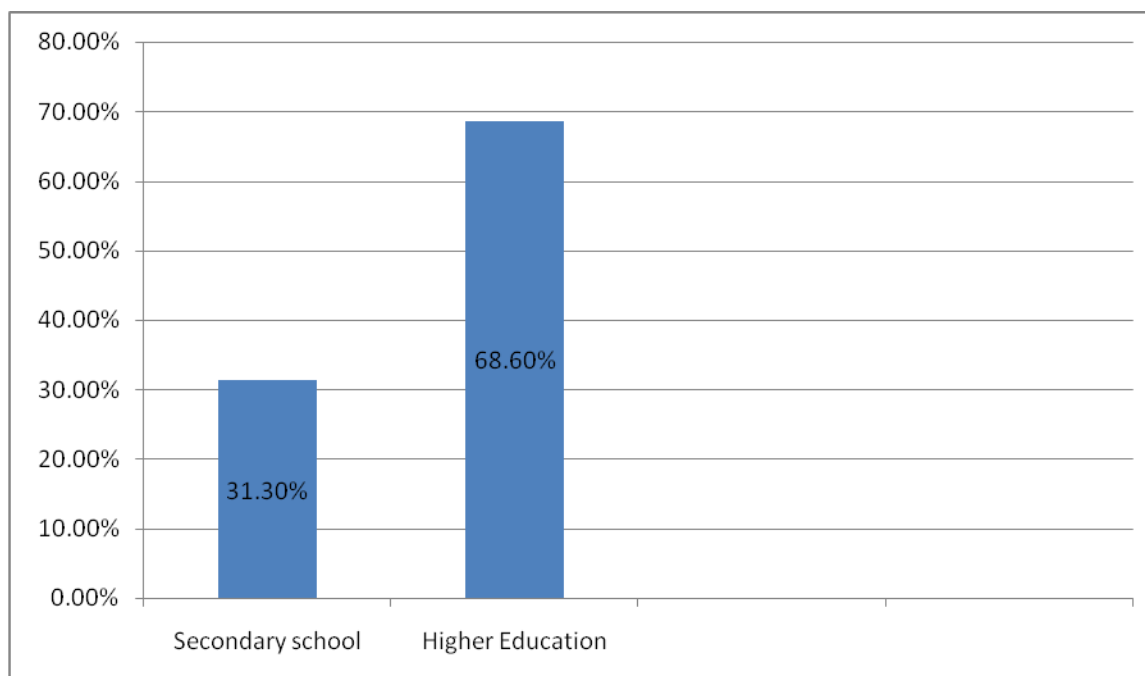


Table 5: Level of Education of Respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary	383	31.3%
Higher Education	839	68.6%
Total	1,222	100%

In this table, there were 383 of the respondents representing 31.3% that had secondary education while 839 of the respondents representing 68.6%.

Level of Education of Respondents



Section B: Respondents' Understanding of the Concept-Public Relations and Local Government Administration

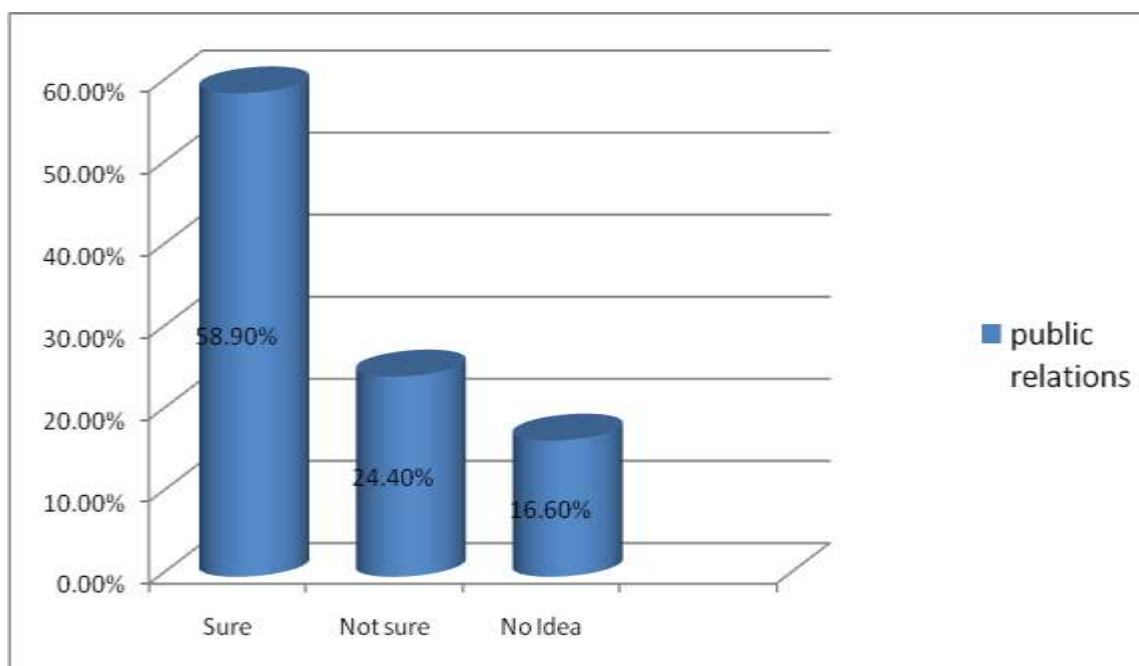
Response to Research Questions

Research Question 1: Do Public Relations Department exist in Local Government Administration in Nigeria?

Table 6: Respondents' Understanding of the Concept-Public Relations

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Sure	720	58.9%
Not sure	299	24.4%
No idea	203	16.6
Total	1,222	100%

Respondents' Understanding of the Concept-Public Relations illustrated in Chart



From the data obtained, 720 (58.9%) of the respondents were sure that they are familiar with the concept of public relations, 299 (24.4%) were not sure while 203 (16.6%) of the respondents had no idea to the question asked.

Table 7: Response to Public Relations Definition

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Management of public affairs.	335	27.4%
Mutual relationship between organization and the public.	649	53.1%
A way of getting and winning public confidence.	190	15.5%
Ways of making money from the public.	48	3.9%
Total	1,222	100%

When asked the option that best defined public relations, 335 of the respondents representing (27.4%) said it is management of public affairs, 649 of the respondents representing (53.1%) defined public relations as mutual relationship between organization and the public, 190 of the respondents representing (15.5%) see it as a way of getting and winning public confidence and 48 of the respondents representing (3.9%) see public relations as ways of making money from the public.

Response to Public Relations Definition in Chart

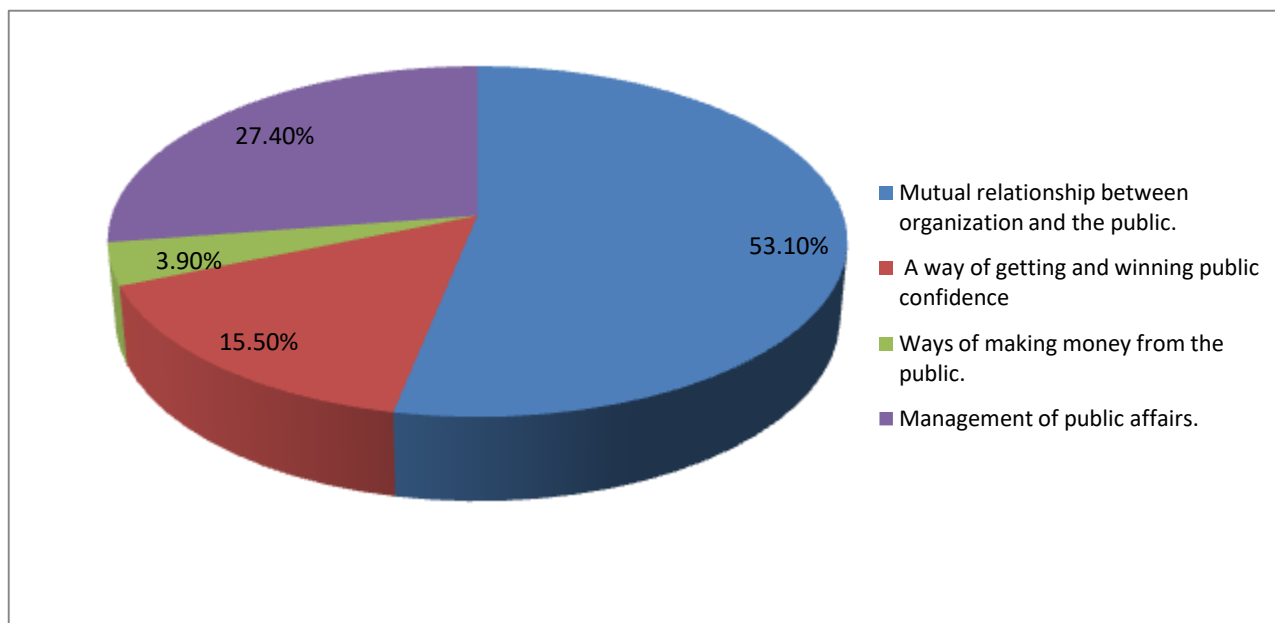
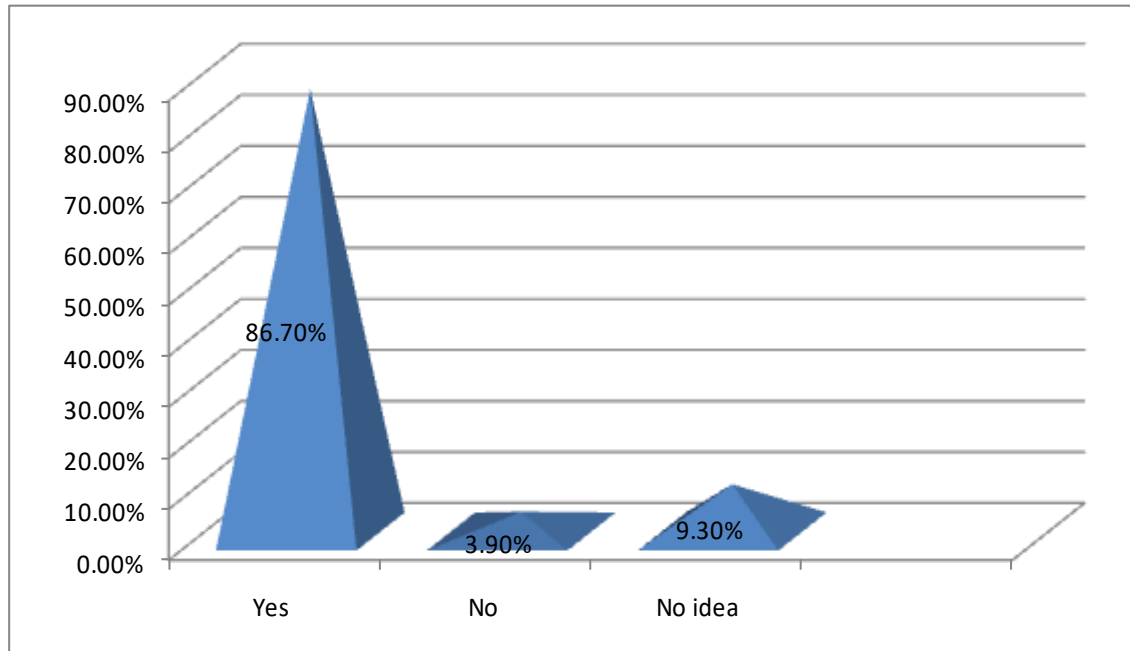


Table 8: If Public Relations Department Exist in Local Government Councils

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	111	86.7%
No	5	3.9%
No idea	12	9.3%
Total	128	100%

This item in the questionnaire was administered only to the Local Government councils in these states (Delta, Edo and Rivers) under study. From the one thousand, two hundred and twenty-two (1,222) questionnaire administered to the public, one hundred and eight (128) were administered to the Local Government Councils staffs. From the responses obtained, 111 of the respondents representing (86.7%) said yes that there is public relations department in their council, 5 of the respondents representing (3.9%) 12 of the respondents representing (9.3%) had no idea whether public relations department exist in their councils.

Chart illustrating whether Public Relations Department Exist in Local Government Councils



Answer to Research Question 1

Results in response to question one showed that public relations department exists in many Local Government Councils in Nigeria. It can be shown that 86.7% of the respondents attested to this. Also, responses obtained from those interviewed showed that public relations is called by different names in some council. Some call it Department of Public Affairs, or Community Affairs and others Department of Communication. In addition to the above, in Table 7, majority (53.1%) of the respondents see public relations as a mutual understanding between an organization (in this case, the council) and the public. Many of the respondents understand the concept of public relations. This implies that there is public relations department in Local Government Council.

Table 9: Influence of Public Relations in Local Government Administration

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	588	48.1%
No	200	16.4%
No idea	434	35.5%
Total	1,222	100%

Data from table 9 showed that 588 (48.1%) of the respondents agreed that public relations practice can enhance the influence of Local Government Administration in many communities. 200 (16.4%) disagreed while 434 (35.5%) had no idea to the question asked. Those respondents that answered in the affirmative believe that through effective communication and adherence to public policies, public relation can enhance the influence of Local Government Administration in many communities.

Chart illustrating Influence of Public Relations in Local Government Administration

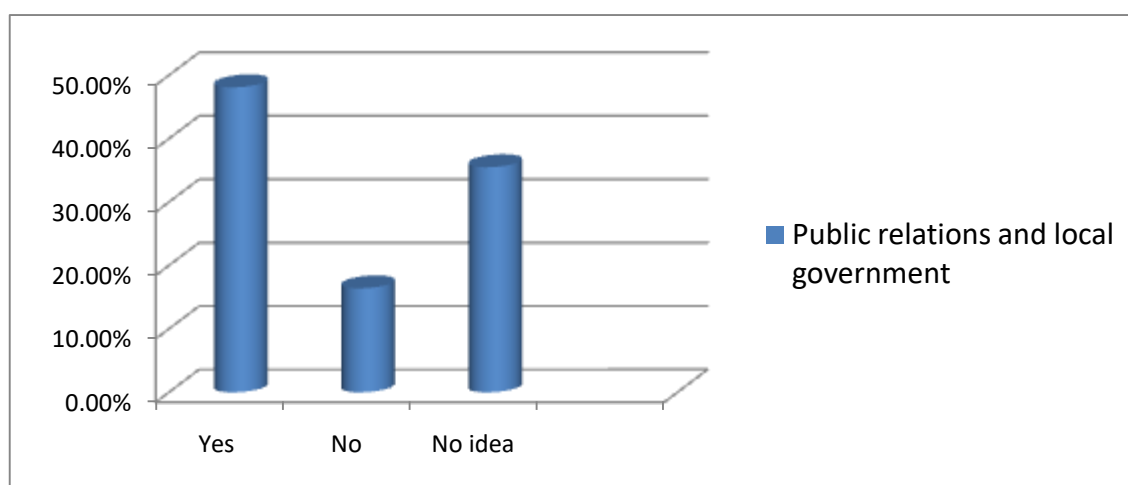


Table 10: Public Relations Communication Strategies in Local Government Administration

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Traditional mode of communication.	173	14.1%
Town hall meetings.	331	27.1%
Radio announcement	477	39.0%
Television announcement	174	14.2
Newspaper report	67	5.5%

The table provided the most effective public relations communication strategies that may be used in Local Government. The data showed that radio announcement with 39.0% was the most effective public relations communication strategy used in the Local Government Councils that were studied.

Chart illustrating Public Relations Communication Strategies in Local Government Administration

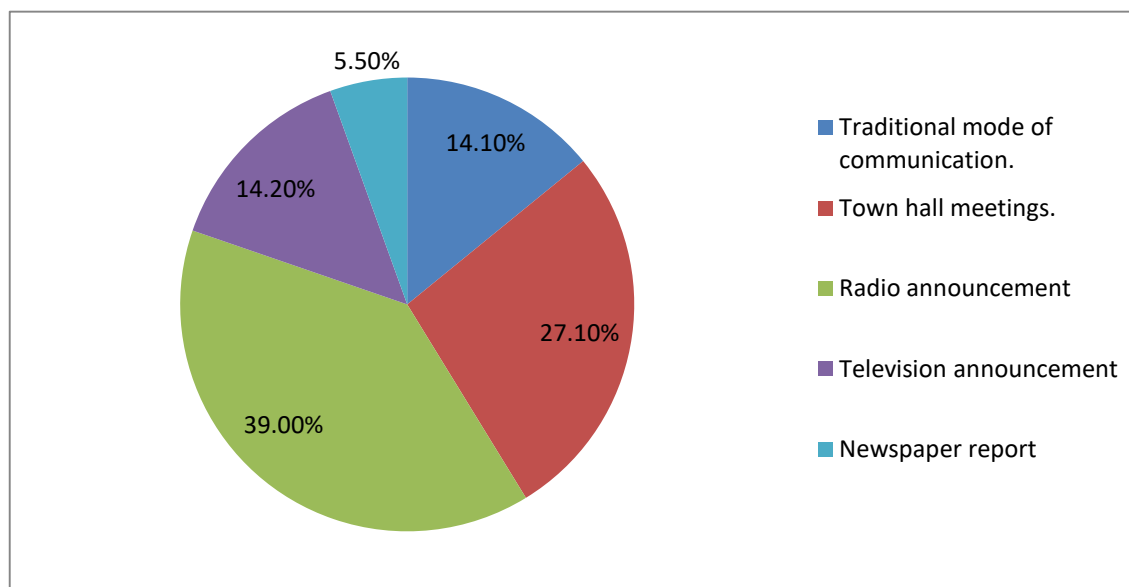


Table 11: Extent of Public Relations Practice in Local Government Administration

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Good	216	17.6%
Average/Fair	462	37.8%
Poor	384	31.4%
Very poor	162	13.2%

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which public relations in the Local Government Council has been used in matters that affect them. From the results obtained, 216 of the respondents representing 17.6% rated it as good, 462 of the respondents representing 37.8% rated it as average or fair, 384 of the respondents representing 31.4% rated it as poor and 162 of the respondents representing 13.2% rated it as very poor.

Chart illustrating Extent of Public Relations Practice in Local Government Administration

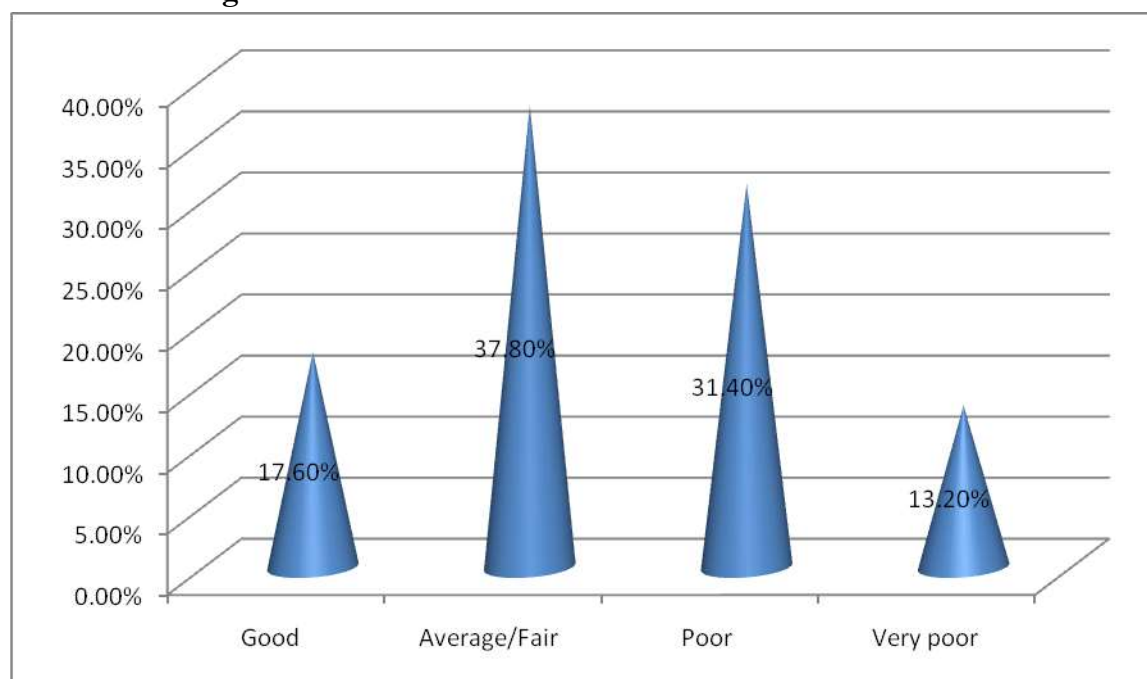
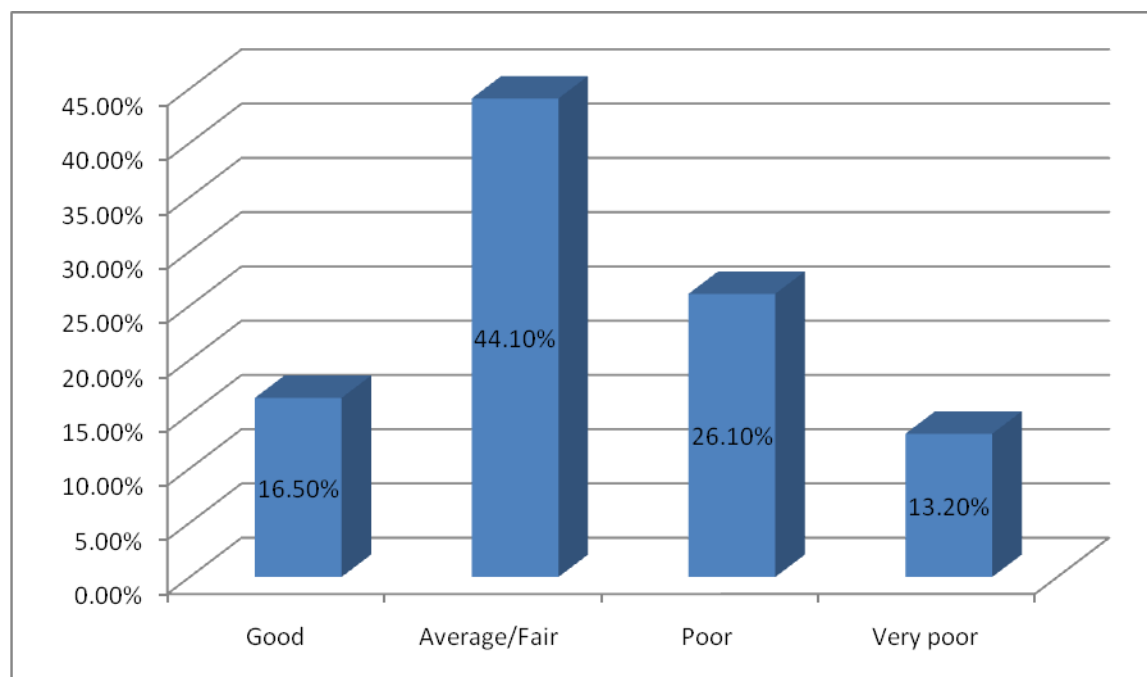


Table 12: Performance of Local Government Council in terms of Community Relations

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Good	202	16.5%
Average/Fair	539	44.1%
Poor	319	26.1%
Very poor	162	13.2%

Chart illustrating Performance of Local Government Council in terms of Community Relations



Respondents were asked to rate the performance of Local Government Council in terms of community relations. Results showed that 202 of the respondents representing 16.5% rated it as good, 539 of the respondents representing 44.1% rated it as average or fair, 319 of the respondents representing 26.1% rated it as poor and 162 of the respondents representing 13.2% rated it as very poor.

Research Question 2: How do the Public Perceive Public Relations Practice in Local Government Administration in Nigeria?

Table 13: Respondents' Perception of the Role of Local Government in terms Public Relations

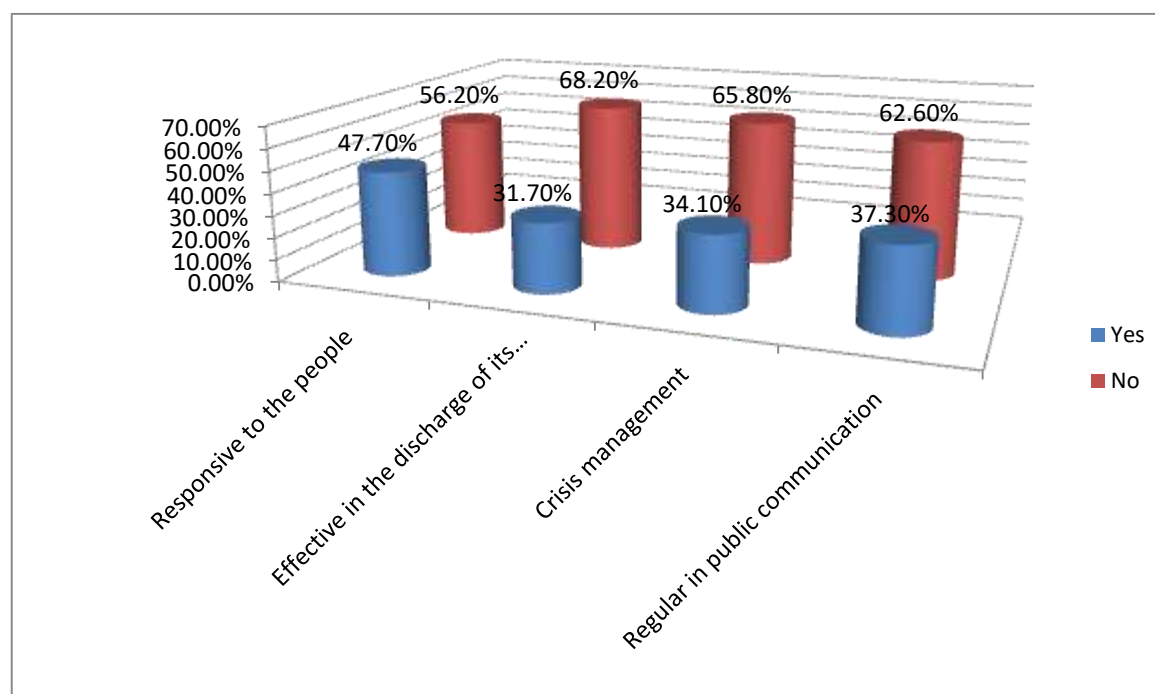
Options	Frequency	
	Yes	No
Responsive to the people	535 (47.7%)	687 (56.2%)
Effective in the discharge of its functions.	388 (31.7%)	834 (68.2%)
Crisis management	417 (34.1%)	805 (65.8%)
Regular in public communication	456 (37.3%)	766 (62.6%)

From the data obtained, 535 (47.7%) perceived the role of Local Government Administration in terms public relations as responsive while 687 (56.2%) do not. 388 (31.7%) perceived the role as effective while 834 (68.2%) do not. 417 (34.1%) perceived the role as proactive in crisis management

while 805 (65.8%) do not. 456 (37.3%) perceived the role as regular in public communication while 766 (62.6%) do not.

As follow up to the above question, respondents were asked to state their views about Local Government Administration in terms public relations. By interpretation, all the answers obtained showed that public relations has not been effective in Local Government Administration because of poor communication strategies and lack of public confidence in the Local Government system.

Chart illustrating Respondents' Perception of the Role of Local Government in terms Public Relations



Answer to Research Question 2

Results in response to research question two showed that Local Government Administration had not been responsive, effective, proactive in community crisis management and regular in terms of public communication. All the results in Table 13 were in the negative. This shows that the public perceived Local Government Administration in terms of public relations practice as unresponsive and passive to the public situation. This implies lack of confidence of the public on Local Government Administration.

Research Question 3: Do Public Relations enhance the Image of Local Government Administration in Nigeria?

Answer to Research Question 3

From the results obtained from Tables 9 -10 showed that public relations can enhance the image of Local Government Administration in Nigeria. For example, in Table 9, majority of the respondents (48.1%) agreed that public relations can enhance the image of Local Government Administration. This is possible through the regular use of radio announcement as shown in Table 10

where 39.0%, being the largest, agreed that radio announcement was an effective medium of image making by the Local Government. Also, in item 5 of Table 14 where respondents at the midpoint at 2.50 rejected the question but believed that community/public relationship with the Local Government Council can be effective with the application of PRs techniques. This is so because public relations is image making.

Research Question 4: How influential is public relations practice in Local Government Administration in Nigeria?

Answer to Research Question 4

An average or fair results were obtained in Tables 11 and 12 in response to the question. This shows that public relations practice in Local Government Administration has not been too influential. Although by way of definition, many people know public relations but they do not understand its practice because it has not been effectively used in many Local Governments in Nigeria. The result showed that while knowledge on public relations was high (Tables 6 & 7) but practice in many Local Government Councils was low or poor (Table 13). As also obtained in item 3 of Table 14 public confidence in the Local Government Administration in Nigeria is lacking because of absence of PRs application. This also shows poor application of public relations practice in many Local Government Councils in Nigeria.

Research Question 5: What are the communication strategies used by Public Relations Units between Local Government and its Publics?

Answer to Research Question 5

The answer to this question was obtained in Table 10 where radio announcement (31.1%) and town halls meetings (27.1%) were the most effective means used by the Local Government Council under study as communication strategies used by Public Relations Units between Local Government and its Publics.

Table 14: Determination of Public Relations Influence in Local Government Administration

S/N	Item statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	X	Decision
1	Public relations is very important to the success of Local Government Administration in Nigeria?	646	353	104	72	47	4.21	Accepted
2.	The application of PRs in Local Government Administration has helped to influence public opinion better in matters that affect them?	408	538	137	93	46	3.95	Accepted
3.	Public confidence in the Local Government Administration in Nigeria is lacking because of absence of PRs application?	431	438	134	12	77	3.82	Accepted
4.	Public relations is not a strong instrument for good governance in	106	166	194	410	346	2.40	Rejected

	Local Government Administration in Nigeria?							
5.	Community/Public relationship with the Local Government Council can be effective without the application of PRs techniques?	98	109	335	452	228	2.50	Rejected

To determine the mean for each item, Likert responses were coded as SA = 5, A = 4, UD = 3, D = 2, and SD = 1. The cut-off point is 3.00, obtained as $(5+4+3+2+1) \div 5$. Thus, a mean of 3.00 and above is accepted, while below 3.00 is rejected. Item 1 recorded a mean of 4.21, showing that respondents agreed that public relations is very important to the success of Local Government Administration in Nigeria. Item 2 (3.95) indicates agreement that public relations improves the influence of public opinion on local government issues. Item 3 (3.82) shows agreement that weak PR practice contributes to low public confidence in local government. Item 4 recorded 2.40, below the benchmark, meaning respondents rejected the claim that public relations is not a strong tool for good governance; rather, they affirm it as effective. Item 5 (2.50) was also below the cut-off, indicating disagreement with the view that community relations cannot be effective through public relations techniques, suggesting that PR strategies can enhance community–government relations.

Table 15: Suggestions on PRs Application to Local Government Administration

Options	Frequency	Percentage
The training and retraining of council staff for administrative competence.	275	22.5%
The non-interference of the council boss/chairman with the union (NULGE).	43	3.5%%
A regular meetings or press conference of the council boss/chairman with the target public.	193	15.7 %
That the public should have free access to information.	239	19.6%
An effective and proactive PRs unit in the council.	472	38.6%
Total	1,222	100%

The data collected revealed varying opinions among respondents regarding the most important measures needed to improve local government administration and public relations practices. A total of 22.5% of the respondents identified the training and retraining of council staff to enhance administrative competence as the most critical requirement. Meanwhile, 3.5% believed that non-interference by the council chairman or other political office holders in the affairs of the Nigeria Union

of Local Government Employees (NULGE) was the most necessary measure. Furthermore, 15.7% of the respondents emphasized the need for regular meetings and press conferences between the council chairman and the target publics as a means of promoting transparency and effective communication. Another 19.6% advocated for unrestricted public access to information concerning council activities and policies. However, the largest proportion of respondents (38.6%) considered the establishment of an effective and proactive public relations unit within the council as the most essential measure for improving communication, fostering public trust, and strengthening the relationship between local government authorities and the people.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that a majority of the respondents were familiar with the concept of public relations. Specifically, 58.9% indicated awareness of public relations, while 68.5% correctly defined it as a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics aimed at fostering understanding, cooperation, and public confidence. This suggests a reasonable level of public awareness regarding the role and functions of public relations in governance and administration. The study further established that public relations units exist in many local government councils in Nigeria, although in some councils these functions are performed under Information Departments. Despite the presence of these units, the image of local government administration remains largely unfavorable. This negative perception stems from the apparent gap between governmental promises and actual performance, particularly in areas such as service delivery, communication, and the provision of basic infrastructure. Consequently, public confidence in local government institutions has remained low.

The findings also indicated that 48.1% of the respondents believed that effective public relations practice could enhance the image and influence of local government administration. This position is supported by responses in Table 14, where respondents acknowledged the critical importance of public relations to the success of local government administration. Supporting this view, Black (2004) argued that public relations provides one of the most effective means of fostering cooperation and mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. Similarly, Nworgu (2011) emphasized the importance of collaboration with local associations, town unions, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations in strengthening public relations efforts within local government administration.

The study further revealed that communication strategies such as radio broadcasts, town hall meetings, public announcements, and information dissemination activities can contribute significantly to improving the public image of local governments. While many councils rely heavily on radio broadcasting as a medium of communication, only a few utilize town hall meetings and other interactive platforms. Although town hall meetings may reach smaller audiences, they provide opportunities for direct engagement and feedback, thereby strengthening relationships between councils and community members. These findings provide an answer to the research question concerning the role of public relations in enhancing the image of local government administration.

However, respondents rated the extent of public relations utilization by local government councils as moderate. Similarly, the overall performance of local governments in carrying out public relations functions was assessed as average. According to Nworgu (2011), public relations functions include information dissemination, communication management, advisory and counseling services, policy

formulation support, event management, protocol services, community relations, employee relations, marketing support, and financial relations. The findings suggest that local government councils have only partially fulfilled these responsibilities, thereby limiting the effectiveness of their public relations activities.

Data obtained from key informant interviews also indicated that the relationship between local government councils and the public was generally average and, in some instances, poor. For example, Robinson, a senior staff member and Head of Department in Ughelli South Local Government Council, rated the relationship as average, while Chika, Head of the Information Unit in Oshimili South Local Government Council, considered it poor. These assessments reflect the persistent communication gap between local governments and their constituents. Furthermore, the findings showed that the public perceives local governments as insufficiently responsive to citizens' needs and concerns. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of local governments in service delivery, crisis management, public communication, and responsiveness to emerging issues. This finding supports the assertion of Anele (2008) that local governments have generally failed to meet public expectations and aspirations.

The study also confirmed the strategic importance of public relations in promoting effective local government administration. When properly implemented, public relations can facilitate mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation between government institutions and citizens. This position aligns with Nkwocha's (1999) assertion that the fundamental purpose of public relations is to establish a two-way flow of communication and mutual understanding based on truth, knowledge, and adequate information. The study found that the absence of effective public relations practices contributes significantly to the low level of public confidence in local government administration. Conversely, the proper application of public relations can positively influence public opinion and improve citizen-government relations. In support of this argument, Soeze (2006) described public relations as a persuasive communication process that helps develop and sustain relationships between government and the people. As a management function, public relations plays a vital role in policy formulation, decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. It enables organizations to establish and maintain productive relationships with individuals and groups that influence their operations and development. Overall, the findings demonstrate that public relations is a critical instrument for promoting good governance at the local government level. A significant proportion of respondents emphasized the need for proactive and effective public relations units in local government councils. This view is consistent with Black's (2004) observation that democratic governance cannot function effectively without sound public relations practices. Citizens require adequate information about government activities, policies, decisions, services, rights, and responsibilities in order to participate meaningfully in governance. Consequently, public relations serves as an essential mechanism for educating citizens, fostering transparency, encouraging participation, and strengthening accountability within local government administration. Through effective communication and engagement, public relations can enhance public trust and contribute to the overall effectiveness of local governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of public relations in the effective functioning of organizations, particularly within the public sector. Public relations serves as a strategic management

tool for fostering mutual understanding, enhancing communication, building trust, and maintaining positive relationships between organizations and their various publics. In the context of local government administration, public relations is indispensable for promoting transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and public confidence.

Despite its importance, the study revealed that public confidence in local government administration in Nigeria remains relatively low. This situation can largely be attributed to the gap between governmental promises and actual performance in service delivery, communication, and developmental projects. The findings further indicated that public relations practices have not been effectively utilized in many local government councils, thereby contributing to the poor public image of local government administration. Consequently, local governments have not fully succeeded in informing, educating, and engaging citizens regarding their developmental programmes and policies. The study established that effective public relations can significantly enhance mutual understanding and strengthen public confidence in local government administration when properly applied.

In conclusion, effective public relations remains a vital instrument for achieving good governance and sustainable development at the local government level. Its proper application can improve communication, foster public participation, enhance accountability, and ultimately strengthen citizens' confidence in local government administration. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Local government councils should establish fully functional and proactive public relations departments staffed by qualified professionals. These units should be adequately empowered and resourced to manage communication, stakeholder engagement, media relations, and public enlightenment programmes. The services of experienced public relations practitioners should be utilized to improve interactions with both internal and external publics.
- ii. Regular training and capacity-building programmes should be organized for council staff to enhance their administrative competence, communication skills, and service delivery capabilities. Continuous professional development will equip employees with modern management skills and improve their ability to respond effectively to public needs and expectations.
- iii. Local government councils should periodically conduct public opinion surveys to assess citizens' perceptions, expectations, and levels of satisfaction with council activities and services. Such surveys will enable councils to identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), thereby providing valuable information for policy formulation and improved service delivery. The feedback obtained will also facilitate stronger relationships between councils and their communities.
- iv. Local government chairmen should hold regular town hall meetings, stakeholder forums, and press conferences to communicate council policies, programmes, and developmental initiatives to the public. These platforms will provide opportunities for citizens to express their concerns, contribute ideas, and participate in decision-making processes. Regular interaction between government officials and citizens will promote transparency, accountability, and public trust.

- v. To strengthen the practice of public relations in Nigeria, higher educational institutions should expand opportunities for the study of public relations as a distinct academic and professional discipline. Increasing the availability of public relations programmes will facilitate the training of competent practitioners capable of meeting the communication and relationship-management needs of public and private organizations.

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